



## Base and framework Industrial fundamentals have remained resilient, but are not broad-based

Earlier this week, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation released the latest Index of Industrial Production (IIP), a key barometer of India's industrial health. The April 2026 print assumes added significance as it is the first release under the new 2022-23 base series and the second full month following the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran. Industrial output grew 4.9% year-on-year in April. While direct comparisons with earlier data should be treated with caution given the extensive revisions to the index's basket, weights and methodology, the numbers suggest that India's industrial fundamentals have remained relatively resilient despite disruptions to global oil and gas supply chains. A granular reading, however, reveals that this resilience is far from broad-based. Capital goods output expanded by a robust 16% year-on-year, reflecting the continuing effects of elevated public capital expenditure and infrastructure spending. By contrast, consumer durables output grew only 4.3%, while consumer non-durables expanded by a modest 2.8%, suggesting that rising fuel and energy costs may be exerting pressure on household consumption.

More significant than the headline growth number, however, is the extensive overhaul of the IIP itself. The revised series seeks to better reflect the structure of a rapidly changing economy. New products and sectors have been incorporated and several obsolete items dropped. A fourth major sector – water supply, sewerage and waste management – has been introduced with a weight of 2.02%. The electricity category has been expanded into Electricity and Gas Supply, with its weight rising to 10.87% from 7.99% earlier. Manufacturing remains the dominant component of the index, though its weight has declined marginally to 76.06% from 77.63%. More notable is the reduction in the weight of mining and quarrying to 11.05% from 14.37%. These shifts suggest that the importance of value-added infrastructure and utility services in gauging industrial activity has expanded, while the relative significance of primary resource extraction has diminished. Together, these changes better capture India's emergence as a components and value-added manufacturing hub integrated into global supply chains. Most importantly, the government has indicated its intention to move towards a chain-linked framework with more frequent updates to sectoral weights. Such a system would allow official statistics to better keep pace with structural changes in the economy, making the IIP a more accurate and timely gauge of industrial health.

## Preserving the record

The right to be forgotten must be set  
against public interest

On the one hand, constitutional law holds up a principle of open justice that, among other things, allows public scrutiny of courts, facilitates public understanding of the law, and creates a historical record of the administration of justice. On the other, in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy* (2017), the Supreme Court of India recognised the right to informational privacy, including the ability of individuals to exercise some control over personal information about themselves. The Delhi High Court order on May 29 concerning the 'right to be forgotten' illustrates how these two principles can sometimes point in opposite directions. While the digitisation of court records transformed the ability of anyone with an Internet connection, but also search engines and automated archivers, to access judgments and legal records, it also altered the consequences of publicity. In Europe, where the resulting persistence of digital information first gave rise to the 'right to be forgotten', the right is usually weighed against the freedom of expression and public interest. In India as well, the right should accommodate the principle of open justice without necessarily breaching the bounds of the right to privacy. Yet, the High Court decided otherwise. Justice Sachin Datta concluded that simply updating records would not suffice as search engines could excerpt small portions without sufficient context, that open justice does not demand the ability to discover particular details of the case using the accused person's name, and that updating the official version would not necessarily update records that have since been copied to other websites.

The real problem is incompleteness, not discoverability. If a court acquitted or discharged a person from a dispute, anyone looking for the proceedings should also find that decision, rather than limiting a searcher's ability to find the original decision. This is crucial if open justice is understood to require the records to be practically accessible rather than merely exist somewhere. Court records are official acts of the state and their obfuscation in any manner *vis-à-vis* the public record will have serious ramifications for the public record, to echo the court in the closely related *Indian Kanoon* matter (2024). While the High Court's concern about the petitioner's right to privacy is commendable, it should also consider digital accuracy as the way out. That is, judicial records must be wholly public as well as updated to prominently reflect major actions and decisions, rather than preserve the accusation alone, and the judiciary must impose conditions on any platform, including court registries, indexing legal information to refresh their databases on a regular basis and endeavour to display the results of any user queries with the proper context. Doing so would protect both fundamental rights and address the problem's root cause.

# Assembly poll results that recast the political landscape

Outcomes in the recent Assembly elections in Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam demand careful introspection. The results in Assam and Kerala were not unexpected, but Tamil Nadu and perhaps West Bengal, appear to signal the shape of things to come, and of the role of Gen Z in this respect.

In Tamil Nadu, a close to 60-year-old duopoly of the Tamil Dravidian parties was ended by a party headed by a relatively unknown newcomer, who had few pretensions to any ideology. Complementing the upheaval in Tamil Nadu was the eclipse of the 'people's leader' in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, who only a few years back had toppled a Marxist conglomerate that had remained entrenched for nearly three decades.

### The script in Assam and West Bengal

Assam, adhering to the script, produced an expected result, *viz.*, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or rather more appropriately a Himanta Biswa Sarma victory, who notched up his second consecutive success. Victory was a foregone conclusion, given the extent of communal politics prevailing in the State and the redrawing of constituency boundaries, which reduced the number of Muslim-majority seats and put the BJP's rivals such as the Congress and the All India United Democratic Front at a disadvantage. This time Mr. Sarma also ensured the eclipse of the remnants of Assam's political past, as also the legacies of Hiteswar Saikia, Tarun Gogoi and Bhumidhar Barman and the era of Congress rule.

More significantly perhaps, in a State with 34% Muslim population, he ensured that not one Muslim representative was elected as a member of the majority BJP party, even as 18 of the 19 Opposition Congress MLAs elected were Muslims. While some form of ethnic cleansing had been in evidence in Assam for some time, ostensibly to eliminate 'illegals' (essentially 'Bangladeshi Muslims'), the wider implications of not a single Muslim being elected as part of the ruling echelon is worth examining in some detail. At one level it would seem a travesty of India's claims to be a multi-religious, multi-cultural civilization.

The Assembly elections in West Bengal witnessed the BJP coming to power in the State for the first time. Bengal appeared to be a State under siege during the two phases of polling, with the deployment of over 2,500 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces, ostensibly to maintain order, even though no major law-and-order issues were reported. Together with the removal of several lakh voters from the electoral rolls following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, this created a surreal atmosphere in the State during the elections.

Explaining the outcome in Bengal may appear relatively straightforward, but understanding the factors behind the BJP's success is less so. The standard explanation for Ms. Banerjee's eclipse is that, after 15 years in office, her regime had



**M.K. Narayanan**

Former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

ossified. Its perceived overreliance on the Muslim vote – more specifically on 'returnees from erstwhile East Bengal' – allegedly provoked adverse reactions.

Coupled with charges of administrative apathy and a lack of employment opportunities, this is said to have contributed to a consolidation of the Hindu vote against her. Interestingly, despite the existence of a 27% Muslim vote in Bengal, not a single Muslim was elected as part of the ruling alliance, while the Opposition returned over 35 Muslim MLAs in its tally of 86 seats. The implications of this development merit careful consideration.

Other reasons being adduced for the defeat of Ms. Banerjee and the All India Trinamool Congress, are the tardy response of the erstwhile Chief Minister and her coterie to the R.G. Kar Hospital imbroglio, the lingering shadow of Singur and Nandigram, and a failure to recognise Gen Z's aspirations for better employment opportunities in a shrinking job market. Taken together, these factors allowed the BJP to capitalise on a prevailing anti-Mamata and anti-Trinamool sentiment.

### Upending Dravidian dominance

If the change in Bengal could be compared to a political earthquake, the real tsunami was in Tamil Nadu, where close to six decades of 'Dravidian' rule was swept aside by the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) headed by a political neophyte, C. Joseph Vijay. Rationalism and caste took a back seat, concerns about North Indian domination seemed to recede to the background, even as established Dravidian parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam bit the dust. The erstwhile Chief Minister, from the DMK, became a victim of the tidal wave of youth power.

The 1967 eclipse of the Congress party by the DMK under C.N. Annadurai hardly bears comparison with the achievement of Mr. Vijay's two-year-old party, despite its lack of a well-defined political construct. The electorate only appeared determined to remove decades of duopoly of the DMK and AIADMK, viewing Mr. Vijay as a breath of fresh air in a region long consumed by anti-Delhi beliefs and ideas. Mr. Vijay's TVK promised to retain the model of social justice and the broadly secular welfare-friendly policies of the previous regime, but his emergence denotes the beginnings of the end of 'Dravidianisation' of politics in the State.

The change in Tamil Nadu does suggest that southern politics, despite a strong anti-Delhi thrust, may be in for a change. Even as the ideas and concepts of Periyar, Annadurai and Karunanidhi are likely to remain, many concepts and beliefs could alter, and this might well provide space for other ideologies to enter. The reasons for Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's defeat in a constituency that he had assiduously nursed for years, and having provided relatively competent leadership to the State overall, does call for a deeper study as its implications are huge.

The recent election results in four key States have revealed shifting voter priorities and challenged established political certainties

# After Maoism, the next battle is for Adivasi trust

On May 19, 2026, the Union Home Minister addressed a press conference in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, his first since March 31, 2026, when India was officially declared Maoist-free. The most encouraging aspect of the briefing was his assertion that "the fight against Maoism would remain incomplete until every resident of Bastar is integrated into the mainstream".

### The road to 2031

Having accomplished the March 31 objective, the Union Home Minister mentioned that 2031 would be the next milestone for ensuring the overall welfare of Bastar's Adivasis. This is welcome, since insurgencies do not have an expiry date. According to the Home Minister, this objective is to be achieved through democratic values, cooperation and development. The government also intends to expand its outreach by delivering welfare schemes to the doorsteps of local communities through designated centres operated by the security forces.

One of the methodologies that the Home Minister emphasised for the empowerment of Adivasis was a commitment to the tiered system of governance, from the tehsil level upwards to the Centre. The constitutional vision of this system was to be based on two parallel channels. The first comprised the Panchayati Raj Institutions, with the Gram Sabha as the basic unit. The second consisted of government-appointed officials such as tehsildars, District Collectors and others. The distinction is that the former is elected by the people, while the latter is appointed by the government. These channels were not to converge or be overshadowed by the



**Shashank Ranjan**

An Indian Army veteran (Colonel) with substantial experience in counter-terrorism operations, currently teaching at the O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana

Constitutional guarantees hold the key to Bastar's lasting peace

government-appointed channel, which normally has been the case on the ground. The Home Minister outlined a blueprint for the government's future initiatives. However, sustained peace will require addressing deeper structural issues. Surprisingly, his press conference made no mention of the most crucial of these concerning grassroots governance as guaranteed by the Constitution.

Welfare schemes, the road laying, and the installation of mobile communication towers do contribute significantly to improving the ease of living. However, the larger issues relate to *jal*, jungle and *zameen* (water, forest, and land). These are the concerns that will ultimately determine the people's trust in the government.

### Implementing PESA in earnest

Now is an opportunity for the government to complete the unfinished agenda of implementing the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act, 1996. Across India's Fifth Schedule Area States, the record of PESA implementation has been dismal. Since implementation was left to the States, each interpreted and applied the Act differently, often undermining its spirit and intent.

Grassroots governance centred on the Gram Sabha forms the basis of the PESA Act. Its effective implementation in letter and spirit has the potential to deliver justice to the Adivasi. Today, the Adivasi is with the government, largely due to the security forces' tactical victory over the Maoists. However, as the security challenges recede, the government will be tested by the Adivasi on the parameters of justice delivery. The Adivasi are aware of the guarantees that the Constitutional Acts provide and are unlikely to

Meanwhile, Mr. Vijay is clearly the 'trumpeter' of change, but he may not necessarily be the future.

### The Kerala result

Elections in Kerala followed a more traditional pattern of alternating between a Congress-led coalition and a Marxist-led Left Front. In 2021, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), under Pinarayi Vijayan, had bucked this trend, and continued in office with its alliance for a further five years, but Mr. Vijayan was to be the main reason for the debilitating defeat of the CPI(M)-led Front in the recent Assembly elections. In the event, a Congress-led United Democratic Front emerged victorious, securing 102 seats in the 140-member Assembly.

A significant aspect of the Kerala elections this time has been the emergence of a forward caste leader (V.D. Satheesan), without the support of casteist formations such as the Nair Service Society and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, denoting a shift in the politics of Kerala. However, the rise and rise of the Muslim League will be seen by many as bucking this trend. If the new Chief Minister, Mr. Satheesan, is able to detach State politics from the stranglehold of communal and casteist forces, and seize the moment with both hands, it could well usher in a new era in the politics of Kerala.

Few elections to State Assemblies in the past carry this degree of significance as the just concluded ones. Assembly elections this time were held in the backdrop of an assertion by the ruling party at the Centre, of the virtues of the same party being in power at the Centre, and in the States – the so-called 'double engine sarkar'.

Victory for the ruling party at the Centre in the States that went to the polls, were meant to add one more layer to this edifice of the same party ruling the government at the Centre and in the States. West Bengal was the prime target, and ensuring the defeat of Ms. Banerjee had become the single point objective. The campaign was carried out with military precision – less an 'election' than a campaign. Central paramilitary forces were employed extensively to maintain order. The SIR succeeded in the elimination of lakhs of voters, at least some of whom might have fulfilled the voter criteria, and most of whom belonged to the minority. That these tactics succeeded in achieving victory according to a predetermined plan, would suggest that elections are no longer confined to voting without fear or favour.

The implications of this are very considerable. A belief, as also a determination, that the same party should be in power at the Centre and in the States, may appear attractive, but it undermines the logic that people vote according to their conscience, and according to their own logic. In this sense, the elections of 2026 could have a far greater significance than initial outcomes would suggest. It has certain implications as well, for a 'double engine sarkar', often touted as the answer to several of India's problems, especially those faced by the various parties in the country.

scale down their aspirations.

With decentralised governance at its core, the PESA Act elevates the Gram Sabha to the cornerstone of local self-governance. Under the Act, the Gram Sabha is granted decisive powers to safeguard Adivasi identity, manage community resources and resolve local disputes in accordance with customary laws. The consent of the Gram Sabha on matters affecting lives and livelihoods has the potential to bring about the structural change necessary for positive peace – one that goes far beyond the mere absence of violence. However, State governments have often attempted to circumvent the authority of the Gram Sabha in pursuit of other objectives. A case in point was the Chhattisgarh government's 2022 proposal to amend the Act by replacing "consent" with "consultation". This would have diluted the Gram Sabha's veto power and undermined the essence of the PESA Act. There have also been instances where Gram Sabha resolutions and consent records were allegedly forged or fabricated with *mala fide* intent.

### The imperative of trust

The intent here is not to express scepticism about the sincerity of what the Home Minister said during his press briefing. However, for people to place their trust in the government, structural and historical issues must be addressed. Upholding and strengthening constitutional guarantees should be the primary concern of the government. This would help allay the lingering doubts in the minds of Adivasis, many of whom may still be ambivalent. Through genuinely participatory governance, the government should allow Adivasi to define the "mainstream" into which the Home Minister seeks to integrate them.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### State of the environment

India needs a permanent 'national council for sustainable development' to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship. Such a body should bring together policymakers, scientists, industry representatives and conservationists to evaluate projects before ecological damage occurs, protect fragile ecosystems,

ensure transparent assessments and minimise environmental costs. (Inside pages, "The Hindu Huddle to look at Aravallis, Nicobar, and India's development debate", June 3).  
**R.S. Narula**, Patiala, Punjab

The Aravallis and the Nicobar Islands are among the few remaining ecological lungs that require

fierce protection from the relentless pursuit of development. The Hindu Huddle would help foster deeper understanding of these issues.

**Balasubramaniam Pavani**, Secunderabad

### Examination format

I wish to highlight the grievance of thousands of aspirants affected by the mandatory Tamil Eligibility

Test in the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) examinations. While ensuring administrative proficiency in the State's official language is a laudable objective, the complete removal of the General English paper has inadvertently created an uneven playing field. It places candidates from CBSE, ICSE and other

non-State boards, where Tamil was not the primary medium of instruction, at a significant disadvantage. Further, the requirement of securing a minimum of 40% in this language paper as a precondition for evaluating the General Studies papers creates an additional barrier. Many otherwise meritorious candidates are eliminated at the outset, leaving their technical

expertise and core aptitude unassessed. In the interest of merit and fairness, the TNPSC should consider reintroducing the General English option. Language proficiency requirements can be done at the Civil Service Training Institute.  
**B. Shanmaathi**, Chennai

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

# Why judicial holidays are necessary

The debate over judicial holidays has resurfaced in recent weeks, with critics questioning why courts observe extended breaks. The assumption is that judges, like most professionals, step away from work during these periods. That assumption is largely wrong. For most judges, a holiday is rarely a holiday in any conventional sense.



**Kapil Sibal**  
Senior lawyer and Member of the Rajya Sabha

The public sees only the visible part of the work: judges presiding over courtrooms, hearing arguments, questioning lawyers and delivering orders. What they do not see is the considerably longer phase that begins after court hours, when judges return home to write judgments. This work often stretches past midnight. Each judgment requires close analysis of facts, application of legal principles, reference to precedent, and precision in language, since every word carries legal weight.

A single decision can affect lives, businesses, reputations and personal liberty.

### A time for uninterrupted work

This pattern is not unique to India. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was a judge of the United States Supreme Court for 27 years, was known to arrive at her chambers shortly after lunch and work late into the night. Her former law clerk Goodwin Liu, now a Justice of the California Supreme Court, has spoken of receiving voicemails from her at two or three in the morning, when she was at the height of her writing. From oral argument to majority opinion, she averaged 60 days, the fastest pace on her Bench. When she underwent surgery for colon cancer in 1999, and again for pancreatic cancer in 2009, she scheduled her procedures so as not to miss a single day on the Bench.

In India, the workload is no less demanding. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, during his eight-year tenure in the Supreme Court, authored over 600

judgments and sat on more than 1,200 Benches before retiring as the 50th Chief Justice of India in November 2024. Few professions outside the Bench demand such sustained intellectual output year after year, and that too with little public recognition of the labour involved.

The mornings begin no easier. Long before court assemblies, judges are reading voluminous case files, studying precedents and preparing for the day's hearings. By the time proceedings open, hours of unseen work have already gone in.

Judicial breaks, then, are not periods of rest but working windows. During these breaks, judges complete pending judgments, study lengthy case records and prepare for matters of constitutional importance. With case backlogs continuing to rise across courts, these are often the only stretches available for uninterrupted work.

Families bear much of the strain. Spouses and children of judges describe a familiar pattern: even on holidays, judges are occupied with their laptops, files or video calls with law clerks. The time supposed to be shared in company with their family is regularly interrupted by judicial work. Thus, judicial service is not only an individual commitment. It becomes a shared one for the household.

### Not as lucrative

The economic side of the Bench is also not discussed often. While judges receive a structured and respectable salary, it is not comparable to what senior lawyers earn at the top end of the bar. A senior advocate may earn in a single hearing what a judge earns over several months. Judges, in turn, carry the greater burden of decision-making and accountability.

Many take the Bench after giving up lucrative practices, choosing service to the nation over personal financial gain. The pressures do not end with

the workload. Judicial decisions are scrutinised publicly and legally. Judges must remain neutral and detached, even when the cost of doing so is high.

### The unseen cost

In his autobiography, *Neither Roses Nor Thorns*, Justice H.R. Khanna recalled the night before he delivered his lone dissent in the *ADM Jabalpur* case during the Emergency. Sitting in the moonlight in his compound with the Ganges flowing in front of them, he turned to his younger sister and said, "I have prepared a judgment which is going to cost me the Chief Justiceship of India." He was right. The following year he was superseded for the top post by Justice M.H. Beg, who had ruled with the majority, and resigned soon after.

His dissent, eventually vindicated when the Supreme Court overruled *ADM Jabalpur* in the *Puttaswamy* verdict of 2017, is now remembered as one of the bravest decisions in Indian judicial history.

The dedication asked of a judge does not end with retirement either. Lord Denning, whom Margaret Thatcher described as probably the greatest English judge of modern times, served on the Bench for 38 years and delivered around 2,000 reported judgments before retiring at 83. He continued writing books on the law till his 100th birthday.

Closer home, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer kept producing books, articles and lectures on jurisprudence long after his retirement from the Supreme Court, almost until his death at 99 in 2014.

The debate on judicial holidays deserves a more informed footing. A judge's duty does not pause when courts close. It continues through late night drafting, early morning preparation, and constant engagement with the law.

Before questioning the system, it may help to first understand what it actually asks of those who serve in it.

# A re-entry into Telangana politics

Pawan Kalyan seeks to transform controversy into political capital in the State

### STATE OF PLAY

Ravi Reddy

What began as a stray remark by former journalism professor and political analyst K. Nageshwar has spiralled into one of the most contentious episodes in Telangana's political discourse in recent times. His claim that the Jana Sena Party (JSP) chief and Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan had lobbied Union Home Minister Amit Shah to act against the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy led to severe backlash in Andhra Pradesh, which made him withdraw the allegation. Yet, the damage was done.

JSP cadres filed multiple FIRs against Mr. Nageshwar in Andhra, prompting Telangana's civil society activists, and journalists' bodies to rally behind him. For them, the FIRs symbolised an assault on Telangana's freedom of speech.

Thus, the controversy, which might have faded quietly, became a rallying cry for identity politics.

Against this backdrop, Mr. Kalyan seized the moment. At a press conference in Jubilee Hills, he announced the JSP's re-entry into Telangana politics, vowing to contest the 2029 Assembly elections. "We will not retreat from Telangana," he declared. He accused Congress leaders of a divisive rhetoric, urged the Centre to intervene, and questioned why his entry into Telangana was opposed when leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi had contested outside their home States without controversy.

Congress leaders, including Telangana State Transport Minister Ponnamb Prabhakar and



MLA Anirudh Reddy, responded sharply to the press conference, branding Mr. Kalyan's remarks as arrogant. Mr. Prabhakar dismissed him as a "paid artist" who had once opposed Telangana's formation. Both insisted that while Telangana welcomed Andhra residents, opportunistic politics would not be tolerated.

The controversy soon drew in other players. K. Kavitha, daughter of Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) chief K. Chandrashekar Rao, who had recently formed her own party, condemned the FIRs against Mr. Nageshwar, insisting that freedom of speech was non-negotiable. The symbolism of the Andhra Pradesh police allegedly seeking to assert authority in Hyderabad reinforced the narrative that Telangana's autonomy was under threat.

### Multiple alignments

For Mr. Kalyan, the timing was calculated. His announcement coincided with the Telangana Formation Day, which was a symbolic moment to project the JSP's entry into the State. He declared plans to expand the JSP's organisational base in Hyderabad, with a focus on the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation polls. The police denied him permission for a proposed meeting in Hyderabad, which in itself became a part of his offensive strategy, allowing him to frame the denial as an issue around democratic rights.

Mr. Kalyan's entry is also personal; Telangana was where he announced the JSP's formation a decade ago. His re-entry, therefore, carries symbolic weight, positioning him both as an insider and an outsider to the State's politics.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), meanwhile, has kept a cautious distance, limiting its involvement to criticising the Congress government for denying permission. Yet, its intentions are evident. Struggling to expand beyond urban pockets, the BJP sees potential in replicating Andhra Pradesh's alliance politics in Telangana. By aligning with the JSP and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), it hopes to tap into the large Andhra origin vote bank in Hyderabad.

For the Congress, which currently rules Telangana, the JSP's re-entry poses a challenge to its consolidation in Hyderabad. Welfare schemes and urban development have been its main tools, but the combined appeal of Andhra Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's administrative experience and Pawan Kalyan's youth connect could chip away at its urban voter base. And as for the BRS, the JSP's success could further erode its base among urban voters.

The episode underscores how a 'non-issue' snowballed into a political flashpoint. What began as a professor's stray remark has now reshaped Telangana's political landscape. For Pawan Kalyan, it has become an opportunity to re-enter the State. For the Congress and the BRS, it was a reminder that Telangana's identity politics remains volatile. And for the BJP, it is a chance to test alliance arithmetic in a State where it still seeks a breakthrough.

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# How India scaled its startup industry from 2016 to 2025

The Startup India scheme has been a success due to a supportive policy environment, robust startup growth, and a positive investment climate

### DATA POINT

Thillai Rajan A.,  
Chinni Chaitanya,  
Vamika Perumal

The Indian startup economy has truly come of age in the 10 years since Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave the clarion call during his Independence Day address on August 15, 2015, to make India the "Number 1" country in startups, and thereby sowed the seeds of significant directional change.

The three traits that make startups different from conventional businesses are an emphasis on innovation, the use of technology, and market opportunity. To distinguish startups from other businesses, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) started recognising companies that aligned with government guidelines as startups. Despite DPIIT recognition not being mandatory for startups to operate, there has been a significant growth in startups applying for its recognition. From 288 in 2016, which was just 3% of the total startups functioning then, the DPIIT's coverage has increased to 77% in 2025. The growing willingness to join the formal startup ecosystem has been an important measure of success for India's startup story.

Another indicator of success has been the penetration of startup culture across the length and breadth of the country. There has been a remarkable shift in startup formation from Tier 1 cities to Tier 3 towns. In 2016, Tier 1 cities dominated the startup landscape, accounting for about 65% of the total startups set up that year, while Tier 3 towns accounted for only about 15%. In 2020, these shares changed to 49% and 27%, respectively. However, the biggest change happened in 2025, when Tier 1 cities accounted for just 18% of new startups, whereas Tier 3 towns made up for 71%. This shift high-

lights the spread of innovation beyond major urban hubs.

The age and gender distributions of startup founders reveal a strong presence of the youth. A substantial portion of founders across both genders (approximately 66% are male founders and 59% female founders) are under 40. The embrace of entrepreneurship early in one's career signals a favourable and supportive ecosystem for startups. The data shows that women embark on their entrepreneurial journeys relatively later and their proportion increases notably with age. While women account for about 21% of the founders in the under-30 age group, they account for 33% in the 50-plus age group. Creating a supportive environment for women to pursue entrepreneurship has been an important policy imperative. The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of women founders stood at 20%, compared with 14% for men, underlining the strong trend of women increasingly pursuing entrepreneurship.

### The funding landscape

A surge in the confidence to invest in Indian startups has been yet another defining feature of the 2016-25 period. In 2016, India had 10,000 startups, of which 2,000 were funded ventures. The numbers have increased dramatically in 2025 with a total of 2,50,000 startups, of which 75,000 are funded ventures. This is an increase of 25-fold and 38-fold respectively.

Trends indicate that a supportive policy environment, robust startup growth, and a positive investment climate in the first 10 years of the Startup India scheme have created several moments of success. The decade from 2016 to 2025 has firmly placed India among the top four in the league of startup nations.

Thillai Rajan A., Chinni Chaitanya and Dr. Vamika Perumal, the Centre for Research on Startups, Indian Institute of Technology Madras

## Startup surge

The data were sourced from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), and YNOS Venture Engine



Chart 1: The growth in the number of DPIIT-recognised startups between 2016 and 2025

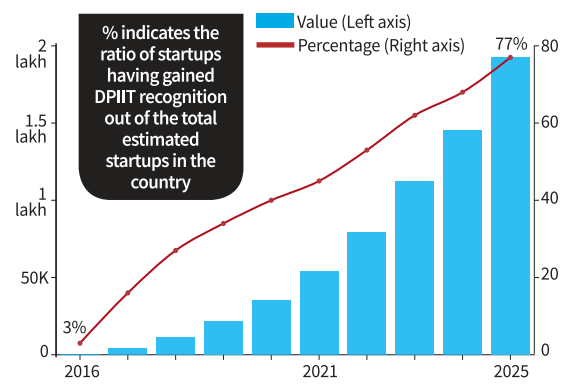


Chart 2: The number of startups set up in Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 cities and towns in 2016, 2020, and 2025

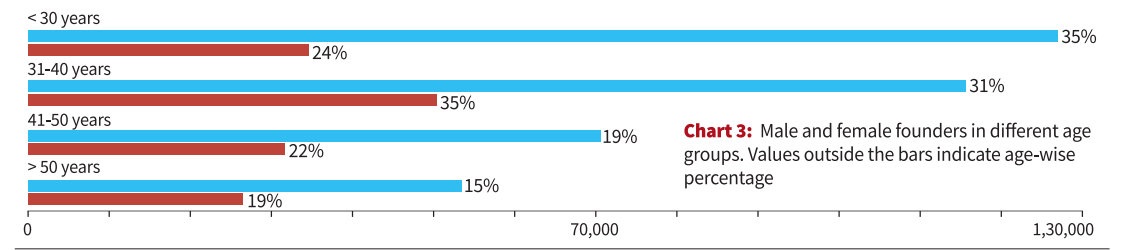
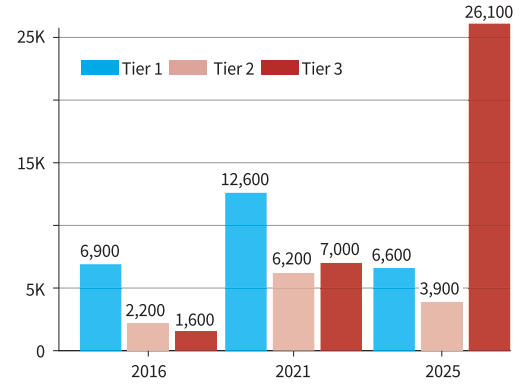


Chart 4: The growth in male and female founders between 2016 and 2025

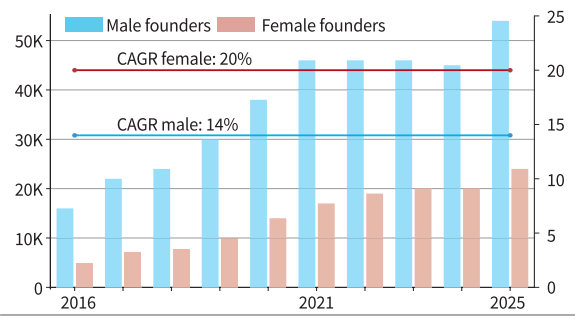
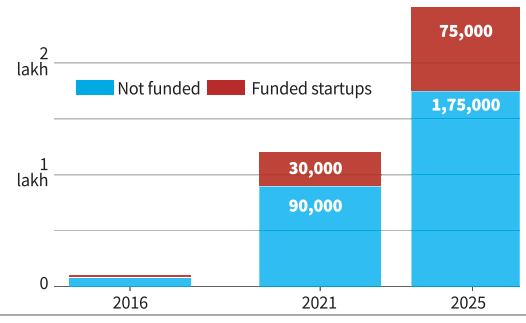


Chart 5: The growth in startup formation and funded startups between 2016 and 2025



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 4, 1976

## Full take-over of Oil India planned

New Delhi, June 3: The Central Government is seriously thinking of complete take-over of the joint sector Oil India Limited (OIL) in which the Government and Burmah Oil Company hold 50 per cent equity each.

The future of OIL has assumed importance in the context of current negotiations over the taking over of the Indian assets of the two remaining foreign oil companies operating in India - Caltex and Assam Oil Company. The Ministry of Petroleum proposes to set up an inter-ministerial committee to expedite the take-over of these two companies.

The thinking in the Ministry is that the same committee should also go into the future equity setup of OIL, mainly with a view to developing the organisation as the second public sector oil exploration and production agency in the country.

The Ministry also thinks that OIL should be developed with added responsibilities in on-shore and off-shore oil exploration and production. But this would be possible only if the concern becomes a 100 per cent government enterprise.

According to the thinking in the Ministry, all constraints on the restructuring and expansion of the oil industry will disappear once the remaining foreign assets in the industry are taken over.

At present the Oil and Natural Gas Commission and OIL are self-reliant in on-shore exploration. They could be further expanded to take over more of off-shore exploratory work. Where expertise is needed, it could be commercially bought.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 4, 1926

## Wheat forecast

Calcutta, June 3: The fourth All-India Wheat forecast says that the total area is now returned at 30,288,000 acres as against 31,636,000 acres at this time last year or a decrease of four per cent.

The total yield is now estimated at 8,668,000 tons at this time last year as compared with 8,882,000 tons at this time last year or a decrease of two per cent.

The condition of the crop on the whole is reported to be fair.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

**NEWS IN NUMBERS**

**Indian tyre exports in the financial year 2025-26**

**27,312** In ₹ crore. Indian tyre exports were at record high of ₹27,312 crore in FY2025-26, with the U.S. being the largest export destination for the segment, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association said on Wednesday, citing data released by the Commerce Ministry. The exports rose 9% from ₹25,057 crore a year ago. PTI

**Applications filed for re-evaluation under CBSE**

**43,980** Nearly 44,000 students have availed the re-evaluation facility for board exams and completed the application process till Wednesday morning, the CBSE said. "The portal has accepted 4,924 applications for verification and 39,056 applications for re-evaluation (total of 43,980) as of 12 noon today". PTI

**Persons killed in south Delhi hotel fire on Wednesday morning**

**21** A massive fire broke out in a hotel in a congested bylane in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar area on Wednesday, killing at least 21 people, including foreigners whose ailing relatives were being treated in hospitals nearby. The death toll could rise with several of the injured in a critical condition. The blaze began around 8.30 a.m. and quickly spread, catching everybody unawares. PTI

**Recent fine imposed on Shein by French authorities**

**22** In million euros. French authorities said on Wednesday that they had imposed two fines on the Asian fashion giant Shein totalling more than 22 million euros (\$25.5 million), citing problems with product traceability, environmental labelling and delivery times. The latest fines were imposed by the government's consumer protection agency DGCCRF. PTI

**Japan's fertility rate falls to a record low**

**1.14** Japan's fertility rate fell again last year to a record low, official data showed. Japan has one of the world's lowest birth rates, as well as a falling and ageing population, leading to labour shortages, a ballooning social security bill and a shrinking tax base. The number of babies born in the country fell by nearly 15,000. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## Is shoot-to-disable the new normal?

Why is Operation Langda a pragmatic strategy? Has a sporadic enforcement tactic become a routine practice? What makes it legally defensible? To what extent does the State endorse half-encounters? Is it a self-sustaining system? Why are piecemeal reforms insufficient?

**EXPLAINER**

G.S. Bajpai  
Vibhuti Sharma

**The story so far:**

The "leg-shot" doctrine appears to have become the new normal in Uttar Pradesh, emerging as a genuine crime-control model that Herbert Packer advocated in 1968, in his work – *The Limits of the Criminal Sanction*. Between 2017 and 2025, the State Police recorded over 16,000 encounter operations. In about 97% of cases, the accused survived with a bullet wound to the leg. At this scale, the question is no longer whether something unusual happened, but what it means when the unusual becomes routine.

**What is Operation Langda?**

A motorcycle is intercepted on a highway. The accused attempts to flee. Shots are fired. He is injured, typically in the leg, and taken into custody. This sequence, which now recurs across the State, is now known as "Operation Langda", or "half-encounters", from the Hindi word *langda* (lame), a policing methodology cultivated by the Uttar Pradesh Police since 2017 under its "zero-tolerance" framework. What may initially have appeared as a sporadic enforcement tactic has, over time, acquired the characteristics of a routine practice governed by a dual logic of incapacitation and punishment.

Refined through repetition, encounters have evolved into a recognisable policing pattern marked by targeted leg injury, standardised reporting, official endorsement and overt punitive logic.

**How are half-encounters structured?**

A study by the Centre for Criminology and Victimology at National Law University Delhi, based on official U.P. Police data and 100 verified encounter cases (January 2025–May 2026), found that these incidents follow a



In Uttar Pradesh, encounters have evolved into a recognisable policing pattern marked by targeted leg injury, standardised reporting, official endorsement and overt punitive logic. PTI

near-identical sequence: intelligence received, suspect intercepted, alleged attempt to flee or fire, police response in self-defence, gunshot to the leg, arrest, and recovery of a locally made pistol. This seven-step sequence is the standardised operational template of Operation Langda, repeated across more than 30 districts over nearly a decade.

What distinguishes the practice is its focus on incapacitation rather than lethality. By visibly disabling accused persons, it functions as both a disciplinary mechanism and an assertion of state authority. The standardised language of police reports further normalises this extra-procedural punishment by presenting it as routine law enforcement. Nearly 80% of 100 cases in the micro-level dataset used either "retaliation" or "self-defence" as the major justificatory framing, no matter what the alleged offence is.

The consistency of this framing across widely different offences suggests a standardised narrative template rather than case-specific accounts. This helps

reproduce the practice across districts as a recognisable policing methodology.

In most of the 100 cases examined, media reports reproduced the police version without critical scrutiny. Critical coverage emerged only when direct counter-evidence challenged the official narrative. As a result, these incidents entered the news cycle largely as routine law-and-order events, that functioned as transmission rather than scrutiny.

The emergence of this methodology must be understood against the institutional constraints faced by the Uttar Pradesh Police. Prior to 2017, conviction rates in several categories of violent crimes were below 20%, while investigative capacity lagged far behind caseloads. In this environment, 'half-encounters' present a pragmatic alternative.

Crucially, shooting to disable rather than kill makes the practice more legally defensible. The accused survives to be produced in court, the officer can claim self-defence, and the state records an arrest rather than a death. This

distinguishes the U.P. model from the typical "fake encounter" tradition. It is also a reason why the practice continues to enjoy official support. State data show declines in crimes such as dacoity and robbery, but these gains do not address concerns over due process and the erosion of the rule of law.

Uttar Pradesh publicly treats encounter statistics as indicators of law-and-order achievements. Through official recognition and accelerated promotions, an exceptional tactic has become an accepted metric of policing performance. The incentive structure is reflected in the data: 2,739 encounter operations were recorded in 2025 alone – the highest annual figure in the dataset.

This official endorsement contrasts sharply with established judicial standards. In *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. State of Maharashtra (2014)*, the Supreme Court laid down sixteen principles and mandated an independent inquiry in every case. While these remain the legal benchmark, they have not been systematically applied in the State.

In January 2026, the Allahabad High Court observed that "half-encounter" practices were often driven by official rewards and promotions. The court reiterated that the power to punish belongs exclusively to the judiciary.

**What makes reform so difficult?**

The central problem is that "Operation Langda" is that it operates as a self-sustaining system. Political endorsement, professional incentives, media transmission and the chronic weaknesses of the criminal justice process do not merely tolerate the practice, they reproduce it. Piecemeal reforms will not be enough. What is most striking is how a practice that sits outside legal norms has, through routine and reward, become part of how the state governs. Any durable reform must dismantle the interlocking incentives and channels that produce it.

G.S. Bajpai is the Vice Chancellor of the National Law University, Delhi. Vibhuti Sharma is an Academic Fellow, NLU Delhi. Views are personal.

**THE GIST**

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## Is climate research being held back by local instrumentation?

What are India's biggest gaps in climate research? Why do prototypes fail to become products?

Jacob Koshy

**The story so far:**

A Mega Science Vision-2035 report on Climate Research is a roadmap prepared by the Indian climate research community with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, as the nodal institution, and submitted to the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) to the Government of India, was made public this week.

**What is its central message?**

The central message of the report is that India has effectively lost the ability to build its own scientific instruments. "Today, virtually no company in India manufactures quality scientific instruments for climate research," it

states, adding that "billions of rupees have been spent and continue to be spent on procuring instruments manufactured elsewhere." Worse, imported instruments are often used "without knowing the principle of operation, the built-in assumptions... and their limitations," and left uncalibrated for years – producing, in the report's words, "incorrect data being reported in national and international journals, often leading to questions on the credibility of Indian science."

**What is the Mega Science Vision exercise?**

The Mega Science Vision exercise, historically used to plan large, long-horizon projects in nuclear and high-energy physics, was for the first time extended to climate research, ecology and astronomy, and facilitated by the PSA's

office under Prof. Ajay K. Sood. A working group chaired by Prof. S.K. Sathesh, with former Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) director Dr. S.S.C. Sheno, as member-secretary, drew on consultations with over 3,000 researchers. Crucially, the document calls itself "a Climate Research community document" of "hopes and aspirations" whose projects are "indicative" – it is neither a mandatory prescription nor a statement of government policy or funding.

**Hasn't India built any of its own climate instruments?**

It has built prototypes, but rarely products. The report notes that Indian engineers can design and demonstrate instruments, "some of which have already been demonstrated successfully," yet

"they are not often translated into final industrial products." Examples include automatic profiling floats developed at the National Institute of Ocean Technology for ocean observation, and automatic weather stations by the India Meteorological Department and ISRO. Although transferred to industry, "most of them have not reached the market yet." Tellingly, the first phase of the proposed sensor programme is an audit to identify why such technologies fail to scale to production. The suggested remedy – mandating that most instruments be made in India, backed by assured procurement and pricing – sits uneasily with recent experience: the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal, made mandatory to support domestic vendors, was rolled back for scientific institutions in June 2025 after scientists found it hindered access to customised, high-quality equipment.

**Why study uncontrolled renewables?**

Although renewable energy seems to be the right solution to replace polluting sources, the report cautions that studies are needed to assess the long-term effects of uncontrolled tapping of natural resources – even as it insists renewables must remain a priority to sustain recent momentum. India, which has pledged 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030,

crossed the halfway mark in installed capacity in 2025. The report also calls for scientific methods to estimate the social cost of carbon, a "polluter pays" mechanism to prevent the atmosphere from becoming a dumping ground, and measures to offset the burden of carbon taxation on the poor.

**What else in the report is of importance?**

The report proposes a pan-India Climate and Health Observatory under a mega project on adaptation and resilience, reflecting how thinly India tracks climate-related health impacts. It outlines eight mega projects spanning observational networks, indigenous sensors, satellites, two strands of climate modelling, field campaigns, carbon-neutrality research and adaptation science, to be overseen by a high-level apex committee. On science, it enters contested ground, backing a dense Black Carbon observatory network despite disputed claims about its relative role in global warming. It flags India's thin paleoclimate networks as a gap in understanding the monsoon's deep past, and the risk of crossing tipping points such as ice-sheet collapse and shifts in ocean circulation. It also warns of limited trained manpower, including in environmental epidemiology.

# A liver protein triggered by exercise reversed memory loss in mice

After exercise, small molecules called exerkinins are released by the liver, skeletal muscles, heart, and brain into the bloodstream; these include peptides, lipids, and hormones and mediate the beneficial effects of exercise, promoting cardiovascular fitness and improving metabolism

Sheetal Potdar

As we grow older, our cognitive abilities begin to wane. We forget names and places, lose trains of thought, and become creatures of habit. A key to overcoming these ageing-induced cognitive deficits may be exercise.

“Exercise improves cardiovascular fitness, glucose metabolism, insulin sensitivity, blood pressure, lipid profiles, sleep, mood, and immune function,” Atefe Tari, a researcher studying exercise and brain health at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and St. Olav’s University Hospital, said.

“While all of these can influence brain health, exercise also affects the brain more directly by many different processes, including changes in signaling molecules.”

A new study published in *Cell* has reported how a signal released by the liver after exercise reduces cognitive decline due to ageing and Alzheimer’s disease in mice.

## Exerkinins to the rescue

After exercise, small molecules called exerkinins are released by the liver, skeletal muscles, heart, and brain into the bloodstream. These include peptides, lipids, hormones, and nucleic acids. These exerkinins mediate the beneficial effects of exercise, including promoting cardiovascular fitness and improving metabolism, throughout the body.

In the study, Gregor Bieri and colleagues at the University of California, San Francisco, examined the mechanism of action of one such exerkinin produced by the liver: GPLDI.

The researchers increased the levels of GPLDI in the livers of older mice that had exercised – voluntarily running on wheels, like a treadmill. Old mice that could not exercise because their wheels had been locked had lower levels of GPLDI in their livers.

Next, the researchers tested the cognitive abilities of young and old mice. Young mice performed better at a spatial memory test compared to old mice. The test was to find a platform hidden in a pool of water. Young mice made fewer errors and found the platform sooner compared to their older peers. The young mice also preferred novel objects instead of familiar ones and would readily explore novel locations, while old mice showed no such preferences.

Importantly, these cognitive deficits were reduced in old mice whose livers were injected with GPLDI, showing that GPLDI could mitigate ageing-induced cognitive decline.

## Protective barrier

GPLDI is an enzyme that breaks down hundreds of proteins on cell surfaces. Based on this function, the authors focused on the blood-brain barrier in mice – a network of blood vessels and specialised cells that surround the brain.

“The blood-brain barrier tightly regulates the signals and nutrients that get shuttled between the brain and blood,” Dr. Bieri, the lead author of the study, explained.

As we age, the barrier accumulates proteins that make it leaky. The authors



Exercise affects different parts of the body simultaneously. STEVEN LELHAM/UNSPLASH

found one such protein, called TNAP, to be highly enriched in the blood-brain barriers of old mice, notably even around the hippocampus, the learning and memory centre of the brain.

“While we do not fully understand its role, we observed that TNAP drives inflammation and impairs the transport of factors from blood to brain,” Dr. Bieri said.

He and his colleagues performed three experiments to tie the roles of TNAP and GPLDI. First, the scientists found that old mice that have more TNAP in their barriers also had leaky blood vessels. Next, young mice in which TNAP levels were artificially increased in the barrier surrounding the hippocampus showed leaky blood vessels and cognitive defects similar to old mice. Third, injecting GPLDI in the livers of old mice, while also artificially increasing TNAP in the blood-brain barrier, nullified the beneficial effects of GPLDI on cognitive function.

“A strength of this study is the combination of approaches that provides mechanistic evidence that TNAP is functionally involved in blood-brain barrier dysfunction and cognitive decline,” Dr. Tari said.

Overall, these experiments showed that TNAP, which accumulates on the blood-brain barrier due to ageing, is broken down by GPLDI, an enzyme released by the liver after exercise.

**Therapeutic potential for Alzheimer’s**  
Given that ageing is a risk factor for neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, the authors next tested whether the GPLDI intervention could reduce cognitive decline in a mouse model of Alzheimer’s disease.

Dr. Tari, who was not involved in the study, exercised caution on this count, noting that “mouse models of Alzheimer’s

do not fully reproduce the complexity of the disease in humans, which develops over decades and involves vascular dysfunction, inflammation, metabolism, genetics, and lifestyle factors.”

“When the blood-brain barrier becomes leaky, several things can happen that are relevant to Alzheimer’s development,” Dr. Tari said. “First, inflammatory molecules and other blood-derived factors can enter the brain more easily and activate immune responses. This causes chronic inflammation in the nerve cells which can accelerate disease processes.”

“Secondly, if the blood-brain barrier function is impaired, the brain may become less efficient at clearing toxic proteins and maintaining its internal environment.” Alzheimer’s disease is characterised by the accumulation of toxic amyloid protein, which clump together to form plaques, leading to neurodegeneration and cognitive decline. These features are modelled in genetically modified mice by expressing human genes with multiple mutations that force the rapid buildup of amyloid protein.

The team allowed the Alzheimer’s-modelled mice to run on wheels voluntarily for three months, after which their GPLDI levels were higher, and their cognitive performance was notably improved, compared to Alzheimer’s-modelled mice that did not exercise.

In another experiment, GPLDI was injected into the livers of Alzheimer’s-modelled mice. In these mice, TNAP levels in the blood-brain barrier were lower, the blood vessels were less leaky, there were fewer amyloid plaques, and cognitive dysfunction was reduced.

Experts said these results are encouraging and have clinical implications for Alzheimer’s disease. Dr. Bieri noted that “while a lot of

research and potential therapeutic strategies have focused on the brain, recent antibody-based interventions are associated with side effects resulting from a breakdown of the blood-brain barrier. Thus, improving blood-brain barrier function could also improve the treatment efficacy of other therapeutic interventions.”

“This study identifies a promising pathway that may become relevant for drug development or biomarker work,” Dr. Tari added. “But it does not mean we are close to replacing exercise with a pill yet.”

## Parallel and convergent pathways

Exercise affects different parts of the body simultaneously. Brain function is also influenced by multiple factors. Recently, in another study, researchers from Seoul National University and the Korea Brain Research Institute found that exerkinins secreted by skeletal muscles could improve cognitive performance by crossing the blood-brain barrier, unlike GPLDI. This exerkinin was found to boost new neuron formation within the hippocampus. “The benefits of exercise are unlikely to be explained by a single molecule or pathway alone,” Dr. Tari noted, adding that “the strength of exercise likely lies in its ability to trigger a coordinated, whole-body response.”

Dr. Bieri said he sees clinical opportunity in the possibility of multiple exerkinins working in tandem: “As potential new therapeutic strategies keep expanding, [the] discovery of complementary mechanisms will allow for a more personalised medicine approach. Future treatments will likely be combinatorial, tackling different cell types and hallmarks of ageing and disease.”

(Sheetal Potdar is a freelance science journalist with a PhD in neuroscience. sheetaldpotdar@gmail.com)



Quark-gluon plasma are extraordinarily hot, reaching trillions of degrees centigrade. Representative image. IMAGE CREATED BY AI

## New result pushes bounds of how small a liquid can be

Vasudevan Mukunth

Physicists have spent more than two decades studying one of the strangest forms of matter ever created in a laboratory: the quark-gluon plasma (QGP). Quarks and gluons are the smallest pieces of matter. A QGP existed in the first few millionths of a second after the Big Bang, before the quarks bound together to form the first protons and neutrons. Researchers routinely create small droplets of QGP by colliding heavy atomic nuclei at extremely high energies. These droplets are extraordinarily hot, reaching trillions of degrees centigrade. Their behaviour, however, has been more surprising: instead of acting like a gas, the QGP behaves like a fluid.

A new study in *Physical Review Letters* has now reported a new ‘boundary’ in this field. By smashing together oxygen nuclei at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC),

### The new study addresses a different question: how small can a droplet of matter be and still have fluid-like behaviour

researchers have found the smallest dollop of QGP – so far – that still behaves like a fluid. Physicists have known for decades now that energising and colliding lead nuclei, which are much heavier than oxygen nuclei, produces QGP. The new study addresses a different question: how small can a droplet of matter be and still have fluid-like behaviour? The LHC usually smashes together protons. The researchers picked oxygen ions because they occupy a middle ground between the tiny clumps of energy and matter created by smushed protons and the massive ones formed by lead ions. A middle ground that could reveal the tipping point where subatomic matter starts to resemble a fluid. The research team analysed collisions between oxygen nuclei at the LHC, looking for fast-moving particles that emerged from the collision, and compared their numbers with what would be expected if no dense medium had formed. If no dense medium forms, physicists can predict how many such particles should appear. But if a medium is present, some of the energetic quarks and gluons should lose energy before they escape, reducing the number of energetic particles eventually reaching the detector.

The researchers have reported signs of such a suppression. It was less pronounced in collisions involving the oxygen ions, but it was noticeable. The finding suggests that oxygen-oxygen collisions can create a medium large enough to affect the motion of energetic quarks and gluons. The data “are also in better agreement with theoretical models that include quark-gluon energy loss than they are with models that omit it,” *Physical Review Letters* associate editor Nikhil Karthik wrote in *Physics*. Properties like viscosity and flow are associated with fluids, and these fluids usually have an enormous number of particles. A droplet of water sliding down a wall has quadrillions of water molecules. A glob of honey big enough to show how slowly it slides has roughly a quintillion sugar molecules. Yet the QGP is much, much smaller – it has maybe thousands of quarks and gluons – but it is still a fluid. According to the new finding, a strongly interacting medium can emerge even in collisions involving relatively light nuclei. At the same time, it makes the mystery of where exactly the transition between a fluid-like medium and a gas of largely independent particles emerges more intriguing. (mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in)

## THE SCIENCE QUIZ

### Different perspectives: a quiz on things that light does

Vasudevan Mukunth

#### QUESTION 1

When light from a distant object passes near a very heavy body like a galaxy or a black hole, the object’s gravity bends the path of the light. As a result, the light can become distorted or magnified. Name this phenomenon, which astronomers use to study objects that are magnified in this way.

#### QUESTION 2

When light travels, it carries momentum. So when it strikes an object, it exerts a small force. Over a long period, this force can slowly accelerate a spacecraft without fuel. A spacecraft design called \_\_\_\_\_ makes use of this technology to be propelled through deep space. Fill in the blanks.

#### QUESTION 3

An X wave is a form of light that appears near a surface but fades

rapidly away from that surface. It doesn’t travel freely through space like ordinary light does. Scientists use these waves in technologies such as optical fibres to confine light using total internal reflection. Name X.

#### QUESTION 4

Light is an electromagnetic wave. The direction in which its electric field oscillates is called its polarisation. In circularly polarised light, what happens to the field’s direction as the light travels? Scientists have used this detail to send microscopic particles spinning.

#### QUESTION 5

When some stars die, their cores become super-dense objects called magnetars, which sport some of the most powerful magnetic fields in the universe. These fields are so strong that they render the vacuum of space \_\_\_\_\_, which splits up light according to the way it is polarised. Fill in the blank.



**Visual:** Name the effect that partly polarises the light in the sky; the image on the right shows only polarised blue light. Many insects use this polarisation pattern to find their way. Light pollution is not polarised, confusing them. PICCOLONAMEK (CC BY-SA)

Please send in your answers to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in)

#### Answers to to May 28 quiz:

- Gulf in Arctic Russia at end of longest unobstructed sea route – **Ans: Khatanga**
  - Point on land farthest from any coastline – **Ans: Continental pole of inaccessibility**
  - Most remote island, a South Atlantic Norwegian territory – **Ans: Bouvet Island**
  - Name of underwater channel adept at transmitting sound – **Ans: SOFAR**
  - Line marking belt of highest mean surface temperature – **Ans: Thermal equator**
- Visual: **Null Island**

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For feedback and suggestions for ‘Science’, please write to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in) with the subject ‘Daily page’

## Prepare the ground

IMD forecast points to a deficient agri season this year

**T**he India Meteorological Department's (IMD) June forecast for South-West monsoon carries more bad news than the April one. IMD now believes that monsoon rainfall for the country will likely be at 90 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), compared to the April forecast of 92 per cent. IMD's June forecast for the monsoon is usually more accurate than the early April one. It suggests a deficient monsoon year, instead of merely a sub-normal one, and calls for greater preparation.



The forecast also casts a damper on the spatial distribution of rain. Only North-East India, not very critical for the agri-economy, is now expected to receive normal rain. Central and South Peninsular India and the North-West are likely to experience below normal rains. The monsoon core zone, which is rainfed and critical for agricultural output, is expected to receive less than 94 per cent of LPA. The forecast also raises the possibility of the looming El Nino coinciding exactly with the monsoon months. In April, the IMD had talked of weak La Nina conditions persisting until June, pushing back the advent of El Nino. It also held out the hope that a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (a weather phenomenon that counteracts the impact of El Nino) could emerge towards the end of the Southwest monsoon season. A positive IOD has in some years negated the El Nino effect. However, the latest forecast says that neutral IOD conditions are expected to continue, suggesting that this hope is receding. The World Meteorological Organisation has just predicted that there is an 80 per cent probability of a moderate to strong El Nino emerging between June and August. June has already seen a patchy start to the Southwest monsoon, accompanied by a countrywide heat wave. Should these conditions last through July, the critical sowing month, kharif output could be seriously hit.

In its latest estimates this week, the Agriculture Ministry has marginally lowered its kharif output target to 151 million tonnes for rice (from 154 million tonnes last year), 52.5 million tonnes for maize (55.1 MT last year) and 40 million tonnes for oilseeds (43.1 MT last year). Estimates for other kharif crops such as sugarcane, jowar, bajra, tur, urad and moong have either been hiked or left unchanged from the previous year. No estimates have been provided for horticulture crops. It is unclear if this is because the Ministry expects no impact from a deficient monsoon, or plans to course-correct as sowing progresses.

Pulses and vegetables have been key contributors to spells of runaway inflation in the past. Therefore, a sensible approach is to start with realistic estimates — and avoid knee-jerk actions such as export bans or import duty cuts which hurt farm incomes and impact India's reputation as a reliable supplier of agri-products. Lower paddy and maize output also call for recalibration of the ambitious ethanol blending programme. Overall, the Centre and States should be prepared with policy options to deal with eventualities.

### OTHER VOICES.

## The Guardian

### Civilians need lasting peace, not short-term patches

Let's see how long that lasts," Donald Trump wrote on Truth Social on Monday night, addressing his attempts to de-escalate in Lebanon following Israel's intensified military campaign. Within hours, Israeli drone strikes had killed eight people in the south, including a father and his two children, and damaged a hospital. Hezbollah continued launching rockets and drones. Anxious to escape the illegal war that he launched on Iran, and with Tehran threatening to suspend peace talks over the Israeli offensive, the US president reined in Benjamin Netanyahu — for now — in what was described as an expletive-laden phone call. Mr Trump's post, despite its unusual admission of doubt, still oversold the agreement. LONDON, JUNE 2

# Welding AI with manufacturing systems

**THE ARCHITECTURE.** Tweaking the PLI framework to create ecosystems, converging AI and physical systems for talent formation are vital



VIPIN SONDHI  
G SUNDARARAMAN

**W**alk through the despatch bay of a mid-sized auto-component plant in Manesar, Haryana and ask the plant head what keeps him awake. A year ago, the answer would have been capacity; more orders than the line could absorb. Today the answer is different.

A long-standing European buyer will be introducing a new requirement: full carbon traceability data, shipment by shipment, as a condition of continued supply under the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). The plant can produce, but it cannot yet prove. In global manufacturing, the inability to prove is rapidly becoming indistinguishable from the inability to perform.

This is not an isolated episode. Trade, technology and carbon policy have ceased to be neutral terrain. They shape market access, define the terms of participation in global value chains and determine which nations retain industrial agency. The question for Bharat is whether we build the depth this moment demands, or whether we scale capacity while the architecture lags behind.

**THE SHIFT TO PHYSICAL AI** Artificial intelligence has, until recently, been largely a phenomenon of the screen; content, retail, software. That is changing.

The next phase of AI is physical: applied to factories, logistics, energy grids and supply chains where interaction between software and machines must be seamless and reliable. This is not a distant prospect. It is already under way in the most competitive manufacturing economies and beginning unevenly in Bharat. The applications are concrete. Predictive maintenance systems flag

equipment stress before a breakdown occurs. Digital twins allow factories to be stress-tested virtually before capital is committed to build physically. Machine vision replaces subjective quality inference with real-time assurance. Energy management algorithms reduce industrial consumption that bear directly on carbon compliance. None of these require frontier AI research. They require disciplined deployment of techniques that are already proven.

The concern is not awareness. It is adoption depth. Several large automotive and engineering firms in Bharat are beginning this journey. But the gap between these early movers and the wider MSME base is significant. A mid-sized component supplier operating across three shifts may grasp the value of predictive maintenance in principle.

The challenge is integration: legacy equipment, mixed data architectures and the absence of in-house capability to deploy and sustain these systems. The B2B clusters — foundries, machining shops — are where the adoption gap is widest and the competitive risk, most acute.

**THE ECOSYSTEM IMPERATIVE** Manufacturing competitiveness is rarely the achievement of individual firms. It is the product of ecosystems. In Shenzhen, a hardware prototype moves from concept to revision in days, not because of one exceptional factory but because suppliers, tooling specialists, designers and process engineers operate within a dense, interdependent cluster where learning circulates rapidly.

Bharat has analogues; the auto-component clusters of Pune and Chennai, the textile ecosystem of

**AI investment layered onto poorly designed operating systems will not rescue this situation. It will amplify the underlying weaknesses**

Tiruppur, the electronics base emerging in Tamil Nadu and Telangana. The question is whether these clusters are developing the institutional depth that converts proximity into compounding advantage, i.e. shared testing infrastructure, training pipelines, standards bodies in which industry actively participates and research institutions engaged with problems the shopfloor actually wrestles with. Without these, a cluster is geography, not ecosystem.

The standards dimension deserves particular attention. Mechanisms like CBAM and the EU's Digital Product Passport are not administrative inconveniences, they are the new architecture of market access. Those who shape such standards retain influence over the terms of global trade. Bharat's ambition to be a trusted partner in diversified supply chains requires a deliberate shift from compliance to co-authorship at standards bodies, in trade negotiations and in value chain design.

### WEAK POINTS

The risk Bharat faces is not that it misses this manufacturing moment. The geopolitical realignment of supply chains, the China-plus-one strategies of global corporations, the friend-shoring logic of western procurement creates structural demand for India as a manufacturing destination. That tailwind is real.

The risk is that we respond by scaling capacity without upgrading the underlying architecture, producing growth that is brittle rather than durable.

Most manufacturing systems expand initially through stretch; additional shifts, higher equipment utilisation, extended managerial spans. Stretch releases latent capacity efficiently. But beyond a threshold accountability blurs, variability accumulates and delivery credibility built patiently erodes faster than it was earned. Global buyers managing their own compliance obligations have limited tolerance for inconsistency.

AI investment layered onto poorly designed operating systems will not

rescue this situation. It will amplify the underlying weaknesses.

### A WAY FORWARD

Bharat enters this transition with genuine structural advantages; a large engineering base, demonstrated capacity for digital deployment at scale, deepening integration into global supply chains across automotive, pharmaceuticals, electronics and defence.

Converting these advantages into durable industrial sovereignty requires three specific shifts. First, the PLI framework must evolve beyond output incentives because volume-linked subsidies have served their purpose. The next phase must reward ecosystem formation: supplier depth, shared infrastructure and technical workforce pipelines.

Second, the valley between research capability and industrial application must be bridged through co-funded mechanisms with shared accountability. National laboratories like CMTI and SAMEER carry deep technical capability that is not being converted into production-grade tools consistently. The missing link is not science but industrial partners willing to take prototypes from TRL 4 to TRL 7.

Third, Bharat must treat the convergence of AI and physical systems as a talent formation priority. Engineers who can navigate both algorithms and material systems — thermodynamics, robotics, reliability engineering — will determine which countries shape the next industrial era. Bharat produces exactly this profile. The question is whether institutional conditions exist to deploy that capability at home.

The factory that can trace its carbon footprint, anticipate its failures and integrate cleanly into evolving global value chains is the operational baseline that serious manufacturing buyers are already beginning to demand. And so, while scale will build presence, architecture will build sovereignty.

Sondhi is Independent Director: Global - India, Former MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland and JCB India; Sundararaman is Chief Scientist and Head of Wipro Research. Views expressed are personal

# Monetary policy should not target exchange rate

Interest rate hikes will not address real concerns underlying the rupee fall. Instead, they will harm the domestic economy

Krishan Sharma  
Nida Rahman

**T**he rupee touching 96.96 to the dollar on May 20 was not simply a story of crude oil, dollar strength, or foreign portfolio outflows. Those were the triggers. The deeper issue is that India is operating inside the classic open-economy trilemma: the attempt to preserve currency stability, monetary-policy autonomy, and access to global capital at the same time.

India does not sit at any pure corner of this triangle. It has partial capital controls, a managed float, and an inflation-targeting central bank. But partial insulation is not full insulation. The pressure is visible in the data: the current account deficit widened to 1.3 per cent of GDP in the December quarter of FY26, driven by a higher merchandise trade deficit, even as services exports and remittances continued to provide a partial cushion.

The RBI's response has been deliberately layered. Rather than using the policy rate as a blunt exchange-rate defence tool, it has relied on foreign-exchange intervention, liquidity management, and balance-sheet instruments. The \$5 billion dollar-rupee swap auction, which attracted bids of \$9.8 billion, showed the RBI's preference for managing currency and liquidity pressures

without turning monetary policy into a permanent rupee-defence mechanism.

This distinction matters more than most commentary acknowledges. If monetary policy becomes a standing support mechanism for the currency, the RBI loses the flexibility to respond to the domestic growth and inflation cycle. A central bank that conflates exchange-rate management with monetary policy ends up doing neither well.

The standard response to a slide in rupee typically involves calls to raise rates, intervene more, and attract portfolio flows. Each of these addresses symptoms rather than causes. Portfolio inflows are reversible by nature. Higher rates can attract short-term capital while slowing investment. Forex reserves can smooth volatility but cannot substitute for genuine external competitiveness.

Three structural gaps deserve attention. First, India's energy import bill remains one of the largest sources of current account vulnerability. Despite significant progress in renewable capacity, fuel-pricing reform, faster electrification of transport, and a credible demand-side strategy are needed.

Second, India's services exports, particularly in technology and business process work, are a genuine strength and a stabiliser. But goods exports have



RUPEE. Worrying consequences

repeatedly underperformed their potential, partly because logistics costs remain elevated and partly because India has been slow to embed itself in the regional supply chains that anchor more durable trade flows.

Third, the composition of capital inflows matters as much as the volume. Foreign direct investment and long-term debt and stable external borrowing are far more reliable anchors than equity and short-duration portfolio flows, which move with global risk sentiment rather than India's fundamentals. The broader architecture of capital account management needs to tilt incentives more deliberately in this direction.

There is also a fiscal dimension that is often left out of currency commentary. When external balances are under pressure, the fiscal stance matters. Demand-stimulating expenditure can

worsen import demand and add pressure to the current account at exactly the wrong time. Fiscal consolidation, in this context, is not merely an austerity argument. It is also an external-stability argument.

A government running expansionary policy while the current account is widening and the currency is under stress is adding to the trilemma rather than managing it.

### THE HONEST RECKONING

India is not in an external crisis. Its reserves are substantial, services surplus is real, and growth story remains intact. But the rupee's weakness is a signal that the comfortable conditions of recent years, such as low global interest rates, moderate oil prices, and abundant portfolio flows, may not persist indefinitely.

The rupee is not asking for panic defence. A more honest macroeconomic strategy is needed: less dependence on volatile capital, stronger export competitiveness, lower energy-import vulnerability, and a fiscal stance that recognises external constraints.

The trilemma is not just a theory. It is the budget constraint of macroeconomic sovereignty in an open economy.

Sharma is Assistant Professor, Bennett University; Rahman is Assistant Professor, IILM

LETTERS TO EDITOR Send your letters by email to [bleditor@thehindu.co.in](mailto:bleditor@thehindu.co.in) or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

### CBSE fiasco

Apropos of 'Govt transfers CBSE Chairperson & Secretary, institutes inquiry (June 3)', at last, the government effected transfers of the Chairman and the Board Secretary of CBSE. The One-Member Committee must analyse the causes and the basis of awarding of contract for development of a Solution on Onscreen Monitoring System (OSM)

to a vendor with no dodgy track record. Besides, the findings of the ethical hacker who had highlighted several lacunae existing in the OSM application need to be taken seriously for fixing the loopholes.

**RV Baskaran**  
Pune

### Pithy Pocket

This refers to the cartoon 'Pocket' (June 3). The theme accurately

predicted the impact of the long-term volatility of crude prices inflicted due to the underlying uncertainty over conclusion of the war in the near future, with both fighting parties rigid and adamant with their endless demands and fear of losing sovereignty and domination over each other.

**Sitaram Popuri**  
Bengaluru

### Biodegradable packaging

Apropos 'Mother Dairy rolls-out eco-friendly milk pouch' (June 3). This is a great initiative to be cherished by the consumer sector in general and must be emulated by food processing industries on a pan-India basis. Additionally, the bio-degradable packaging material must be introduced to suit each sector. The E-Com and Q-Com sector must adopt these packaging materials as it is one

of the major generators of packaging waste, most of which is non-bio-degradable. Institutes like IISc and CFTRI must further develop these products and encourage MSMEs to produce sector specific bio-digestive packaging material which offers several advantages including employment generation and environmental conservation.

**Rajiv Magal**  
Halekere Village (Karnataka)

# Securing bank lending

Expected Credit Loss model, a well-reasoned one

Mohan R Lavi



**RISK-PROOFING.** Banks will now have to provide for expected losses

The former Chair of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke once said: "The central bank needs to be able to make policy without short-term political concerns". To a large extent, the Reserve Bank of India has been making such policies — with one such move being making banks embrace Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS). In April 2026, it mandated banks to follow the Expected Credit Loss (ECL) model from April 1, 2027. For three decades Indian banks have provisioned on an incurred-loss basis — money was set aside only once an account had actually slipped. Banks will now have to provide for losses they expect.

### THREE STAGES

At the heart of ECL is a three-stage classification that tracks credit risk from the day a loan is made. A standard exposure that has not deteriorated sits in Stage 1, where the bank carries a provision equal to 12 months of expected loss. The moment there's a 'significant increase in credit risk' (SICR) since origination, the exposure migrates to Stage 2 and the provision jumps to cover the loss expected over the remaining life of the loan. Once the asset is credit-impaired, it falls into Stage 3, again carrying a lifetime provision. The directions force a bank to recognise stress well before an account turns non-performing, capturing borrower problems while there is time to price and manage it.

For most instruments the loss is built from three estimates — the probability of default (PD), the loss given default (or LGD and the total exposure at default (EAD) — multiplied together and discounted to present value. Stage 1 uses a 12-month PD; Stages 2 and 3 use a lifetime PD that must genuinely reflect higher lifetime risk rather than be mechanically scaled from the 12-month figure.

The RBI has set a PD floor of 0.03 per cent, and where a bank cannot reliably model recovery, it has set regulatory backstop LGDs of at least 65 per cent on secured and 70 per cent on unsecured exposures, easing to 30 per cent for the safest collateral such as cash, gold and government paper. Crucially, the estimate must be forward-looking and probability-weighted across multiple macroeconomic scenarios. A loss is recognised even where the bank expects to be

repaid in full, but if repayment will arrive later than contractually due. This is because ECL reflects the timing of money, not only its eventual receipt.

The norms do not leave provisioning entirely to internal models. Recognising that models can be optimistic, the RBI overlays prudential floors as a regulatory minimum: the final threshold is the higher of the modelled ECL and the prescribed floor. NPA recognition must be system driven and borrower-level — if one facility defaults, every exposure to that borrower is tagged. Banks must adopt effective interest rate method for amortised cost, and on April 1, 2027, the transition date, route the difference through retained earnings rather than P&L account.

The capital impact of moving from the old regime to ECL may be phased into Common Equity Tier 1 over four years on a declining 80-to-20 per cent basis. Overseeing this is a governance architecture: board-level accountability, a committee chaired with the CFO and CRO, and a risk management framework requiring independent validation before any model goes live.

Disclosure obligations are correspondingly granular — credit quality by stage, reconciliations of the loss allowance, the SICR methodology and the macroeconomic assumptions all enter the notes to accounts, with further detail filed privately with the RBI. The framework brings Indian banks materially closer to Ind AS 109 and in doing so it changes what a provisioning number means. A provision will no longer be a backward glance at accounts already gone bad; it will be a forward statement about the portfolio's health. Going forward, like the IRDAI, the RBI should mandate banks to transition completely to Ind AS including fair valuing treasury portfolio.

The writer is a chartered accountant

# The missing link in monetary transmission

**ASYMMETRY.** If monetary easing does not reduce the risk-free benchmark rate, can transmission really be regarded as complete? Notably, the largest borrower is the Union Government



GETTY IMAGES



S ADIKESAVAN

Given the circumstances under which the June meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is taking place, there is little expectation that the Committee would seek to compound the problems of domestic economic agents by raising the cost of money.

Consequently, a status quo on the repo rate is the broad market consensus. This time around, however, the Statement on Developmental and Regulatory Policies — issued alongside the MPC decision — may prove more consequential.

Transmission of policy rates will continue to remain a key issue. The RBI's assessment of how effectively reductions in the repo rate have been transmitted to deposit and lending rates will be watched. Yet there is another dimension of transmission that receives less attention.

The largest borrower in the country is not a corporate house, nor the household sector. It is the Government of India. State governments, taken together, constitute another large borrowing segment.

Against incremental credit absorption (growth) of about ₹30 lakh crore in FY 2025-26, the combined net market

borrowings of the Centre and the States in the same period were around ₹26 lakh crore.

In other words, governments borrow almost as much as the entire non-government sector. More importantly, the Government of India is by far the single largest borrower in the market, dwarfing every corporate borrower. In FY 2025-26, the Centre borrowed approximately ₹11.5 lakh crore and the largest corporate loan would probably not have exceeded ₹25,000 crore.

Given this reality, should monetary transmission not also be assessed by its impact on sovereign borrowing costs?

Over the recent period, the repo rate has been reduced by 125 basis points. The benefit of this reduction has flowed, in varying degrees, to different segments of borrowers. Yet the benchmark yield in the government securities market is currently around 7 per cent, compared with about 6.30 per cent a year ago. Thus, even as the central bank's policy rate has moved down, governments have found themselves paying more.

Public discussion on monetary policy

**A divergence of 100 basis points between the repo rate and the G-sec yield can translate into an additional interest burden of nearly ₹28,000 crore on government borrowings**

generally centres on the borrowing costs of housing loans, vehicle loans, personal loans, and MSME credit. Transmission is deemed successful if banks pass on repo rate cuts to these sectors. As for large corporates, their professional treasury managers negotiate aggressively and borrow at the most competitive rates available.

The more fundamental question is this: if monetary easing does not reduce the risk-free benchmark rate in the economy, can transmission really be regarded as complete? And if not, should this issue not invite greater policy attention? The RBI is not merely the monetary authority; it is also the debt manager for both the Union and State governments.

### INTEREST BURDEN

The fiscal impact is material. More than one-fourth of the Union Government's expenditure is devoted to servicing debt. In the Union Budget for FY 2026-27, interest payments alone are estimated at about ₹14 lakh crore out of a total budget size of ₹53 lakh crore. State governments collectively would have a comparable interest burden.

A divergence of 100 basis points between the movement in the repo rate and the G-sec yield can translate into an additional interest burden of nearly ₹28,000 crore on government borrowings. For many States, even a difference of ₹1,000 crore in borrowing costs can materially affect fiscal planning.

On the ground, almost every category

of borrower has vocal advocates who raise concerns about the cost of credit. Governments, however, appear to have no such constituency. One cannot expect politicians or ministers to focus on the finer points of sovereign yield movements. But public finance managers would certainly know that while the overall cost of debt and capital has declined, governments have not enjoyed a similar benefit. (For government, read the people.)

There is, of course, merit in the argument that inflation expectations, fiscal deficits and global bond market movements influence sovereign yields. Markets may have entirely valid reasons for keeping long-term government bond yields elevated despite policy easing. Yet the asymmetry in transmission remains striking. When banks fail to transmit repo rate reductions, it is viewed as a policy failure. When sovereign yields fail to respond — or move in the opposite direction — it is accepted as a market outcome.

As India's public debt and borrowing requirements continue to grow, perhaps the concept and coverage of monetary transmission deserves a relook. A textual approach would be to assess that inflation is the sole parameter for assessing monetary policy effectiveness, not even transmission. But, should the success of regulatory moves not also be judged by the behaviour of the sovereign yield curve, given its impact on public debt?

The writer is a commentator on banking and finance

## thehindubusinessline.

### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 4, 2006

#### Vanaspati imports from Sri Lanka through Nafed

In a bid to regulate inflow of cheap Sri Lankan-origin vanaspati into the country through the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) route, the Government has appointed the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (Nafed) as the canalising agency for undertaking these imports. Currently, the FTA implemented since March 2000 allows vanaspati imports of up to 2.5 lakh tonnes (t) annually from Sri Lanka at zero duty.

#### LIC may not enter health insurance

The LIC of India is having second thoughts about its proposed health insurance venture. According to Mr TS Vijayan, Chairman, LIC, the corporation will not enter the segment unless it has the right business model.

#### Tata Power may join Tata Steel for coal mining

Tata Power is planning to forge a tie-up with Tata Steel Ltd for coal mining. The company, which has applied for acquiring coal blocks at sites in Jharkhand and Orissa, plans to invest around ₹18,000 crore to augment generation capacity by over 4,000 MW through coal-based projects. It plans to set up at least four coal power projects in the next five years.

# Aquifer management, key to addressing water stress

Priyanka Vadrevu

From drying borewells in peninsular India to falling water tables across the Indo-Gangetic plains, groundwater, the country's invisible lifeline, is under severe stress. Yet, paradoxically, it remains one of the least governed resources. In this context, aquifer-based participatory water management offers not just a technical solution, but a transformative shift in how India understands and governs water. Increasingly, this shift also aligns with global sustainability priorities, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise integrated, inclusive, and ecologically grounded water management.

At its core, aquifer-based participatory water management rests on a simple but powerful idea: groundwater must be managed where it actually exists 'in aquifers' and by the people who depend on it. Unlike rivers or lakes, aquifers do not follow administrative boundaries. They are geological formations, often shared across villages and districts. Managing them through fragmented policies or individual extraction decisions has led to overuse, inequity, and ecological decline. Recent global sustainability assessments reinforce that such fragmentation is one of the primary

reasons water governance continues to fall short of SDG targets on efficiency, sustainability, and ecosystem protection.

### COMMON POOL RESOURCE

The participatory dimension is equally crucial. Groundwater in India is effectively a common pool resource, accessed through millions of private wells. Regulatory approaches alone have proven inadequate in such a decentralised landscape. Instead, involving communities in understanding aquifer behaviour, monitoring water levels, and making collective decisions on usage introduces both accountability and sustainability.

For decades after Independence, water policy focused largely on supply-side interventions — dams, canals, and later, the proliferation of borewells. Groundwater extraction grew rapidly, aided by subsidised electricity and advances in drilling technology. However, the ecological limits of this model became evident by the 1990s, as over-extraction began to outpace natural recharge. Such unsustainable extraction patterns are contributing not only to local water stress but also to broader environmental risks, including land degradation, ecosystem collapse, and even alterations in regional hydrological cycles.



**GROUNDWATER.** Rapid growth in use

In the early 2000s, a paradigm shift began to take shape. Initiatives such as the Andhra Pradesh Farmer Managed Groundwater Systems demonstrated that when farmers are equipped with basic hydrogeological knowledge and data, they can make informed decisions, adjusting cropping patterns, reducing water-intensive practices, and collectively managing extraction. These experiments challenged the assumption that groundwater governance must be top-down.

Over the past decade, large-scale programmes have sought to map aquifers scientifically and integrate community participation into groundwater management. The emphasis has moved from merely augmenting supply to balancing demand with available resources — through water budgeting, crop planning, and local governance mechanisms.

The spread of such practices across

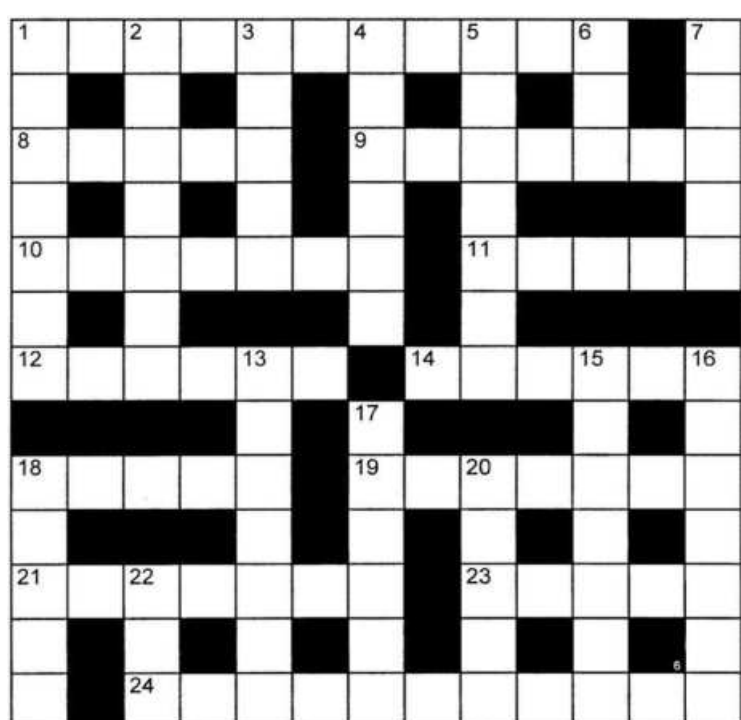
States like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Karnataka underscores both their adaptability and effectiveness. In several villages, communities have voluntarily adopted water-sharing norms, shifted to less water-intensive crops, and invested in recharge structures. These are not isolated success stories, but indicators of a broader shift in thinking.

However, the path ahead is not without challenges. A significant portion of India's aquifers remains inadequately mapped. Hydrogeological knowledge is still limited at the community level. Institutional fragmentation continues to hinder coordinated action, with multiple agencies operating in silos. Economic incentives, such as free or subsidised electricity, often encourage excessive extraction. Without addressing these structural issues, participatory approaches may struggle to scale.

Yet, the future remains promising. Advances in technology, from remote sensing to real-time monitoring, are making aquifer data more accessible. Policy frameworks need to integrate groundwater management with broader efforts in watershed development, agriculture, and climate adaptation.

The writer is an independent researcher (water resources management, climate change and disaster risk resilience)

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2694



### EASY

#### ACROSS

- Delivered on ship without charge (4,2,5)
- Make exultant (5)
- Numerals (7)
- The fusee of a watch (7)
- Like a knot or lump (5)
- An omen (6)
- Brief sleep (3-3)
- Apply colour (5)
- High chest of drawers (7)
- Out of the running (7)
- Sound (5)
- The poorer by a transaction (3,2,6)

#### DOWN

- Scented greenhouse plant (7)
- Rubbing out (7)
- Mountain nymph (5)
- Flag bearing a device (6)
- W Asian country, formerly part of USSR (7)
- Stain, change colour (3)
- Agave fibre (5)
- Withdrawal (7)
- Lofting golf club (7)
- Recompense; reward; punishment (7)
- It, reflexive (6)
- Frantic fear (5)
- 'Language' (5)
- Which person (3)

### NOT SO EASY

#### ACROSS

- Fob shows there's no charge for transport to the docks (4,2,5)
- Energy departed, but it will puff one up (5)
- Book of cardinals, say (7)
- Slip end out of pin on which thread is spun (7)
- No youngster returns to it when it's full of lumps (5)
- After a month jury loses its head, which is a sign (6)
- Tom gives his favourite tip for a bit of shut-eye (3-3)
- About a half-quart of colour (5)
- Like the chest of a youngster called Lofty? (7)
- Not in any place but at present in this place (7)
- Is involved in one sort of racket (5)
- How man may take handkerchief and be poorer by the deal (3,2,6)

#### DOWN

- A reef is set out for a flower (7)
- Anger is wrong if one's wiping it out (7)
- A mountain nymph with nothing to peruse (5)
- One who doesn't want the bomb may carry it on demo (6)
- The country air: mean to change it! (7)
- Starts decrying your every stain (3)
- Fibre is present in the pharmacists' salt (3)
- Stand another round, and fall back (7)
- 8 or 9 iron makes one blink when about a hundred (7)
- May ten-p be enough for discharge of a debt? (7)
- Is felt to be it, emphatically (6)
- Fear of putting a sylvan god in charge (5)
- It's the language of fish, and nothing more (5)
- What person works out how? (3)

### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2693

**ACROSS** 1. Doing 4. Blossom 8. Window-shopper 10. Steer 11. Gale 12. Stag 16. Event 17. Exceptionally 19. Talents 20. Sheer

**DOWN** 1. Downing Street 2. Inn 3. Grouse 4. Basked 5. Odours 6. Separates 7. Morning prayer 9. Political 13. Deepen 14. Remiss 15. Stones 18. Lee

# The Editorial Page

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2026

● **WEB EXCLUSIVE**  
 'Indians run some of the world's biggest companies. Why do we build so few of them?' — By Jasveer Singh  
 Log on to [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

● **WORDLY WISE**  
 There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.  
 — Lord Acton

**The Indian EXPRESS**  
 ~ FOUNDED BY ~  
**RAMNATH GOENKA**  
 IN 1932  
 BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## Capital tragedy, national shame

**T**HE DEATH of at least 21 people in a fire in South Delhi's Malviya Nagar is part of an ongoing national tragedy. The fire in Palam, Delhi that killed nine people in March; the conflagration in a Cuttack medical college and hospital that claimed 12 lives in the same month; the fire that broke out in a Kolkata hotel in April, killing 14; These incidents, all from the last six months alone, frame a pattern of norms breached and rules circumvented, of overcrowded structures with narrow exits and exposed wires or ageing electrical systems, of lack of basic equipment and wilful ignorance of protocols. The pattern reveals the shockingly low priority accorded to safety in urban governance in a country where more and more people now live in cities.

The causes of the fire in Malviya Nagar will be confirmed after an investigation. But it is not hard to guess the factors that might have turned the site into a tinderbox. The area is a busy spot of commerce and leisure, brimming with eateries, paying-guest accommodations and shops. Given its proximity to three major hospitals, it sees a large number of out-of-town patients and medical tourists from other parts of the world occupying the tiny, windowless rooms available on rent. Buildings sit cheek-by-jowl — the fire began in the basement kitchen of one bed-and-breakfast and spread to the next — and the lanes are too congested for timely help and rescue. As noted in the report "Fires in India: Learning Lessons for Urban Safety" (2020) by the National Institute of Disaster Management, it is this complex web of vulnerabilities that leads to the vast majority of urban fires.

According to a recent working paper by the PM-EAC, India's "hidden urbanisation" phenomenon has meant that far more Indians live in urban clusters than most estimates suggest; going by the satellite data from the Global Human Settlements Layer, India was already 63 per cent urban in 2015. The National Building Code does have extensive directions to prevent fire mishaps, and most states, too, have fire safety guidelines. What is needed is strengthening supervision, enforcing regulations and empowering municipalities — the tier of governance responsible for fire-safety operations. Not long ago, in the wake of the collapse of a building in the nearby area of Saidulajab, which led to the death of six people, municipal officers promised an audit of unsafe buildings. Tragedies like these may be a wake-up call, but they must be followed by sustained attention, apart from demands for accountability.

## India, Myanmar and a shifting balance

**I**N HIS first official overseas trip since being elected president earlier this year, Min Aung Hlaing concluded a five-day state visit to India this week, as part of an effort to rectify Myanmar's diplomatic isolation. Following the coup he led in February 2021 — which resulted in the house arrest and eventual conviction of then-head of government Aung San Suu Kyi on trumped-up charges — Naypyidaw lost much of its political legitimacy, a perception it did little to improve with the stage-managed elections this year that propelled the USDP, a junta proxy, to power. Set against the backdrop of a devastating multi-front civil war between the military, pro-democracy forces and ethnic militias, Myanmar's instability increasingly carries transnational repercussions and a Chinese footprint that India can ignore at its own peril.

Reportedly, talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Min Aung Hlaing covered cooperation across security, trade, rare earths, healthcare, and connectivity projects, among other areas. Security is arguably the most pressing of these, given that the two countries share a 1,600-km border — militancy, ethnic ties, and constant cross-border movement mean that instability on one side spills over to the other. The civil war has underscored this reality as thousands of refugees, many from the Chin community, have sought shelter in Mizoram and Manipur. Further, the military has weaker control over areas that border India. Myanmar also serves as the land bridge underpinning India's Act East Policy.

There is little doubt that the junta has committed atrocities against its own people over the past decade — first against the Rohingya, then against supporters of democracy. Even as the civil war grinds on, it also retains a firm grip on critical urban centres and institutional power. As much of the West has shunned the Min Aung Hlaing establishment, China has steadily widened its influence and thrown its weight behind the military leadership, driven by its own interests, not least the protection of its oil and gas infrastructure. New Delhi's challenge, therefore, is to balance engagement with Naypyidaw and non-state actors who control stretches of the border. Until stability returns to Myanmar, a flexible approach is critical to India's neighbourhood policy.

## It's ok, cinema is alive and well

**I**N 1929, in an interview with Gladys Hall in *Motion Picture Magazine*, Charlie Chaplin said, "[Talkies] are spoiling the oldest art in the world — the art of pantomime. They are ruining the great beauty of silence." Years later, after making several talkies himself, he admitted, "I was obsessed by a... fear of being old-fashioned." The 21st century, too, has had its share of Chaplins amid the ruptures caused by the information age and an isolating pandemic. Many wonder: Is cinema dying? If recent box-office numbers are anything to go by, however, the answer is no — the talent is just finding new ways to break through.

In the US and many other markets, the top two films this week are Kane Parson's *Backrooms* and Curry Barker's *Obsession*. Both filmmakers are among a growing number who found their start on YouTube and first created the stories they told on the big screen in the digital format. Barker co-founded the sketch comedy/horror duo (and YouTube channel) *That's a Bad Idea*; *Weapons* director Zach Cregger did the same with *The Whitest Kids U'Know*. (Bo Burnham was one of the first on this scene). Many in the industry have been blaming "attention-deficit kids today" for the dwindling numbers in theatres. While there may be some truth to the allegation, the problem lies elsewhere: No one behind the traditional camera seems to quite "get the kids" today. Barker and Parson's successes underline an old truth about show business: If you tell the right story, and do it well, the audience will find you.

These creators have, in a lack, found an opportunity to articulate the fears of their generations. No wonder many of their films focus on horror, anxiety, politics. The artists and the audiences can breathe easy, and the gatekeepers can step back: Cinema is alive and well, it's just evolving, and the kids are in the room.



**THAROORTHINK**  
 BY SHASHI THAROOR

**D**EAR GEN Z Indians who signed up to the "Cockroach Janta Party": It is impossible to look at the current landscape of India — the headlines, the stories emerging from exam centres, and the raw, unfiltered conversations flooding social media — without feeling the immense weight of the collective frustration gripping your generation.

On May 16, Abhijeet Dipke posted an invitation to join the "Cockroach Janta Party". Five days later, he had 20 million Instagram followers. His satirical movement has captured the imagination of Gen Z and others like you, frustrated by the inadequacies of our political system and its failure to meet your needs. Instagram is your town square. But it is not a ballot box.

To those of you feeling lost, angry, and disillusioned: Your pain is seen, and your anger is heard. The reasons you signed up for the CJP are valid. When you dedicate years of your life to preparation, sacrificing sleep, social connection, and mental well-being for a dream, the news of paper leaks and system failures is not just a news headline — it is a betrayal of your time, your effort, and your future. The tragic news of stu-

dents losing their lives in despair is a devastating reminder that the "rotten system" isn't just an abstract concept; it has real, human consequences that cut to the core of our society. But there is a danger in mistaking an outlet for your frustration as the solution to your problems. It is not.

The emergence of movements like the CJP offers a powerful, albeit heartbreaking, piece of political theatre. It captures the visceral feeling of being treated as disposable by a system that seems unresponsive to the struggles of ordinary citizens. It seems a safe space for those of you dealing with the crushing weight of unemployment, the rising cost of living, and the narrowing of the pathways to quality education. But while venting and finding solidarity in this movement is necessary for emotional release, there is a danger in stopping there. History shows us that while rage can ignite a fire, it requires a steady hand and a clear strategy to build a structure that endures. Instagram alone doesn't do it.

If you want more than just temporary attention, you must channel this energy into something that forces the system to bend. That is why working within the system you feel has failed you and pushing against the existing system so that it serves your needs is the most effective path forward.

First, as an MP myself, let me tell you that you can make your representatives accountable. The system is not a monolith; it comprises people who are, at least in theory, beholden to you. Flood the offices of your local MLAs and MPs with structured grievances and demand they take it up with the authorities. Use the

**If all else fails, take your case to court. But for that, you need to have a case, not just a set of slogans or memes expressing your frustrations**

## India's approach to US trade deal needs an urgent rethink



ABHIJIT DAS

**T**HE INDIA-US Interim Agreement for trade is back in the spotlight. Sergio Gor, the US Ambassador to India, has said that the deal is 99 per cent complete. Officials are ironing out a few issues and are reportedly finalising the deal this week.

On February 6, the two countries had issued a joint statement announcing that they had reached a framework under which the US would reduce reciprocal tariffs on India from 25 per cent to 18 per cent, while India had committed to reducing or eliminating tariffs on most US agricultural and industrial exports. As part of the bilateral trade agreement, India may also be required to align its economic policies and laws, including those in the digital sector and intellectual property rights, with US interests.

Much, however, has changed over the past four months.

On February 20, the US Supreme Court declared reciprocal tariffs to be illegal, thereby undermining the basis for the 18 per cent reciprocal tariffs. Subsequently, the US imposed 10 per cent tariffs across the board on most countries. As these tariffs are due to lapse on July 24, the US has already proposed a tariff of 12.5 per cent against India for labour issues under Section 301 investigations. These illegal tariffs could go even higher after the investigations on excess capacity are concluded.

In this negotiating environment, India could be compelled to accept an interim agreement that, in reality, may not be balanced and equitable. Further, if any action of India, including the purchase of Russian oil or any other policy decision, is perceived by US President Donald Trump to be against American interests, he may not hesitate to impose higher punitive tariffs, thereby undermining tariff predictability.

Then there is the rapid depreciation in the value of the rupee, with the widening trade deficit being one of the triggers. The India-US joint statement requires India to purchase \$500 billion of US goods and services over the next five years. This would further exacerbate the depreciation crisis. Any increase in India's ex-

ports resulting from the interim agreement may not be sufficient to offset this.

The case put forth by some commentators is that the interim agreement will boost India's exports from labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and clothing to the US and create employment. This may well be true, provided India faces a tariff in the US that is substantially lower than that faced by its competitors, including Bangladesh, China and Vietnam. However, concessions by India in the area of agriculture are likely to push a far greater number of farmers out of employment, including through tariff concessions on almonds, apples, apple juice, cotton, orange juice, red sorghum and soybean oil among other products, and other concessions.

An important demand of Washington is that its partner countries mandatorily allow imports of dairy, meat, and poultry products from the US if they are accompanied by health certificates from the relevant American authorities. If India agrees to this, its farmers will be adversely impacted by low-priced and subsidised imports of these products. Finally, the livelihood of millions of Indian farmers of rice and wheat would be jeopardised if the US leverages the interim agreement and secures changes in India's minimum support price scheme, an objective that it is pursuing aggressively at the WTO.

A golden rule at the negotiating table is "let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate". If India's continued bilateral trade engagement with the US is premised mainly on avoiding ever-increasing and illegal tariffs on labour-intensive products, then we must be prepared to face the adverse consequences of a deal that is likely to be substantially tilted against the country. At a time when many countries are seeking to diversify their export destinations, by firmly tethering its economic policies and prospects to the political and commercial interests of the US, India runs the risk of narrowing its options. An urgent rethink of India's approach to the interim agreement is called for.

Das is an international trade expert. The views expressed are personal

**The India-US joint statement requires India to purchase \$500 billion of US goods and services over the next five years. This would further exacerbate the depreciation crisis**

## Adhik Maas: When calendar teaches inner correction



SHASHANK JOSHI & SHAMBO SAMRAT SAMAJDAR

**A** YOUNG man once asked his grandfather, "What is the secret of a peaceful life?" The old man smiled and placed three cups on the table. In the first, he poured water until it overflowed. In the second, he added sugar until the tea became impossible to drink. In the third, he placed a lamp and kept adding oil until the flame turned smoky. Then he said, "Even good things lose their beauty when they cross the limit." This is the wisdom behind the Sanskrit saying: "Ati darpehata Lanka, ati mane cha Kauravah; Ati dane Balir baddhah, sarvam atyantam garhitam" (Lanka was destroyed by excessive arrogance. The Kauravas fell because of excessive pride. King Bali was bound because of excessive giving. Therefore, anything in excess becomes dangerous)."

Adhik Maas, the sacred extra month in the Hindu calendar, comes like a divine pause button. It reminds us that life also needs adjustment. Just as the calendar needs correction, our inner life also needs correction. For the youth, Adhik Maas says: Ambition is good, but comparison can burn the mind. Success is beautiful; ego can destroy it. Social media may give applause, but it can also create restlessness. Dream big, but do not lose yourself in the race. For the middle-aged, it says: Responsibility is noble, but constant anxiety is not. Earning is necessary, but endless greed is not. Caring for family is sacred, but forgetting the self is not wisdom. For the elderly, it says, memories are precious, but bitterness is heavy. Experience is a gift, but attachment to control can disturb peace. Bless more, complain less, and become a shelter of calmness for the next generation. Kazi Nazrul Islam reminds us that no one's condition remains unchanged forever. Today's king may become tomorrow's seeker. Power, youth, wealth, fame and beauty all move like clouds. His poetic vision teaches us that arrogance is foolish because time is stronger than all crowns.

Rabindranath Tagore offers another deep lesson. He suggests that sometimes, when life does not give us everything we desire, it may actually be saving us. Denial is not always punishment. A closed door may be protection. A delay may be preparation. A loss may be purification. A limitation may save us from excess. History, scripture and poetry, therefore, speak the same language. Ravana had knowledge, power and prosperity, but arrogance made him blind. The Kauravas had strength and privilege, but pride made them unjust. Bali had generosity, but even generosity needed surrender before the divine. Adhik Maas is not asking us to reject life. It is asking us to refine life. Eat, but not with indulgence. Work, but not with obsession. Love, but not with possession. Give, but not with pride. Lead, but not with arrogance. Worship, but not with display. Let us take one small vow: To reduce one excess from our life. Less anger. Less ego. Less comparison. Less greed. Less complaint. And let us add one virtue: Gratitude, humility, patience, kindness or prayer. Because life does not collapse in one day. It collapses when excess slowly becomes our nature. And life does not become sacred by one grand act. It becomes sacred when balance becomes our way of living.

Joshi is a Mumbai-based endocrinologist. Samajdar is a clinical pharmacologist and diabetes and allergy-asthma therapeutics specialist in Kolkata



**Adhik Maas is not asking us to reject life. It is asking us to refine life. Eat, but not with indulgence. Work, but not with obsession. Love, but not with possession. Give, but not with pride**

## 40 YEARS AGO

June 4, 1986



### Akali rebels organise

FORMER PUNJAB chief minister Parkash Singh Badal, will head the organisational wing of the new party the Akali dissidents propose to form. A consensus to this effect has been reached among the breakaway group's senior leaders, and it was in accordance with this understanding that Captain Amarinder Singh, who resigned from the Barnala cabinet in protest against the police entry into the Golden Temple complex, was elected leader of the dissident Akali legislators.

### All-party meeting in Sri Lanka

SRI LANKAN President JR Jayewardene announced his government's acceptance of a

proposal to convene a conference of all registered political parties to discuss the island's ethnic crisis. The suggestion was made by the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP) and subsequently endorsed by the ruling United National Party's working committee. Addressing ruling party MPs, Jayewardene said the government had agreed to the proposal.

### India's dismay at China's claim

INDIA EXPRESSED dismay at China's renewed claim to 90,000 square kilometres of Indian territory in the eastern sector. Although the statement by Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Liu Shuqing merely reiterated the position taken by the Chinese delegation during border talks in New Delhi the previous

November, its timing — just weeks before the next round of negotiations in Beijing — created difficulties for India.

### 6 children die in grenade blast

The lure of scrap metal from discarded ammunition led to the deaths of six children and prompted criminal proceedings against their parents in Bhandara village near the Babina Army firing range, about 42 kilometres from Jhansi. According to official reports, the children had picked up an unexploded hand grenade along with several empty shells. While attempting to break open the shells inside a hut, they struck the grenade, which exploded, killing all six children, aged between six and 10, and setting the hut on fire.



# Great Nicobar task: Pursuing national security with ecological responsibility



D K JOSHI

STATE that does not secure its frontiers, alliances and trade routes cannot secure its future.” Kautilya’s lesson, written into the grammar of statecraft centuries ago, has returned with unusual force in our time. Nations today are again being tested not merely on the size of their economies or the strength of their armies, but on their ability to read geography, anticipate the future and act before opportunity turns into vulnerability. Great Nicobar is one such test for India.

Located close to some of the most important seaways of the Indo-Pacific, Great Nicobar is one of India’s most important strategic windows to the world. That is why the proposed development cannot be understood merely as an infrastructure project. It is a strategic test of whether India is prepared to convert a rare geographical advantage to further bolster its Comprehensive National Power.

For centuries, the Indian Ocean shaped India’s destiny, carrying our trade, ideas, civilisational influence and, at times, our vulnerabilities. Yet, for much of the post-Independence period, India’s strategic imagination remained heavily continental.

Great Nicobar is one of the largest islands in the archipelago, with an area of about 910 sq km. The total project area of 166.10 sq km is only about 2 per cent of the total area of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, of which 130.75 sq km, approximately 1.82 per cent of the total forest area of the islands, is proposed for diversion. Great Nicobar lies close to Southeast Asia and sits near major global sea lanes.

Its importance becomes clearer when viewed from the strategic lens of the high seas. Imagine the ships moving from the Gulf of Aden towards the Malacca Strait, energy cargo sailing from West Asia and Africa towards East Asia, container traffic connecting Asia, Africa and Europe, naval assets, surveillance platforms and logistics

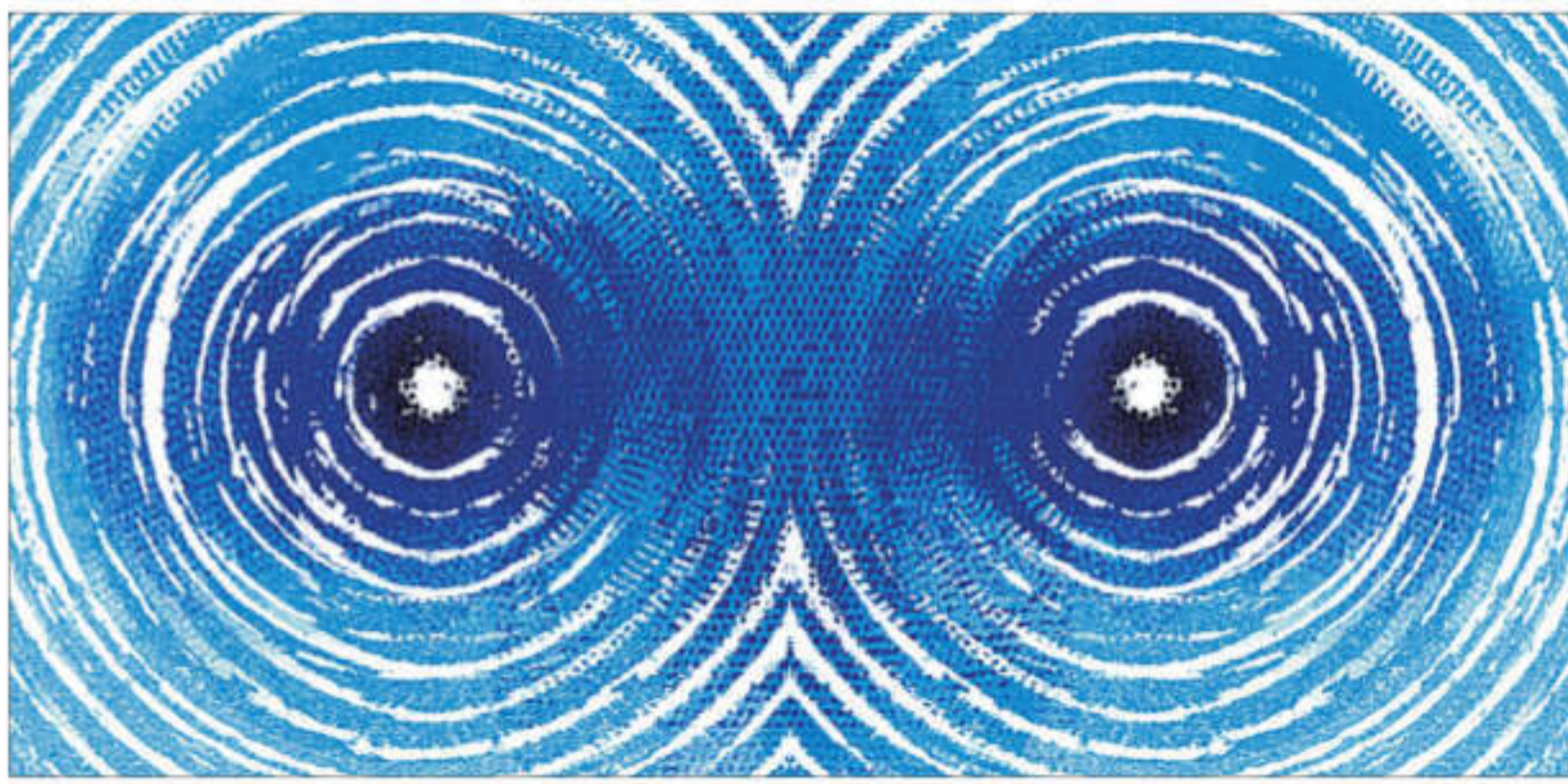


ILLUSTRATION: C.R. SASIKUMAR

chains moving through these waters.

The Indian Ocean is increasingly becoming a crowded strategic arena. Energy flows, container traffic, naval deployments, island facilities, undersea cables and maritime surveillance are now part of a larger contest that is decisive for the future of nations. Recently, Thailand shelved a decades-old proposal for a canal connecting the Andaman Sea to the Gulf of Thailand. Instead, an overland 90 km multi-modal land bridge connecting two newly designed deep-sea ports along the 10th parallel — one in Ranong on the Andaman Sea and another in Chumphon on the Gulf of Thailand — along with dual-track high-speed rail, multi-lane roads, energy pipelines for oil and gas and an air-digital grid, is pending final approval. All these factors redefine the Indo-Pacific trade route and shift the economic centre of gravity to the Andaman basin.

The Strait of Malacca is among the world’s most important chokepoints. It connects the Indian Ocean with the Pacific and carries energy (oil and LNG) and commerce of enormous value. Great Nicobar’s Galathea Bay is about 45 km from the Six Degree Channel, which connects the Malacca Strait with routes leading towards Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Around 1 lakh ships pass annually through the Ma-

Across the IOR, powerful countries are expanding their presence through ports, naval assets, surveillance systems and economic corridors. India’s answer must be strategic consolidation

lacca Strait-Six Degree Channel route. The island’s proximity to the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok chokepoints gives India a significant strategic advantage.

Across the IOR, powerful countries are steadily expanding their presence through ports, logistics arrangements, maritime access facilities, naval assets, surveillance systems and economic corridors. India’s answer must be strategic consolidation. Sovereignty is strengthened when territory becomes connected, inhabited, serviced, productive and strategically usable. The International Container Transshipment Port, greenfield airport, township and power plant will together create the ecosystem needed for India to maintain a credible, sustained and multidimensional presence at a decisive maritime location.

The National Green Tribunal, after due diligence and consideration of observations, acknowledged the project’s great significance not only for the economic development of the island and the surrounding areas of strategic location, but also for defence and national security.

Singapore did not become a great maritime hub merely because it was well located. It built capacity around that location. Location gave it the opportunity, and its infrastructure converted that opportunity into influence. Diego Garcia offers another lesson from the Indian Ocean. It shows how a remote

island, when equipped with logistics and operational infrastructure, can acquire outsized strategic significance.

Great Nicobar allows India to do this in a balanced and distinctly Indian way. It can support trade and strengthen national security, reduce dependence on foreign transshipment hubs, enhance India’s maritime reach and serve as a gateway to Southeast Asia and a platform for the wider Indo-Pacific. A transshipment port at Great Nicobar can reduce dependence on foreign ports, improve supply-chain resilience, attract investment, generate employment and give India greater certainty over the movement of its own cargo.

Of course, Great Nicobar is environmentally sensitive. Any project of this scale must be implemented with ecological care, legal compliance, scientific monitoring and genuine mitigation. But ecological sensitivity cannot become a permanent veto on strategic thinking. The challenge is to pursue national security with ecological responsibility.

The real question is whether India wants to responsibly develop a strategic island, or whether it will leave that island under-connected at a time when the entire Indo-Pacific is being reorganised. India is both a continental and maritime power. For too long, the continental mind overshadowed the maritime one. The Great Nicobar project is, therefore, not extravagant, but strategic foresight. A nation’s destiny is shaped not only by the threats it faces, but by the opportunities it recognises in time. Great Nicobar is one such opportunity. To neglect it would be to leave geography unused and vulnerable to being shaped by others. To develop it wisely would be to turn geography into a strength.

India does not need to apologise for thinking strategically. It only needs to act responsibly, decisively and with a clear sense of national interest. In the Indo-Pacific century, Great Nicobar is not the edge of India. It is India’s watchtower at the gateway of the future.

The writer is Lieutenant Governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and vice chairman of the Islands Development Agency. He is a former chief of the naval staff and was commander-in-chief of the A&N Command during 2009-10

## There’s a fire in my neighbourhood, and a world away



AAKASH JOSHI

HERE IS a fire in my neighbourhood. But is it really my neighbourhood? The Hauz Rani *gali*, where at least 21 people have already died, is across the road from Saket, from Press Enclave, where I was born and live. The hotel that caught fire is next to where our general store was, where Babli *bhailya* would give us an extra chocolate, or candied cigarettes on credit. About 20 metres down the street is Adam’s Hair Salon, where Rashid *bhai* takes a razor to my throat once a week, as we discuss our life and times. It is where, after a game of cricket, we would get either bread-omelette or pastries. And where, as teenagers, we took furtive drags from our first clandestine cigarettes (not made of candy, but just as sweet).

But, for all the intimacies that remain, the road that divides Saket and Hauz Rani, the upper middle class and their civic experience from the working people that make it possible, has hardened into a border. And in that line is the tale of what is broken in our cities.

The dichotomy in the “development” of the Hauz Rani-Khirki belt in Malviya Nagar frames both the potential of Delhi — and India — as a cosmopolitan, global space and the tragic failure of governments and people towards that end.

More than the glitzy malls a kilometre away in Saket or the unaffordable eateries at the Eldeco complex, it is in the semi-legal, overcrowded, and unpretentious areas of Malviya Nagar that Delhi is the most global. Medical tourists (the gigantic Max Hospital complex is across the road) and some refugees from all over West Asia and beyond occupy many of the small apartments. African students and workers, many of them Muslim, have told me in the past that it is one of the few areas where they are given accommodation, and feel a sense of community. Scores of people who work in the homes of their neighbours across the road also rent rooms here.

The marketplace has responded to this diversity. Restaurants serving Afghan, Yemeni, Iraqi, and a host of other cuisines rise and fall. Search Instagram, and you’ll see yuppie influencers telling you about “food walks”. Small tailors and clothes shops carry the fashions favoured by the diverse clientele. Chemists offer discounts to medical tourists. And there are artists’ collectives and studios at the cutting edge of creativity.

But if the streets show you diversity, they are also proof of apathy. In the last two decades and more, a metro station has emerged, as has a world-class hospital. But the *galis* themselves have become more congested. The lane that was ablaze often floods, sometimes with rainwater but most times with a sourceless puddle that smells suspiciously like sewage. Open wires form the canopy between buildings, and on a sunny day, there is an oddly beautiful dapple on shop fronts that are now stained with smoke. The sheer lack of space and light between rooms and in them tells you the story of a government that has not paid attention for a long time.

Now, as the death toll climbs, there will be the predictable conversation about “accountability”. The hotel owner(s) will have the rulebook thrown at them. Perhaps the small shops will all be taken to task for not being up to code by the civic authorities, trying to show they are competent, after the fact. Many will bay for blood. But few of us will look at ourselves.

The road that divides Press Enclave-Max Hospital, the malls, and Hauz Rani-Khirki-Malviya Nagar was once more porous, physically and metaphorically. The fence on the divider had several gaps, and we could just walk across. We bought our vegetables, meat, and groceries from there. Now, most people on the right side of the tracks order in, with quick commerce replacing human interaction. The gaps have been blocked, the divider raised so that it is difficult for most people to cross over. Most of my friends no longer go to our Hauz Rani barber for a Rs 100 haircut-and-shave. The people who have to go back and forth every day — domestic workers, mostly — have no voice or power to change this. And the MLAs, corporators, councillors, politicians and journalists are more likely to listen to a debate about stray dogs and cats in a colony than a broken civic architecture.

Imagine, for a moment, if our neighbourhoods were more organic, more connected. Where Hauz Rani and Khirki were not merely places we visit as tourists to try out an exotic cuisine, but as people with stakes in a place. If the privileged spoke for their cities, not just their gated colonies, it is perhaps more likely that governments would take public housing and cheaper, planned markets and hotels seriously. And maybe we would elect leaders who don’t demonise either the people who live there or the “foreigners” here to learn and work.

Of course, that’s just a dream, a fantasy of a childhood that looks better than it was. Reality will see performative outrage, as it always does. Sometimes, that’s easier than crossing a road.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Women in JEE

THE SURGE in the number of girls qualifying for JEE Advanced reflects what sustained policy support and social change can achieve (“Girls rewrite JEE script. Campus must keep pace”, *IE*, June 3). The introduction of supernumerary seats in IITs in 2018, along with targeted STEM outreach, has clearly widened access. Yet participation alone is not enough. A 2023 UNESCO report noted that women continue to face barriers in research funding, leadership, and retention in STEM careers globally. India must now focus on mentorship, safer campuses, maternity support, and equal research opportunities.

Havya Garg, Chandigarh

### Integrity of evidence

THE TWISHA SHARMA case highlights a systemic problem that extends well beyond a single investigation (“When a distorted autopsy denies justice”, *IE*, June 3). Forensic protocols for unnatural deaths — particularly those occurring within seven years of marriage — must be standardised and made non-negotiable. Private hospitals conducting autopsies need direct regulatory oversight, along with mandatory documentation standards and third-party audit mechanisms.

Abbharna Barathi, Chennai

### Remarkable talent

FOR A Gen-X listener like me, the song “Zindagi Imtihaan Leti Hai” from the blockbuster film *Naseeb* instantly brings back memories of Suman Kalyanpur’s soulful singing (“In and as Suman Kalyanpur”, *IE*, June 3). Kalyanpur was one of the finest voices in Hindi film music, yet she spent much of her career in the shadow of the Mangeshkar sisters. By repeatedly referring to her as the “other Lata”, the music industry failed to accord her the independent recognition she deserved in the pantheon of great playback singers.

Nawal Thorat, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar



MRINAL PANDE

IT WAS the dismal October of 1987, the year of the stock-market meltdown in the US, when a French fashion designer, Christian Lacroix, launched a “luxe” collection at a society gala on Wall Street. It was not an accident. The fashion industry had already dubbed this genius the “messiah”. So, while the ardour for fashion was plunging along with the stocks, he rescued the fashion and beauty industry in that best of years, the worst of years.

Fast-track to the recent Cannes red carpet extravaganza, held against an even bigger global economic and political breakdown. As the world saw images of the starving and severely wounded from Asia and Africa, India’s mainstream as well as social media and the beauty industry saw nothing wrong in joining the gala event in France, streaming images of models and Hollywood/Bollywood beauties of yesterday.

Feminism had long warned women against the beauty industry sneaking its agenda into their worldview. In the 20th century, when global beauty contests began to seem passé, the industry mined feminist phraseology to push products for the “liberated woman”. The advertising world used all sorts of clichés to push back against old-school feminists who had been berating expensive gals and holding up real-time data about working-class women.

The next real wave of liberation will have to be rooted in a collective idea of self-esteem among women of all ages, classes, castes, and communities

## A feminist future cannot rely on past language

In 2026, threatened by recession and job losses, promoters of fashion and beauty products were forced to look for a “messiah” to lift up their sagging bottom lines. An erstwhile beauty queen, a model-turned-actor from Bollywood, rose as a natural symbol for promoting the idea of “ageless beauty”. A media blitzkrieg followed the 24th consecutive appearance of the Chosen One at Cannes as proof of how a real beauty ages naturally.

Like Psyche, the mythical Greek figure forever navigating doubt and questioning appearances, this old-school feminist commented on the phenomenon of agelessness being possibly based on cosmetic enhancement. All hell broke loose. The first reaction ascribed the comment to “envy”; clichés like “a woman is a woman’s worst enemy” were then brandished.

No ideology can claim to give you terminologies for a lifetime. Feminism is no exception. At 80, I can see more and more younger women rushing to claim a so-called feminist future. But theirs is built on phrases emanating from past activism and gender politics, co-opted by both politicians and the fashion industry. The daily reports of dowry deaths and simultaneous calls for “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao” make for uneasy partners, as do the linking of beauty-enhancement creams with “self-esteem”. This has produced massive misunderstandings over older feminist concepts. Cosmetic surgery,

injecting botox or silicone gel to lift sagging skin, is now labelled professional beauty enhancement. If it fails to hide what was to be hidden, it is described as beauty’s defiance of patriarchy. All this is creating what two octogenarian feminists had foretold: “Tyranannies of social expectation” (Gloria Steinem) and “the chrysalis of conditioning” (Germaine Greer).

The term “ageism” was originally coined to mark the social value denied to women past their prime. It surfaces frequently at these global galas. But truth be told, how many women past 60 figure in media-led feminist discourses on fashion and beauty? How much do we get to hear of their fear of disease and dependency after crossing 70?

The next real wave of liberation will have to be rooted in a collective idea of self-esteem among women of all ages, classes, castes, and communities. It’s time branded concepts of *shakti*, ageism, and *saas/bahu* attitudes were replaced with new phrases created out of fresh insights. When beauty contestants and all women past their prime feel free to talk collectively about ageing, the fears of not retaining their looks eternally, and how much it has cost them throughout their lives, a truly new powerbase will be created. Who knows, it may go on to spur a new socio-political movement towards equality. Some may lose their present power and constant media attention, but all of us stand to gain.

The writer is former chairperson, Prasar Bharati

## Missing in India’s heat action plans: What to wear

stress. In extreme conditions, this is not about discomfort. It is about bodily strain.

India’s heatwaves are becoming longer and more intense, and temperatures remain elevated after sunset. This matters because the body depends on cooler nights to recover from daytime heat exposure. When that recovery window disappears, heat stress accumulates. Under such conditions, what people wear shapes how much strain the body absorbs. Yet clothing is almost entirely absent from India’s heat action plans.

This gap is especially visible in institutional settings. Schoolchildren wear uniforms. Factory workers follow dress codes. Delivery personnel, security guards, and construction labourers operate in standardised clothing systems shaped by cost, durability, and visibility. In these contexts, fabric

and design are rarely chosen for thermal performance. They can intensify exposure.

Over the past two decades, mass clothing systems in India have become increasingly dependent on synthetic fibres, particularly polyester blends. They are cheap, durable, and easy to maintain. But these materials are often less breathable than natural fibres and can trap heat and moisture, especially in humid conditions where evaporative cooling is already compromised.

India is one of the world’s largest textile producers. Yet in the sectors where heat ex-

The question now is no longer only how we cool our cities, but how we enable the human body to endure

posure is most acute — schools, informal labour, public-facing work — clothing systems remain disconnected from climatic realities.

This is a policy gap. Policy frameworks rarely engage with clothing as a factor in heat exposure. There are no widely enforced guidelines for summer-appropriate school uniforms. Occupational safety protocols emphasise hydration and rest breaks but seldom incorporate fabric performance. Public procurement prioritises cost and durability, with little regard for breathability.

This omission is increasingly untenable. Heat stress already reduces labour productivity. As temperatures rise, these losses will deepen. There is also an energy cost. As clothing fails to support natural cooling, reliance on air conditioning increases, placing additional strain on power systems.

A more responsive approach would begin by recognising clothing as part of climate adaptation infrastructure. School uniform policies can incorporate breathable fabrics and climate-responsive design. Occupational standards can include textile performance in heat exposure guidelines. Public procurement can factor in thermal comfort alongside durability and cost. Textile innovation can be directed towards heat-resilient garments for mass use.

The question now is no longer only how we cool our cities, but how we enable the human body to endure. In that equation, the first layer of adaptation is not air conditioning. It is the fabric on the skin.

The writer is associate professor and programme coordinator for fashion design at IILM University, Gurugram

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

HEALTH

## How new pancreatic cancer pill doubles survival rate

Pancreatic cancer is notoriously hard to treat. But a daily pill promises to be the beginning of a new class of drugs that can transform treatment



EXPERT EXPLAINS

ANANT RAMASWAMY

SPECIALIST IN GASTROINTESTINAL CANCERS AND GERIATRIC ONCOLOGY, TATA MEMORIAL CENTRE

A NEW experimental pill is offering hope for patients of pancreatic cancer, one of the deadliest and hardest-to-treat forms of the disease. Results from a large international trial presented at an American Society of Clinical Oncology meet showed that daraxonrasib, a once-daily oral drug, nearly doubled survival time in patients with advanced pancreatic cancer whose disease had progressed despite earlier treatment.

The drug works by targeting KRAS, a cancer-driving gene mutation found in the vast majority of pancreatic tumours — one that researchers have spent decades trying to effectively shut down. “For years, the average (median) survival for patients with advanced pancreatic cancers has hovered around one year. It was six months in the late 1990s and just about 9-12 months three decades later. Improvements in survival have been minimally incremental despite active research over the last two decades,” says Professor Anant Ramaswamy, specialist in gastrointestinal cancers and Geriatric Oncology, Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai.

“In such a scenario, the impact of an oral pill improving or rather doubling survival in pre-treated patients with pancreatic cancer is great news. Also, this is just the beginning for this new class of drugs. Patients and oncologists can expect more improvements in the times to come,” he told Rinku Ghosh in an interview. Excerpts:

### Why has pancreatic cancer remained so difficult to treat compared with some other cancers?

There are multiple reasons. First, a majority of patients (70-90%) are diagnosed at an advanced stage and that itself is a major limiting factor. Second, while a number of other cancers have had targeted agents and immunotherapy markedly improving survival, till date these have not shown significant

### The deadliest form of the disease

#### WHAT IS PANCREATIC CANCER?

Pancreatic cancer is an aggressive disease that forms when malignant cells develop in the tissues of the pancreas, which produces digestive enzymes and blood sugar-regulating hormones like insulin.

#### WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO DETECT IN ITS EARLY STAGES?

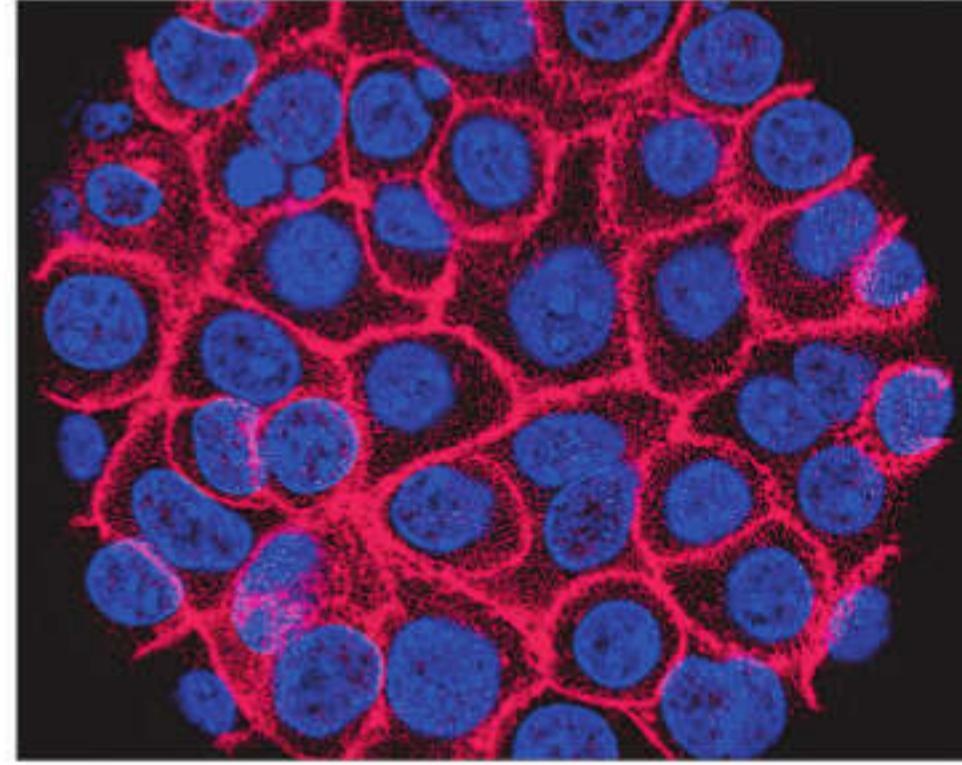
Symptoms usually do not appear until the tumour has grown large or has started to spread to surrounding organs. Common indicators include jaundice, pain, nausea, loss of appetite, unexplained weight loss & new onset diabetes.

#### WHAT'S THE SURVIVAL RATE?

The overall five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer is approximately 13%.

#### HOW COMMON IS IT?

The annual incidence of pancreatic cancer in India is relatively low compared to Western countries, with approximately 23,000 new cases diagnosed each year. The crude incidence rate is about 1.6 per 100,000 people, affecting slightly more men than women.



A microscope image shows pancreatic cancer cells. AP FILE

It ranks 24th in overall cancer incidence but 18th in cancer mortality.

#### INDIAN RISK PROFILE

Diabetes, tropical pancreatitis (such as in Kerala and Tamil Nadu), lifestyle and obesity

effects in pancreatic cancer. Third, and a bit technically, in pancreatic cancer, it's not just the tumour but also the surrounding tissue around it (called the stroma) that has been very resistant to available treatment approaches.

### What role does the KRAS gene play in pancreatic cancer? The drug is described as 'locking onto' the mutated KRAS gene. In simple terms, how does it work?

KRAS is a protein that is ubiquitously expressed in almost all cell types in the human body. It is encoded for by a gene called KRAS gene. Mutations (damaging alterations in the gene which cause cancer) in the KRAS gene family (of which KRAS is the most common) affect approximately 20% of all cancers. Approximately 80% of pancreatic cancers have alterations in the KRAS gene, which have made it a major area of research in pancreatic cancers.

Basically, when the KRAS gene is mutated, it becomes continually active (or 'ON' mode) by binding to some small molecules in the cells and then ensures that there is disruption of activity in normal cells. That's how

### A ticking clock

In the late 1990s, the average survival time for patients with advanced pancreatic cancer was six months.

Three decades later, it is just about 9-12 months, despite active research.

these cells become dysregulated and cancerous. Daraxonrasib inhibits this state from inside the cell and suppresses pathways that perpetuate cancer cell growth. It is the first drug of its class that has shown such successful results, though many drugs with similar activity should emerge in a few years.

### What makes daraxonrasib different from existing treatments?

Daraxonrasib is the first drug of its category that has shown to successfully inhibit RAS activity, including the various subtypes of RAS as well, irrespective of whether RAS is mutated or not. This makes it a notable triumph in the era of precision oncology.

### The drug appeared to cause fewer severe side-effects than chemotherapy. What kinds of side-effects did patients experience?

Even though it is an oral drug, daraxonrasib had a significant incidence of side-effects almost on a par with chemotherapy, with which the drug was compared. The common side effects included a skin rash, loose motions, oral ulcers, vomiting and vomiting-like sensations, tiredness, and

fall in haemoglobin levels, among others. About a third of patients required reduction in dose as well. Since it is a new drug, oncologists and physicians over the world will slowly learn to use this drug so that side effects can be ameliorated to some extent.

### Which patients are most likely to be eligible for this treatment?

As of now, patients with pancreatic cancer, who have previously received chemotherapy and have worsening disease, are candidates for receiving daraxonrasib. However, clinical trials and studies are already exploring these drugs in patients who are treatment-naïve (meaning an individual has never received therapy or medication for a specific medical condition or disease). I think that these will possibly be used earlier rather than later in pancreatic cancers as well as other cancers in the coming times.

### Can this drug have applications beyond pancreatic cancer?

Daraxonrasib as well as other drugs similar to it, which inhibit activity of RAS, are being explored in a number of cancers since RAS mutations are noted in about 20% of all cancers. They are actively being evaluated in lung and colon cancers since these are relatively common and have a high incidence of RAS mutations.

### What about accessibility?

The drug is not available in India. But with the kind of scope it has, I think this class of drugs will soon make its way to the country. Everyone is interested because of their potential to treat a number of cancers. Informally, we have heard that there is a long waiting list even to get into clinical trials evaluating RAS inhibitors. So we will have to wait and see with regard to accessibility of daraxonrasib.

### What does this breakthrough tell us about the future of precision medicine in cancer treatment?

Precision medicine has already transformed the management of certain cancers like lung cancers. With more research, oncologists like me can hope for more personalised and precise treatments. At the same time, we also need to remember that the basics of cancer therapy — surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy — are very important and precision medicine has to work in tandem.

HISTORY

## Mountbatten Plan at 79: How it redrew the subcontinent

Nikita Mohta

New Delhi, June 3

LORD LOUIS Mountbatten arrived in Delhi on March 22, 1947, to assume office as Viceroy with a clear mandate: Transfer power to Indian hands no later than June 30, 1948. He entered a country gripped by escalating communal violence. The Calcutta killings of August 1946 were followed by riots in Noakhali and Bihar, while tensions had spread to Bombay and other parts of the country.

Mountbatten swiftly concluded that the idea of Pakistan had become unworkable. Following consultations in India and a visit to London in mid-May, he returned to unveil the Partition Plan on the evening of June 3, 1947.

On this day, the principal political actors of the day prepared to announce the fate of the subcontinent: Lord Mountbatten, the British Viceroy; Jawaharlal Nehru, representing the Congress; Muhammad Ali Jinnah, representing the Muslim League; and Baldev Singh, speaking on behalf of the Sikhs. The announcement they delivered came to be known as the June 3 Declaration.

### What did the plan propose?

At its core, the plan accepted the division of British India. It proposed that the Assemblies of Punjab and Bengal would vote on whether their provinces should be partitioned; Sindh's Assembly would decide whether to join India or Pakistan; and referendums would be held in the North-West Frontier Province and Sylhet district to determine their future. If partition occurred, a Boundary Commission would demarcate the borders, particularly in Punjab and Bengal. The plan also provided for the creation of two independent dominions, India and Pakistan, each with its Constituent

### THE OBJECTIONS

The Muslim League continued to oppose the partition of Punjab and Bengal. Sikhs pressed for stronger safeguards in the Punjab boundary settlement. Congress argued that the North-West Frontier Province should have the option of independence before determining its relationship with India.

Princely states were required to accede to one of the two dominions, and the transfer of power was advanced to August 15, 1947.

### How did the rival parties agree?

The Congress was driven to accept the plan out of the desire to contain spiralling communal violence. It also concluded that a smaller but more cohesive India with a strong central government was preferable over a united India in which the Muslim League could permanently obstruct governance. For the Muslim League, acceptance of the June 3 Plan guaranteed the creation of Pakistan, the fulfilment of its central political objective. The League feared that Muslims would be politically marginalised in a united, Hindu-majority India. Partition, therefore, offered what it saw as a path to political self-determination.

### The unanswered questions

Crucial questions remained unanswered. Would people be expected to migrate? Where exactly would the borders be drawn? Which districts would fall within Pakistan and which would remain in India? Mountbatten was repeatedly pressed on whether the plan would trigger large-scale migration. “Personally I don't see it,” the Viceroy replied. Yet the tragic consequences soon became apparent to the world. In the weeks to come, violence would engulf large parts of the subcontinent, triggering one of the greatest mass migrations in history.

Centre	हिंदी माध्यम	English Medium
१ Karol Bagh	८ जून   सुबह ८:०० बजे	12 June   8:00 AM
२ Noida	९ जून   सुबह ११:३० बजे	12 June   11:30 AM
३ Indore	२२ जून   सुबह ८:०० बजे	8 June   8:00 AM
४ Lucknow	२९ मई   सुबह ८:०० बजे	25 May   8:00 AM
५ Prayagraj	१० जून   सुबह ८:०० बजे	23 June   8:00 AM
६ Ranchi	९ जून   शाम ५:०० बजे	29 May   2:00 PM
७ Patna	व्यक्तिगत आरंभ	25 May   8:00 AM
८ Jaipur	२६ मई   शाम ५:०० बजे	4 June   11:00 AM

DIPLOMACY

## Hormuz to nuclear issue: Rubio's testimony tempers expectations

Shubhajt Roy

New Delhi, June 3

A FIVE-hour-long testimony by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio to the US Congress Tuesday provided clues about where the West Asia war is headed amid a fragile peace and uncertain ceasefire talks with Iran.

Appearing before the Senate for the first time since the war began on February 28, a combative Rubio spoke about a range of issues linked to the conflict.

### Nuclear talks

Rubio tried to project optimism about the ceasefire talks with Iran, claiming that Tehran was willing to discuss some aspects of its nuclear programme — previously a no-go area. The US wants Iran to cap its programme and give up its estimated 440 kg of highly enriched uranium.

He cautioned, however, that there was no guarantee that any agreement would be “acceptable to the Senate or acceptable to the American people”. His open-ended assessment is an official acknowledgement that both sides still have wide differences on several issues.

Rubio's statement came a day after Iran's

state-affiliated Tasnim News Agency reported that Tehran would stop exchanging messages with Washington through intermediaries, pointing to Israel's military operations in Lebanon as a ceasefire violation.

### Sanctions relief

Rubio said US negotiators have not offered sanctions relief to Iran in exchange for reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Any such relief, he said, was tied to Tehran giving up its nuclear programme.

Iran's main demand has been relief from the crushing economic sanctions imposed by the US, which had led to widespread protests in January. Its biggest leverage during the conflict has been its control over the Strait of Hormuz. Iran closed the narrow waterway, through which a fifth of the world's energy normally flows, in response to the US-Israeli attack.

Tehran is hoping that Trump, who faces midterm elections later this year, will buckle under the pressure of the spiralling gas and fuel prices and agree to its demands.

### A rift with Israel?

Asked where the US stands on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's goal

### Mojtaba Khamenei's fate

Rubio said he believes that Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, is alive and is increasingly engaging in leadership matters amid negotiations.

By all accounts, however, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is in control, and has access to the new Supreme Leader.

of seizing 70% of Gaza, Rubio said that was not part of President Donald Trump's 20-point plan to end the conflict between Israel and Hamas and rebuild the devastated territory.

This can be seen as a rebuke to the Israeli PM, who has consistently pushed the limits of the wars in Gaza as well as West Asia. Rubio's statement comes after Trump reportedly ripped into Netanyahu over his plans to attack Lebanon capital Beirut, for attacking Lebanon, and jeopardising the Iran peace talks.

### China's role

Rubio said China hasn't provided help to Iran that “in any way impeded our operations”. He told lawmakers that Iran has Chinese military equipment from their previous ties but said the US has seen no indication that anything provided has “changed the dynamic in the battlefield”.

This is an important statement and assessment from the US Secretary of State and acting National Security Advisor, especially in the backdrop of US President Donald Trump's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping last week in Beijing.

From India's perspective, this is an im-

portant lesson since China had provided live intelligence to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor in May last year. This shows that Beijing is mindful of its ties with the US, and worked accordingly. It did not do the same with New Delhi.

### Russian oil waiver

Rubio said that the US would like to end the sanction waivers granted to countries purchasing Russian oil. The US granted a waiver from sanctions on the purchase of Russian oil in March and extended it twice. The last extension was granted on May 17 for one month.

India, which has been reeling under shortage of gas and fuel, has been buying Russian energy to meet its demands and reduce the inflationary impact.

Rubio's words, therefore, are hanging like Damocles' sword — especially at a time when India is negotiating a trade deal with the US. India doesn't want to return to the tariff wars which began after the US slapped 50% “reciprocal” tariffs on India; for high tariffs on US products and buying Russian energy.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM/EXPLAINED

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

## AI cracks an 80-year-old maths problem, marking a landmark in reasoning

Nameera Anjum

New Delhi, June 3

FOR GENERATIONS, mathematicians have tried and failed to solve an 80-year-old problem. In May, an artificial intelligence (AI) model successfully tackled it.

OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, said one of its internal models had made a breakthrough with the challenge first posed by Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdős in 1946 — the planar unit distance problem. The mathematician was known for creating such challenges, which are collectively known as “Erdős problems”.

Claims of AI models solving maths problems are not new, attracting criticism as well as scepticism.

Experts, however, say this particular result stands out. Had a human carried it out, it would merit publication in a top math journal, they say. “No previous AI-generated proof has come close” to meeting those high standards, wrote Tim Gowers, a mathematician at the University of Cam-

bridge, in commentary for OpenAI.

Thomas Bloom, a researcher at the University of Manchester who maintains the website *erdosproblems.com*, told *The Indian Express* that he had ranked the “unit distance problem” among his top 10 Erdős problems and expected that a solution was still a long way off. These breakthroughs, according to him, matter because they show that AI is capable of doing “real research”.

### The planar unit distance problem

The problem is deceptively simple. Take a piece of paper and place some dots on it. As you keep adding dots — even up to the millions and trillions — how do you ensure that you get the maximum pairs of dots that are at the same distance from each other?

Erdős posited that the best strategy to get the maximum number of equal-distance pairs is to arrange them in a shape roughly resembling a square grid.

For decades, mathematicians thought that this was indeed the best way but could

not find a proof. “Like most people, I was expecting a proof,” said Bloom, who is among nine mathematicians who have verified this result.

But the OpenAI model, instead of solving the problem, discovered the square-grid assumption, “discovering an entirely new family of constructions that performs better”, according to OpenAI.

This means that it essentially found a new pattern — one that is difficult to represent visually — drawing from different fields of mathematics to show that it was possible to get even more equal-distance pairs.

### Maths and AI models

AI models that once struggled with basic arithmetic are now solving SAT problems and tackling Olympiad-level benchmarks. Some of these claims, however, have attracted scrutiny.

In October 2025, OpenAI's former Chief Product Officer Kevin Weil said on X that GPT-5 had found solutions to 10 Erdős problems. He later deleted this post.

At that time, Bloom had described the claim as a “dramatic misrepresentation”, saying it only found existing literature.

This is exactly why the new result is so significant. Rather than simply drawing on existing data, it shows that the AI model was able to “read academic papers and understand them well enough to apply them in new ways”, said Bloom.

Days after Open AI's announcement, Google DeepMind said its AlphaProofNexus model had solved nine Erdős problems.

So why is solving maths problems so important in the field of AI? According to Bloom, with creative writing, people can argue about whether something is well-written or not. “With a mathematical proof, it's either right or wrong, and everyone who's read and understood it can agree on which.”

### Disproving the conjecture

“Modern mathematics is very specialised, and people tend to have depth rather than breadth... a powerful technique from another field might have applications in a

completely different field that all humans have missed,” said Bloom.

But unlike humans, AI systems are less constrained by assumptions about which fields connect naturally.

What makes the Erdős result specifically striking is how the AI model drew from multiple domains. Sayan Ranu, a professor at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, told *The Indian Express*. “The model solved a problem in discrete geometry using tools from algebraic number theory, branches of mathematics that experts had not previously connected to this question.”

By gathering literature and synthesising information across vast domains, AI models can appear more efficient in certain fields than an expert working in a single field. It can dig for solutions tirelessly.

### Why these results matter

These results in pure mathematics may have little effect on most people's lives. But, Bloom said, “once AI can do that with maths papers, it could start to do the same with bi-

ology, physics, medicine, engineering.”

According to Ranu, the models are already arriving at original scientific reasoning in a meaningful way, though a gap remains between these systems and the physical world. This, he said, is the next frontier where real progress will be seen.

The result, he believes, settles a common misconception that LLMs are essentially a more powerful Google search, retrieving answers from a giant database.

But Ranu points out that these models are not yet better than the very best specialists in a given field, such as a leading mathematician working on a problem for decades. AI models also tend to hallucinate or give incorrect answers confidently.

This Erdős problem, thus, became a test of whether AI has moved beyond simple retrieval of information, like search engines do. “This problem had no answer to retrieve. The model produced a new construction that humans had not found in eighty years of trying. That is reasoning and creation, not search,” Ranu said.



OPINION

The Hindu Times ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

A tough road ahead for DKS

This is the most public-facing role of Shivakumar's career, and he will have to shed the strongman image and don the garb of a statesman

To manage a complex Indian state with multiple regions, loyalties, communities and languages is always a tall task. But to do it after stepping up to the chief minister (CM)'s chair halfway through the term...

But the road ahead is difficult. This is the most public-facing role of Shivakumar's career, and he will have to shed the strongman image to don the garb of a statesman...

His biggest challenge, however, is the 2028 election. Despite its impressive mandate in 2023, the Congress government was mired for almost three years in a seemingly never-ending power struggle.

Impunity of disaster compensations

How can the loss of life be compensated? While the law continues to grapple with this question, the philosophical underpinnings are even more complex.

In India, the first response to any man-made tragedy, like the fire in a bed and breakfast establishment in Delhi's Malviya Nagar on Wednesday...

Worse still, the alacrity with which the compensation is announced goes missing at the time of disbursement. The Delhi high court has recently sought policy over prompt grant of compensation...

Demands for reform need to be founded in a different register to hold the guilty truly accountable. Moving on to business as usual after paying blood money for tragedies occurring purely due to the confluence of avarice and systemic corruption must stop.

Trump can't force the Abraham Accords

Normalisation of the Arab world's relationship with Israel, if it is to be meaningful and lasting, cannot bypass Palestine and cannot be bundled into geopolitical horse-trading

US President Donald Trump's late-May 2026 demand that virtually every Arab and Islamic State "mandatorily" join the Abraham Accords — and do so as a near-precondition for any settlement with Iran — tells us more about Washington's politics than about any pathway to stability in West Asia.

The proposal contained a basic factual error. Half the countries Trump named — Egypt, Jordan, Turkey — already have diplomatic relations with Israel, established decades before the Accords existed.

The demand seemed cali-

brated less for diplomatic effect than for domestic consumption.

The Accords of 2020 were a genuine, if limited, achievement. The UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and later Sudan formalised relations with Israel under American security and economic inducements.

Saudi Arabia's position is the most consequential and most consistent. Riyadh has spent four years repeating that normalisation requires an "irreversible pathway" to Palestinian Statehood.

Israel's current government — the most Right-wing in the country's history — vehemently opposes a Palestinian State.

closed that he had directed the Israel Defence Forces to seize 70% of the Gaza Strip — well beyond the 53% allotted to Israel under the October 2025 ceasefire with Hamas.

Other capitals have spoken with similar clarity. Islamabad, which has painstakingly mediated the ceasefire between Washington and Tehran, publicly ruled out joining the Accords, with its defence minister describing the move as contrary to national interest.

The biggest structural obstacle is Arab and Muslim public opinion, dramatically sharpened by Gaza. In Saudi Arabia, 81% view normalisation negatively.



Ausaf Sayeed



The more Trump presses coercive normalisation, the more he risks discrediting the instrument he regards as his foreign policy legacy.

This concept is unsellable. Iran's response was compressed.

When Trump floated the idea that Tehran might one day join the Accords, Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi dismissed it as "wishful thinking" and said that Iran would never "recognise an occupied regime that has committed genocide and killed children."

For India, the stakes are real. New Delhi has invested carefully in partnerships with Israel, the UAE, and the wider Gulf — partnerships that anchor I2U2 (India, Israel, the UAE, and the US) and the proposed India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC).

multilateralism — is the right one for this moment.

The broader lesson is now plainly visible. The more Trump presses coercive normalisation, the more he risks discrediting the very instrument he regards as his signature foreign policy legacy.

Ausaf Sayeed is a former secretary to the Government of India, ministry of external affairs, and former ambassador of India to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and High Commissioner to Seychelles. The views expressed are personal

West Bengal's rise needs new energy, where is it?

With a new government taking shape in West Bengal, one of its defining challenges will be reviving the state's economic momentum. Despite its strategic location, major ports, freight corridors and access to eastern and northeastern markets, West Bengal has steadily fallen behind states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in attracting large-scale industrial investment.

At the heart of this challenge lies energy. No industrial economy can grow without reliable, affordable, and future-ready power systems. The ongoing global energy volatility has once again exposed how deeply economic growth, industrial competitiveness and national resilience are tied to energy itself.

tional renewable projects that generate intermittently, RE-RTC combines solar, wind and storage into a single dispatchable product capable of supplying reliable power at all hours of the day.

Second, Bengal's energy transition must be built around grid modernisation rather than generation alone. Much of the state's transmission and distribution infrastructure was designed around large thermal plants feeding one-directional power flows into the grid.

This is where Bengal's infrastructure challenge becomes acute. The state's electricity demand is expected to rise from around 63,000 million units in FY26 to over 81,000 million units by FY30.



Aparna Roy

The future competitiveness of Bengal's industrial economy may, therefore, depend less on how many power plants it builds and more on whether its grid can intelligently manage variable renewable supply.

Third, Bengal must use RE-RTC as an industrial strategy, not merely an energy policy. States such as Gujarat and Tamil Nadu increasingly market themselves as manufacturing destinations supported by cleaner energy ecosystems.

Such a shift would also reduce the long-term fiscal exposure of the state's power system. Coal-linked electricity increasingly faces risks from fuel-price volatility, transport bottlenecks, and environmental compliance costs.

The next industrial race will be won by states that can deliver reliable power when growth demands it most. Bengal's comeback may ultimately depend on whether it can make that transition in time.

Aparna Roy is fellow and lead (climate change and energy), Observer Research Foundation. The views expressed are personal

Advertisement for Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, discussing El Niño and climate change.

Is apex court's confidence in SIR exercise misplaced?

In the wake of the Supreme Court's verdict last week upholding the constitutional validity of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), senior advocate Prashant Bhushan described the ruling as a "blot" on the Court, comparable to ADM Jabalpur during the Emergency.

The comparison is deliberately provocative. While voter-list revision is not equivalent to the suspension of civil liberties, the analogy captures the frustration caused by rights becoming meaningless when courts do not intervene in time.

To understand the distress that followed the judgement, we must understand the stakes. The Election Commission of India (ECI)'s recent SIR exercise in 12 states/UTs has, so far, reportedly struck off more than 6.5 crore voters from draft rolls (almost 7% of the national electorate, and up to an alarming 19% in certain states) even as the exercise is still underway in several states.

Ordinarily, SIRs are administrative exercises undertaken periodically to account for deaths, migrations, and additions. So, the question was never the ECI's authority to clean up rolls; rather, petitioners sought immediate judicial intervention on the grounds that the exercise was proceeding with unusual speed and aggression.

Most troubling, though, has been the Court's treatment of the precedent — Lal Babu Hussein v Electoral Registration Officer. Authored by then Chief Justice A M Ahmadi, the landmark judgement had for three decades, held the line as a bulwark against arbitrary voter deletion and presumptions of citi-

zenship suspicion. Responding to a similar mass exclusion drive in 1995 that had removed numerous slum dwellers from the rolls, the judgement protected voters' rights and struck down the ECI's exercise.

But on May 27, the Court adopted an unusually narrow reading of the judgement relying on a limited passage to stress that errors in electoral rolls are possible and must be corrected. In doing so, protection and presumption of validity, if not formally overturned, have been substantially hollowed out.

This doctrinal weakening is reflected in the Court's broader approach to the exercise. Instead of testing SIR against constitutional guarantees of non-arbitrariness, due process, and meaningful participation, the judgment concentrated on technicalities of statutory remedies and the ECI's broad powers. By treating the matter through a narrow lens of administrative procedure rather than statutory rights, the burden has effectively been shifted onto the ordinary citizens, who must now navigate cumbersome bureaucratic mechanisms to wrest back their rights.

Judicial reasoning appears at ease with the assumption that large scale exclusions can be managed, so long as correction mechanisms remain available on paper. If that confidence proves misplaced, the next question is unavoidable: Will the Court be willing to consider whether elections conducted amid mass exclusions can stand as valid, given the absence of lakhs of citizens from the electoral process? If not, should the Court have demanded stronger safeguards and clear oversight before allowing SIR to proceed?

These questions may outlive this judgment. In the meanwhile, the operation is declared successful. Patient, however, is dead.



Ashish Bharadwaj



Insiyah Vahanvaty

Ashish Bharadwaj is pro vice-chancellor of the upcoming WPU Goa Campus. Insiyah Vahanvaty is a socio-political commentator and author of 'The Fearless Judge'. The views expressed are personal

# Tariff threats

USTR's proposal will increase uncertainty

The United States Trade Representative's (USTR's) proposal to impose an additional 12.5 per cent tariff on imports from India under Section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974, is an attempt to increase overall restrictions on America's imports. The proposal followed an investigation into whether 60 economies, including India, have adequate safeguards against imported products manufactured using forced labour. The USTR has concluded that all 60 economies have fallen short on this count. Countries such as Canada, nations of the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Australia may face an additional 10 per cent tariff, while India and several others would face 12.5 per cent. The sheer breadth of the findings raises questions about the purpose of the exercise. Forced labour is a legitimate concern, but an investigation that covers economies accounting for about 99 per cent of US imports and finds every one deficient appears less like targeted enforcement and more like a search for legal justification for new tariffs.

For India, the implications extend beyond the headline tariff rate. The USTR's report identifies exposure across sectors such as aluminium, cotton, electronics, lithium-ion batteries, and rice, while also flagging exports involving products linked to cotton, fish, palm oil, coffee, cocoa and nickel supply chains. Clearly, the USTR's recommendation cannot be separated from developments in US trade policy over the past year. After the courts struck down the Donald Trump administration's reciprocal tariffs imposed under emergency powers, Washington turned to alternative legal routes. Temporary tariffs were imposed under Section 122 of the Trade Act, which would soon expire.

Tariffs are central to Mr Trump's economic agenda. The administration thinks the world has not been fair to the US, and that is reflected in the trade deficit. It also believes that tariffs will cut imports and increase domestic production, resulting in job creation. Thus, in March, the USTR launched two major Section 301 investigations. One was on forced labour and the other one was on what the USTR describes as "structural excess capacity" in manufacturing sectors of 16 economies, including India. The investigation covers industries such as solar modules, textiles, the health industry, automotive goods, petrochemicals, steel, and construction goods. While such concerns are often associated with China's state-led industrial model, India too has been brought within its ambit. The pattern is difficult to miss.

The Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Wednesday issued a statement that India will remain engaged with the US through the ongoing Section 301 consultation process, while simultaneously pursuing the framework trade agreement announced earlier this year. The USTR proposal has clearly made the ongoing trade negotiations more difficult. It was reported that the tariffs under Section 301 would not be imposed on India if both sides arrived at an agreement. It was also reported from the US side that the deal was 99 per cent done. Given the renewed uncertainty, the government must effectively put forward its position with US negotiators. However, the problem with the current US administration is that nothing can be taken as certain. The experience of other countries shows that the US can always impose new conditions even after a deal is done. Thus, conditions are likely to remain uncertain for some time, and the uncertainty is not limited to India. The US administration is targeting all its major trading partners. This could further increase global uncertainty and disrupt supply chains.

# Restricting revenue

Cap on TV ads should be reconsidered

The recent Delhi High Court verdict that broadcasters must cap advertising at 12 minutes per hour, including two minutes of self-promotion, is based on the grounds that television (TV) channels must not maximise advertising revenue as a right since they are licensed users of spectrum — a scarce public resource. The argument against unlimited monetisation of public resources, while making a case for the common good, may be sound from a legal standpoint, but overlooking the changing dynamics of the broadcasting industry over time puts a question mark on the practicality of the judgment. The latest verdict is unlikely to serve as a closure to a long-winding legal dispute running over a decade. Even as the court dismissed some 17 writ petitions filed by TV channels of various genres, the industry has already announced its decision to appeal at the Supreme Court. The fact that the court, in May this year, upheld the "12-minute per clock hour" advertisement cap — prescribed by the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994, and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) Regulations, 2012 (amended in 2013) — shows that the verdict may have glossed over the passage of time and the shift in consumer preference.

At a time when the consumer has the choice to watch an advertisement or skip it in over-the-top (OTT) platforms such as Youtube, archaic rules dating back to 1994 appear to be a faulty reference point. In 1994, when the mobile-phone launch in India was still a year away, cable & satellite TV had started to make a mark against the monopoly of state-owned Doordarshan. Homes with cable & satellite TV were estimated at around 12 million and advertising revenue had crossed the ₹1,000 crore mark. Some 20 years later, in 2013, when the amended Trai regulation notified a similar 12-minute-an-hour cap on advertisement, cable & satellite TV homes had risen to 161 million. Of the ₹41,700 crore broadcasting revenue, ₹28,100 crore came from subscription and ₹13,600 crore from advertisements.

As of December 2025, the number of homes with cable & satellite TV was down to 100 million, according to estimates. While pay TV broadcasters were getting 50-70 per cent of their revenue from advertising, free-to-air channels were entirely dependent on ads. The linear TV (traditional broadcasting) industry generated revenues of ₹62,000 crore, of which ₹26,300 crore came from advertising and ₹35,400 crore from subscriptions. Against the rapid rise of OTTs, connected TVs or smart TVs, and free ad-supported streaming television, a mandatory cap of 12 minutes an hour may act as a blow to the broadcasting industry.

History shows that the advertising cap has not been implemented in any meaningful manner. After the broadcasting industry largely failed to comply with the advertising rules prescribed by the Cable TV Network Rules, 1994, Trai in 2013 notified the amended "quality of service" regulations for channels after consultation with stakeholders. Ever since, the issue has been under litigation. In principle, with consumers having a choice of parallel platforms, restricting broadcasters through a cap, which could affect their revenues and the quality of content over the medium term cannot be a right policy option. Broadcasters should have more freedom to run their business.

# The missing F in India's armour

India is floundering because it did not build adequate fiscal space when times were good

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has asked everyone to focus on three Fs — foreign exchange, fuel, and fertiliser — to deal with the current crisis. But she might wish to add another key F: Fiscal space. If available, that would have given her more room for manoeuvre in addressing the current crisis.

If India had created more fiscal space in the three good years following the end of the Covid crisis in 2022-23, it would have more options to deal with the current one. In my January 2025 column, I warned that unless India was able to create greater fiscal space during favourable times, we would not have any powder to deal with the next crisis. That warning went unheeded and here we are with a crisis no one anticipated and for which India is badly unprepared with only limited options at its disposal.

The glide path that India has followed in reducing the fiscal deficit has been too slow. Its fiscal deficit in FY27 (Budget Estimate) is projected at 4.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) after a slow glide, which brought the central fiscal deficit down to 4.4 per cent of GDP in FY26 (see chart), from 6.7 per cent in FY22.

Together with the fiscal deficit of the states, which increased in FY24 and FY25, this meant that public debt, as a share of GDP, declined very slowly and has remained above 80 per cent of GDP. Even before the West Asia crisis, the debt was projected to fall below 80 per cent of GDP only in 2030. This must be one of the slowest fiscal corrections after a crisis, creating more financial repression to finance deficits and keeping commercial interest rates elevated (Agarwal and Vardhan).

Two obvious areas for reducing the fiscal deficit faster would have been faster privatisation, which has gone moribund since the much-heralded Air India sale. Except for the Maharatas, which serve a strategic purpose, in a detailed study I did at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy some years ago, I argued that there was no reason to hold on to so many public-sector enterprises (PSEs) and to use the sale proceeds to finance public infrastructure. But since then, India has already invested considerably in public infrastructure, so proceeds of future PSE sales should be used to reduce public debt and create fiscal space for future crises.

In fact, since then, the number of PSEs in India has surprisingly gone up instead of going down — strange for a government that started with the slogan "Maximum Governance, Minimal Government". Selling a large chunk of these companies to pare down the public debt would create the fiscal space that we need to handle future crises — too late for this crisis, but needed for the next one.

The other would have been to address another F — namely "freebies". Every state and general election throws up more freebies. The biggest freebie is the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), which provides free food to 814 million citizens (56 per cent of the population), costing 0.7 per cent of GDP, but whose costs will now rise to above 1 per cent of GDP.

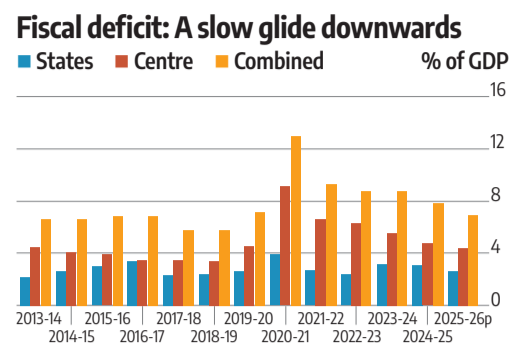
At the recent ET Global Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi explained his reasoning for giving such a large subsidy not just to the 200 million below the poverty line, but also to another 600 million whom he classified as being just above the poverty line and who could fall back into poverty, and therefore deserve free food.

But one wonders where all this free food goes. According to Santosh Mehrotra, former professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, the just-released Sixth National Family Health Survey shows that India's child malnutrition rate was a substantial 32 per cent in 2023-24 — almost unchanged from 2019-21 (NFHS-5).

The real reason for this extraordinary largesse is that he is unable to ensure jobs for so many people and provides them with this huge "freebie" to get their vote. Now every party in every election vies with one another to provide more freebies, leading to bigger central and state-level deficits. State-level deficits increased sharply in FY24 and FY25, contributing to keeping public debt levels high.

But given the lack of fiscal space, and rising fertiliser subsidies, the government will have no choice but to increase prices for fuel and cut back on other expenditure, including its capital expenditure. Monetary policy is also constrained by the rapidly depreciating rupee and the huge surge in inflation likely to come.

The latest survey shows that business inflation expectations done for March 2026 increased by 57 basis points, from 5.07 per cent to 5.64 per cent. Firms



**The expanding state**

Year / Period	Total number of PSEs	Historical context
1951	5	Initial post-Independence ownership
1990s	235 - 240	Post-liberalisation consolidation
2014	290 - 300	Stable peak during mid-2010s
2019	348	Steady growth up to the pre-Covid era
2021	365	Increased government entities, including subsidiaries
2022-2023	437	Government of India corporate data
Current (2026)	448	Total PSE count

Source: Public enterprises survey

held their inflation expectations at over 5 per cent for three consecutive months — a phenomenon witnessed only after August 2022. Businesses in April 2026 expected one year ahead Consumer Price Index headline inflation to be at 4.94 per cent, up by 24 bps from 4.7 per cent reported in February 2026.

The Monetary Policy Committee will be under pressure to raise interest rates — no relief there. There are cries to constrain capital outflows to manage the falling rupee. But this could hurt India even more in the longer run. The only option will be greater credit forbearance to help small firms already hit hard by rising gas and fuel prices to survive until the end of this crisis.

The Reserve Bank of India extended an enhanced credit period of up to 450 days for both pre-shipment and post-shipment export credit disbursed until June 30, 2026. The government has announced a ₹2.5 trillion credit forbearance scheme — especially for micro, small and medium enterprises.

But a big lesson from this crisis is that, especially as global uncertainty rises, India should expect more crises in future, and the best way to deal with them is to have the fiscal space to respond when they do arise. This is the critical F the FM should focus on in future.

The author is a distinguished visiting scholar, Institute for International Economic Policy, George Washington University  
 1. Why commercial credit remains expensive in India  
 2. <http://www.nipfp.org.in/publications/working-papers/1776>



IF TRUTH BE TOLD  
AJAY CHHIBBER

largesse is that he is unable to ensure jobs for so many people and provides them with this huge "freebie" to get their vote. Now every party in every election vies with one another to provide more freebies, leading to bigger central and state-level deficits. State-level deficits increased sharply in FY24 and FY25, contributing to keeping public debt levels high.

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# An ode to Shastri Bhawan

As Shastri Bhawan, a landmark location on Rajendra Prasad Road in New Delhi, gets closer to demolition, murals by Satish Gujral on the façade of the building, which have been there for 60 years, will be among those in search of a new address, as *The Indian Express* reported recently. While the headquarters of about a dozen government ministries and departments housed in Shastri Bhawan make their way to the swanky Central Vista offices, memories of the place would surely keep it alive for thousands of visitors and journalists, besides those for whom it was a workplace.

The seven-storey building, often described as a run-down office and not quite smelling like power corridors are expected to, was rather unique. Unlike other Bhawans, which have been mostly focused on related ministries in a particular building, Shastri Bhawan represented multiplicity like no other. Named after India's second Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, this Bhawan served as the headquarters for ministries as diverse as information and broadcasting (I&B), petroleum and natural gas, corporate affairs, coal, education, law & justice, sports & youth affairs, tribal affairs and women & child development, among others.

The collection of so many ministries at one place gave Shastri Bhawan a democratic air and also made it a storied place. For journalists on multiple beats, it was a dream, as going from one floor to another and from one room to another was rather seamless till a few years ago. At the end of a good day, one could be richer by many stories.

It was important to know which lift a certain minister or a bureaucrat used to be able to get that single

confirmation that could put a story on the frontpage. Tracking high-profile visitors at Shastri Bhawan (and there were many) was also a bit easier than in some other government buildings because of several pathways, nooks and corners that could be negotiated here without attracting suspicion from onlookers. One could pretend to be going to the coal ministry while actually proceeding to a room in the corporate affairs ministry, for instance.



NOT FOR PROFIT  
NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

When media mogul Rupert Murdoch dropped in at Shastri Bhawan more than two decades ago to meet the I&B bureaucracy to discuss Star TV's expansion plans, he was almost like a showstopper, being chased by Indian and foreign media. Mr Murdoch didn't utter a word, while his security ensured maximum distance in the narrow corridors of the Bhawan.

While Bollywood stars, including the Khans, could be spotted at times for Censor Board approvals or new projects, some ofbeat developments also made Shastri Bhawan what it was. For instance, when the film adaptation of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* sparked

protests in India, top Catholic priests of the country gathered at Shastri Bhawan to find a resolution. Also, when the conditional access system controversy was at its peak, prominent cable operators of the country made Shastri Bhawan their second home, even organising pizza parties at the sixth floor committee room, which was otherwise meant for meetings and conferences. No red flags were raised by the officials for the breach.

The binding force at Shastri Bhawan over the years has been the information officers (IOs) attached to the various ministries. Many of them have been household names because of the daily calls and the frequent visits to them — considered a must-do drill for the media. They were the first floor occupants of Shastri Bhawan for six decades, connecting the media to the larger world of policymakers in the upper floors of the same building and elsewhere. Of course, many of them have now shifted a few kilometres away to the National Media Centre on Raisina Road, while retaining their Shastri Bhawan connect.

Shastri Bhawan's first floor conference room, best known for Cabinet briefings by ministers and the much-awaited snacks that followed, has been another piece to remember. Cabinet briefings too shifted to the National Media Centre some years ago.

Some other things stood out at this Bhawan. Like a few administrative offices managed by the ministry of external affairs for visas and such work — that part of the corridor had glossy walls and an air of discipline.

Remembering Shastri Bhawan — as the final shift to Kartavya Path is round the corner — would perhaps be incomplete without recalling that many Prime Ministers have held additional charge of portfolios whose offices were located here.

Now, to the new address.

# The anatomy of India's digital scams



ROOHI NARULA

What distinguishes *Bharat Bluff* from other works on cybercrime is its sharp insight into human psychology. The book is organised around typologies of deception, with Ms Gupta classifying scams into three psychological categories: Fear, greed, and belief. This framing is particularly effective because it shifts attention from technology to human vulnerability. Her emotion-first approach makes the book especially compelling for readers interested not just in the mechanics of scams, but in the social and psychological realities of digital India.

As Arthur Conan Doyle once said, "Life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent." Soumya Gupta's *Bharat Bluff* proves exactly that, plunging readers into a world of digital scams more bizarre and unsettling than fiction itself. The book takes readers through India's expanding "scam economy" through first-person accounts, rigorous research, and reflections on why the internet in India is increasingly becoming a playing field for predators.

Ms Gupta forces readers to confront a new normal in India: In a digital society prioritising convenience and growth, trust has become our greatest vulnerability. "On most days, [the internet's] seamlessness substantially improves our quality of life. But it also means we do not stop to double-check information most of the time," she writes. Take UPI, a pay-

ment interface that many of us have begun to take for granted. Ms Gupta cites data from the Ministry of Finance showing that reported UPI fraud cases in 2023-24 rose by 85 per cent. Such statistics reveal the scale of India's scam economy and how seamlessly scammers have integrated themselves into everyday life.

Some scams do not even have the end goal of soliciting money. Scams of belief take advantage of our human instinct to trust and leave victims psychologically traumatised without having stolen a single penny. Ms Gupta delves into tactics of "social engineering" and manipulation — also known as phishing — that leave a victim primed to be taken advantage of. She cites the case of veteran journalist and TV anchor Nidhi Razdan, who was tricked into believing she had been offered a job at Harvard University, only to discover it was a scam after she had quit her job and publicly announced

the news on Twitter (now X). *Bharat Bluff* is filled with first-person accounts of scams that allow readers to comprehend the gravity of India's scam economy beyond data. Ms Gupta states that "a book about frauds is fundamentally a book about people," ensuring that she pays respect to the victims who came forward with their stories. She treats these accounts delicately, never allowing the reader to indulge in voyeuristic tendencies of consuming them as "juicy" stories. Every account is treated as a conduit to force the reader to recognise that this could very well have been them. She writes, "The next time you feed your name, number, address, and government ID into a website, chances are it may leak and join a vast ocean of other breached data about you, giving a potential scammer an intimate portrait of your life." In fact, Ms Gupta recounts anecdotes from personal experiences with

digital scams, allowing readers to set aside their ego and confront the reality that India's scam economy can entrap anyone.

The book's biggest strength lies in its ability to provide context on how India's socio-economic climate is creating the perfect breeding ground for scams. It shines a light on larger structural issues, including unemployment, economic insecurity, and the culture of shame and stigma that often discourages victims from coming forward.

Ms Gupta also provides readers with tangible steps to avoid scams. From insightful tips from psychologists to information about the Digital Data Protection Act, Ms Gupta empowers readers with the tools we have to protect ourselves. In her conclusion, she states, "The future of India's internet revolution can be secured if we learn to change ourselves with the times

by prioritising awareness, learning to handle our human weakness, and [connecting] with each other beyond guilt and shame."

Despite Ms Gupta's best efforts, you might put down the book with a lingering sense of helplessness before once again surrendering to the convenience of the digital world. Packed with statistics, case studies, expert insights, and daunting cautionary tales, *Bharat Bluff* can at times feel overwhelming in its sheer breadth. Though this is not a shortcoming of the book itself, the scale of the digital scam ecosystem is so vast that readers may find themselves retreating to what is familiar, even as the book compels them to question it.

The reviewer is a communications professional with an academic background in gender and sexuality studies



Bharat Bluff: Inside the Cons of India's Internet Revolution  
Published by Roli Books  
232 pages ₹495



## OUR VIEW



# India's coal-to-gas plan calls for fine calibration

*This initiative in favour of energy security holds immense promise, but India must take due care to keep it in synchrony with the realities of technology, costs and other dynamic factors*

For an economy that imports 90% of its oil and 50% of its gas to meet 35% of its primary energy needs (28% met by oil and 7% by gas), the Indian government has acted swiftly in the wake of the world's largest ever supply disruption. Last week, it launched an effort to review old geological data and secure more of it to ignite investor interest in hydrocarbons. Better data improves the odds of explorers finding oil and gas, but does not guarantee a commercially viable discovery. Seismic studies reveal only indicative spots to drill, imprecision can be unforgiving and a strike may turn out too small. Another recent initiative holds greater promise: a hefty package of financial incentives with an outlay of ₹37,500 crore designed to fast-track projects that convert coal into gas. This is potentially a giant leap towards India's goal of energy independence by 2047, as set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the slogan of self-reliance. We have no dearth of extractable coal and this mission's target of gasifying 100 million tonnes of coal every year by 2030 is ambitious: if met, it would give the country twice the volume of natural gas it currently consumes. Syngas drawn from coal can serve as feedstock for a diverse range of products, from fertilizer and chemicals to hydrogen and transport fuels like ethanol, apart from dimethyl ether, an alternative to the single largest petroleum product we use, diesel.

Coal gasification, however, has challenges as well as a policy trade-off that must be assessed against the aim of self-reliance. China's story is instructive. It is the world's largest coal producer but depends on imports to meet some three-quarters of its oil needs. With gas, Bei-

jing's pursuit of self-reliance began early; today locally gasified coal accounts for over three-quarters of its output of urea, the most widely used nitrogen-based plant nutrient. In contrast, producers of urea from natural gas, like India, have been reeling from a 70% spike in the price of this input caused by the choke of Hormuz. At a time like this, we have a compelling case to gasify coal. India's urea subsidy bill is likely to exceed ₹1.7 trillion, with this fertilizer sold at a tenth of its global price. Advances in process technology, though, will determine how efficiently it is done and how quickly it scales; R&D pacts could guardrail the incentive package.

Coal's syngas can support far more than urea production. The process yields hydrogen, for example, which is used by industries like steel and cement, whose final products are not under state control. In such cases, especially, the Centre must assess global technology and prices before incentives are awarded. Late last year, globally, spiralling costs and weak demand led to almost 60 projects amounting to four times the world's installed capacity for low-carbon hydrogen getting scrapped. While global majors had embraced this clean-tech idea, they struggled to scale up. Now they are on the lookout for a cheaper and faster path ahead. We also have climate goals that the coal-to-gas initiative could help achieve, particularly if its use as an energy source reduces overall carbon emissions. But to gasify coal cleanly, we would need it done within coal mines with appropriate mechanisms to entrap carbon. The technology for this, however, has some way to go before it can be deployed safely and at scale. All said, a complex mix of variables must be managed for an optimal policy balance between costs, self-reliance and carbon reduction.

## GUEST VIEW

# How to tide over hard times: aim to rebalance that asset portfolio

*Investors must keep emotions in check and reshuffle holdings to emerge better off from today's flux*



**DIRAJ RELLI**  
is managing director and CEO,  
HDFC Securities.

The global backdrop has been unusually crowded with cross-currents. Geopolitical unrest, sticky inflation in several pockets, erratic commodity cycles and elongated interest-rate cycles dominate investor minds. Tariff policy is once again reshaping global trade flows, with second-order effects on Indian exporters and supply-chain beneficiaries. Artificial intelligence (AI)-driven concentration has pushed the US and some emerging-market indices (like Taiwan's and South Korea's) to multi-decade highs, with only a handful of mega-caps driving a disproportionate share of returns. Crude oil is a structural variable for India, with every \$10 move in its price materially impacting our import bill, the rupee and inflation expectations.

Markets in recent times have tested the nerves of even the most seasoned investors. Whether volatility will persist is no longer a question. The challenge is how to deal with it without sacrificing long-term returns. 'The investor who survives eventually thrives' is a saying that has proven true in recent times.

While volatility in itself is not a threat, panic-driven actions during volatile times are. Long-term wealth is created not merely by a perfect forecast, but by a resilient portfolio and the discipline of rebalancing it even when every instinct screams otherwise.

Portfolio resilience is often miscon-

strued as just going back to safe-haven assets or sitting on piles of cash in volatile times. However, true portfolio resilience entails building a portfolio that can absorb shocks without requiring the investor to make urgent, reactive decisions under stress. By genuinely diversifying and spreading risk across asset classes that behave differently across macroeconomic environments, one can build a portfolio that can see off tumultuous times.

We believe a barbell construction is the right answer for this environment. On one hand, Indian investors can maintain exposure to high-quality growth themes and consider domestic growth allocations across capital expenditure, manufacturing and financialization themes that are structurally tied to India's decadal story. These assets capture the structural shifts that will define the next decade.

On the other hand, they can build an income-and-stability sleeve through high-quality Indian debt funds and real estate investment trusts (REITs) as well as infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs) and high-dividend-yield equity strategies.

We have been emphasizing a few principles to our clients:

**First**, rebalance with intent, not emotion. Drawdowns are when allocation discipline matters the most. Rebalancing is among the least glamorous disciplines in investing. It involves selling what has done well and buying what has not. In a bull run, it feels like leaving money on the table. In a correction, it could feel like catching a falling knife. Neither feeling is accurate.

**Second**, recognize that the worst returns and best returns in a cycle tend to cluster within months of each other. Exiting during a drawdown is the mathematical equivalent of forfeiting the recovery. And the inverse is also true. Consider what has happened over the past year-and-a-half. Domestic small- and mid-cap equities in India ran up sharply in 2024, pulling portfolio

weights well beyond intended allocations for many investors. Those who did not rebalance found themselves, by early 2025, with concentrated equity exposures just as volatility picked up.

**Third**, build portfolios for resilience, not precision. No one will call the bottom, but a portfolio constructed for multiple outcomes does not need to know that. A systematically rebalanced portfolio helps trim positions that show elevated market valuations and rebuild buffers to cushion drawdowns.

It works because rebalancing is inherently contrarian. It enforces the buy-low, sell-high discipline that investors preach but rarely practise. Research has consistently shown that disciplined rebalancing, particularly during volatile times, can enhance returns—not through market timing but systematic mean-reversion across asset classes.

Optimism in a turbulent market must always be calibrated. That everything will work out fine is just a naive hope, while the case for optimism rests on a structural reading of where investment opportunities are opening up.

The next few months will test the conviction of investors. In such an environment, it is pointless trying to predict when clarity will return. It never arrives with a bell. The aim should be to ensure that one's portfolio is positioned well to participate in a recovery without being destroyed by the drawdown.

This warrants resilience in structure, discipline in rebalancing and optimism grounded in fundamentals rather than sentiment; also, calibrated portfolio rebalancing rather than panic trades.

The investors who will look back at this tumultuous period with satisfaction will probably be those who stayed invested without looking for an exit, retained a rational approach and kept investing—systematically, deliberately and without panic.

Capital markets reward patience. They always have.

Stay diversified. Stay disciplined. And let the cycle do its work.

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

The world of derivatives is full of holes that very few people are really aware of. It's like hydrogen and oxygen sitting on the corner waiting for a little flame.

CHARLIE MUNGER

## MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

# Why let foreign players use derivatives for speculation?

DEVINA MEHRA



is founder of First Global and author of 'Money, Myths and Mantras: The Ultimate Investment Guide'. Her X handle is @devinamehra

Recently, Indians were asked to reduce energy usage through measures like work-from-home, car pooling, etc. Of course, this was consequent to the West Asia war and its disruption of crude oil and petroleum product supplies. But in addition, we were asked to cut back on foreign travel and gold purchases, among other expenses. This went beyond the present conflict to pressure on the Indian rupee's exchange rate. Earlier this year, some measures were taken to restrict the type of foreign-currency transactions that could be undertaken by Indian banks and corporations. The message seems to be that we should reduce outflows of foreign currency to help keep the rupee's exchange rate at a reasonable level.

I have even seen some ill-thought-out recommendations, like disallowing foreign investors and corporations from taking away money through initial public offering (IPO) listings and offers-for-sale on Indian capital markets. However, any restrictions on capital repatriation will further make foreigners

head for the exit. Any such move would have negative second-order effects.

Another set of policy measures, though in a completely different area, aims to curb excess speculation in derivatives on Indian stock exchanges. This year's budget hiked the securities transaction tax (STT). The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has been cautioning that almost all individuals in the derivatives market are losing money. Sebi has been raising entry barriers for traders in this part of the market.

At a policy level, we don't want excessive outflows of foreign exchange and we don't want unbridled speculation in derivatives. In this context, it is inexplicable why India allows derivatives trading by foreign players.

Currently, foreign entities are taking away huge amounts of cash as profits from purely speculative trades in derivatives. This is not just a drain of currency on the balance-of-payments account, but worse. The profits made by these entities are the other side of the same trade that results in massive losses made by Indians. This money is coming out of the pockets of individuals—the 91-93% who make losses, according to Sebi data.

According to Sebi's last study, Indian individuals lost ₹1.8 trillion from fiscal year 2021-22 to 2023-24—a considerable portion

of that huge sum went straight overseas.

Such speculation by sophisticated foreign investors drains hard currency reserves that we can ill-afford to lose. Second, this is not really investment flowing into the country under the definition of foreign direct investment (FDI) or foreign portfolio investment (FPI). Nobody is investing in India. It is short-run speculation, pure and simple. Third, the consequence of this foreign exchange drain is felt in our balance of payments and exchange rate. Fourth, by taking money literally out of the pockets of individual Indian investors, it strains both their precariously balanced household finances and India's lending sector, as many of these losses are financed through various forms of personal loans.

The worst part is that not only are Indian individuals losing money in this zero-sum game, the Sebi study suggests that it is less-educated people, those who live outside the metros and those who earn less than ₹500,000 a year who lose more of it.

Regardless of what various so-called trading courses tell you, there is no way an individual trader can win against a sophisticated rival using high-end techniques and systems. The difference is stark.

To recount, not only are foreign players taking out large amounts of money, they are taking it from exactly the sort of individuals who cannot afford to lose it.

The negatives of India's policy of allowing foreign investors unbridled access to the speculative end of the market are clear. But are there any positives too?

The usual argument is that well-endowed foreign players provide the Indian market with liquidity. But the question is this: Do we at all need a derivatives market of this size? India's derivatives-to-cash segment trading ratio is several times that of the world's most developed markets. This is not something that is required, or even desirable, for healthy markets. It would be fine if liquidity reduces and volumes in the derivatives segment shrink to what is considered normal across the globe.

**Their gains offer India nothing while draining our forex and parting retail investors from their money**



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

# Venture style funding can unlock 100 non-profit unicorns in India

The government should step in to catalyse India's non-profit ecosystem just as it offered commercial startups public support



**TARUN KHANNA, VARUN AGGARWAL & SHUBHAM BANSAL**

are, respectively, Jorge Paulo Lemann professor, Harvard Business School; and co-founders of Change Engine.

Non-profit 'unicorns' are emerging as a powerful pathway to large-scale social change. These are rare organizations that positively impact at least 1 million people. This includes direct impact. Educate Girls has enrolled 2 million rural girls in school through community volunteers, for example. And then, there is their indirect impact. PRS Legislative Research's research briefs for lawmakers, for instance, have led to better laws that affect millions. What's common to them is a search for innovative ways to reduce the marginal cost of reaching each additional person. They signal a shift from service delivery to a product mindset, where the 'product' could be a policy tool, a government scheme playbook, a community lever or a demand-led model.

India has built 130+ startups that fuel economic growth. For example, Zerodha, a startup, gives 16 million citizens easy access to public financial markets. India must now build 100+ non-profit 'unicorns' (defined by scalable impact rather than enterprise value) to deliver population-scale social change. Rocket Learning, a technology non-profit, is a good counterpart. It built an app for *anganwadi* workers that enables early childhood education for 1.5 million children from low-income households. Together, commercial and social startups can help realize the Viksit Bharat dream.

A recent *Ease of Doing Good* report estimates that just \$150 million provided annually over five years, in VC-style, totalling to \$750M, could unlock 100 non-profit unicorns by 2030. This includes funding for pipeline development, stage-wise support for high-potential non-profits and early years of scaling impact.

India already sees \$15 billion in annual philanthropic giving, nearly 100 times the annual need estimate. This is comparable to India's startup funding, placed at around \$12 billion dollars every year. Yet, 80% of non-profits struggle to scale due to funding constraints. The issue is not capital but a lack of 'flexible funding.'

Flexible funding, akin to venture capital for startups, is a distant dream in the non-profit sector. Most funders restrict grants to specific programmes, tightly defined budgets and short time-lines. We have argued previously that building scalable, low-cost solutions requires iteration, experimentation and adaptability—conditions incompatible with line-item funding. The funding mix reinforces this rigidity: 26% comes from corporate social responsibility or CSR budgets (largely programmatic), 27% from domestic foundations and high net-worth individuals (with unrestricted funding reserved just for mature non-profits), 30% from retail giving (rarely directed toward non-



profits doing systemic work) and only 17% from international foundations (which are typically more open to unrestricted funding).

The result: 80% of non-profits report that only a quarter of their funding is unrestricted and 60% say such grants are typically below ₹10 lakh. Nearly 60% of organizations unable to receive foreign funding (lack of Foreign Contribution Regulation Act approval) have never secured a multi-year grant. Endowments for non-profits, which provide a long-term capital cushion, are common in the West but still at a fledgling stage in India. Non-profits also cite regulatory barriers and limited donor awareness as their biggest fundraising challenges. The consequence is lack of innovation and stifled growth.

The Indian ecosystem will find solutions to this problem. But we believe that the government could step in to unlock the creation of non-profit unicorns, as it did for the startup ecosystem by offering seed capital and easing regulations.

Three steps need priority: a philanthropy fund-of-funds (FoF), regulatory reform and national recognition of social founders.

**First, a fund of funds for philanthropy:** India has already deployed this model through SIDBI's FoF for startups and its new Research, Innovation and Development Fund for deeptech. Government capital catalyses private investment while leaving allocation decisions to the market. A \$375 million 'Vikas FoF' over five years (\$75M annually) could similarly unlock unrestricted capital for non-profits.

The government would achieve two things by providing 50% matching funds. It would seed unrestricted philanthropic funds, a new emerging instrument for the social sector. Second, the FoF's matching funds would incentivize philanthropists by giving them a bigger bang for their donated buck. Philanthropic funds would apply to the FoF and be evaluated by a professional and independent team, with grant decisions based on rigour and potential impact. Funds should disclose the

expected impact of their portfolios, so that the sector benefits from clearer metrics and discipline.

Much like startups, not all funded organizations will succeed and success should be measured at the portfolio level rather than at the individual organization level. Crucially, capital must back long-term, high-impact bets rather than short-term, easily measurable gains. The goal should be a high-risk, high-reward portfolio—much like venture investing. Done right, this can seed a new funding architecture for non-profits in India.

**Second, we need deregulation:** The government has undertaken a sustained push for deregulation through its High-Level Committee on Non-Financial Regulatory Reforms and a similar high-level panel on Viksit Bharat. It is time to re-examine constraints on the non-profit sector as well. CSR budgets, worth nearly \$4 billion annually, are highly regulated: restricted to programmatic use, accessible only after three years of non-profit registration and bound by strict rules on unspent funds and director liabilities.

Further, non-profits with tax exemptions (12A/80G under 'general public utility') cannot generate more than 20% of their total annual budget from revenue-based activities. This creates a structural barrier: even when governments want to pay non-profits to scale proven solutions, these organizations cannot accept such funds without breaching caps. Such constraints must be systematically reviewed and reworked to unlock the sector's full potential.

**Third, offer recognition:** The government must celebrate the good work of non-profits and their founders. The government celebrates film performers, scientists, startup founders and even influencers, among others. It should also celebrate social founders through national platforms and top-level recognition. This would elevate role models and help the sector attract talent.

With these steps, India can catalyse 100 non-profit unicorns, organizations capable of making an impact at the scale needed for Viksit Bharat.

THEIR VIEW

# Why an AI bubble burst may serve India's interests well

DEEP MUKHERJEE



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A big sell-off of Indian stocks by foreign institutional investors (FII) was triggered by the recent outbreak of war in West Asia and its impact on our economy. Then a narrative emerged of India being 'nowhere in AI' (artificial intelligence). The fall of Indian market indices, led by IT stocks, even as AI-rich indices surged across the globe, bolstered this narrative. In AI, India is currently a fast follower; it is not a leader (unlike the US and China) but not a laggard either. Globally, the buzz around an 'AI bubble' is getting louder. If the benefits and profit potential of AI, as reflected in the stock prices of AI-related companies, have been overestimated, then inflated valuations point to the existence of an AI bubble that might burst. Domestic narratives suggest that the earnings of listed Indian companies are not dependent on AI. Logically then, Indian stocks could act as an investment hedge against an AI bubble.

**What unites tech bubbles:** The last 200 years have seen several tech bubbles get

inflated by investor enthusiasm. The British railway bubble of the 1840s, the US automobile bubble of 1880-1910 and the internet bubble of the late 1990s are all examples. Such bubbles reflect Amara's Law: People overestimate the benefit of a new technology in the short-run and underestimate its long-term impact. Tech bubbles also exhibit three basic characteristics: overestimation of the speed of adoption that would drive earnings up, outsized capital expenditure and underestimation of competitive pressure. However, the underlying technology has always been transformative and AI may prove more so than the railways, automobile and the internet, irrespective of a bubble.

**How a tech bubble bursts:** A recent Gartner study suggests that AI-driven automation could raise operating costs, driven up by the cost of computation and a specialized workforce. Even at today's discounted compute costs, AI projects fail to scale meaningfully. This is an issue for organizations with a constrained ability to re-imagine existing processes and redesign operations. They require auxiliary capabilities to make the best use of AI and need to experiment. This takes time. Investors buying stocks at sky-high prices could turn impatient if AI returns take too long.

Spending on AI infrastructure has surged. Earlier, hyper-scalers like Amazon and Microsoft were using profits for capex while AI labs with large language models (LLMs) relied on equity funding. Of late, however, debt has also been financing AI capex. The leverage ratios are assuredly low right now. But history shows that debt finance used during the bubble phase of railway, electricity and automobile expansion ended in a pile-up of bankruptcies.

Chinese AI labs with LLMs are drastically reducing their compute costs. Their experience raises questions about the training and inferencing architecture of their US peers and the valuations they command. And history also shows that tech bubbles burst once interest rates spike.

**India's AI play:** The Nifty IT Index's poor returns (about 2% since November 2022 when OpenAI launched ChatGPT and some 25% year-to-date) are indeed worrisome. The stocks of two of India's largest IT majors that have performed badly have a weight of

about half in this index. However, some mid-tier IT companies have delivered 80%+ returns. Some of them have already plugged themselves into the global AI ecosystem. Meanwhile, market investors overlook some of India's most intently AI-focused firms because they are unlisted.

**It may highlight India's role as an investment hedge and buy the country time to catch up in this tech race**

That India is a fast AI adopter is beyond dispute. Github, a leading global cloud platform for AI projects, has identified India as among its fastest growing markets. Indians account for about 15% of Github's user base and its database indicates these 27 million Indian users are contributing to 7.5 million projects. Moreover, as per BCG's AI Radar 2026, a global survey of over 2,300 CXOs, with over 200 from India, revealed that 76% of Indian CEOs believe that their AI investments will pay off. The corresponding proportion for US-European CEOs is under 60%. As per Nasscom, 1,200 of India's 2,300 global capability centres are focused on AI. Thus, India being 'nowhere in AI' is an ignorant statement.

Most laptops today run on chips made by Intel or AMD, which are relatively thirsty for

# Nvidia is hedging its big AI bet with a new mass-market chip

Whether its new 'superchip' will impress laptop users is uncertain



**PARMY OLSON** is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering technology.



Nvidia's market value hinges on chip sales to a few mega-customers.

Gamers who coveted Nvidia's graphics cards long ago because they rendered computer games beautifully may soon be eyeing Windows computers that plug that technology right into the laptop's brain. Nvidia's latest effort to diversify from the monumentally successful business of selling chips for artificial-intelligence (AI) servers is to offer consumers and businesses an alternative to notebooks with 'Intel inside.' It is a smart hedge for Nvidia. Whether these computers will be a smart buy for consumers is far less certain.

Nvidia plans to offer machines built by the likes of Lenovo, HP and Dell that are better adapted to running AI-powered software and agents. Nvidia calls its new RTX Spark a 'superchip' because it fuses two things into one package: a CPU, the brain that runs a personal computer, and a GPU, the graphics engine Nvidia originally built for video games that turned out to be so good at AI that it now powers data centres.

Shares of Intel declined by as much as 7.3% in early Monday trading after the announcement by Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang at the Computex technology show in Taiwan.

On the face of it, Huang is not only expanding his sphere of influence in the global chip market, but savvily hedging his bets on where AI demand will go. Nvidia's \$5 trillion market valuation has long had the whiff of a gamble because so much revenue is dependent on just a handful of large customers. For fiscal year 2026, for instance, one customer accounted for 22% of Nvidia's total sales and another for 14%, meaning two buyers brought in more than a third of turnover. Nvidia does not name these customers in its filings, but they are likely companies such as Foxconn, which assembles systems for hyperscalers like Microsoft and Amazon.

Now Nvidia can also capture business at the so-called edge of the AI business, by pitching its technology to end users like you and me. Lenovo, HP and Dell, three of the manufacturers Nvidia will sell its chips to, account for roughly two-thirds of worldwide PC shipments.

If the new venture does not work out, Nvidia still has the 4% stake in Intel that it recently bought. That particular hedge was worthwhile because while Nvidia has years of experience building inputs for consumer machines from its days making graphics cards for gamers, it does not have a strong track record building the brains of personal computers.

Most laptops today run on chips made by Intel or AMD, which are relatively thirsty for

power. Chips based on Arm's technology, the kind found in smartphones and Apple's Macs, are famed instead for sipping less energy and being gentler on battery life.

But the GPUs that Nvidia makes for data centres are notoriously energy intensive. That, and their price tag, have made AI build-ups extremely costly for labs like OpenAI and Anthropic and hyperscalers such as Microsoft.

It is hard to see how successful a laptop can be if it is running AI agents or whizzy features in Adobe Photoshop but dies within a few hours. Nvidia's RTX Spark, though, is built on Arm's energy efficient blueprints, suggesting it might power laptops in an energy saving way too. At least, that is the idea.

Nvidia is touting "the most efficient PC chip ever built" and promises "all-day" battery life, but has not shared figures for energy-intensive tasks like gaming or running AI agents. The company only says that it will release more performance metrics closer to when its chip goes to market this autumn, and that they are "roughly equivalent" to its RTX 5070 graphics chip for laptops.

Is the RTX 5070 graphics chip efficient? Not especially. If pushed hard with a game, it has been known to drain a laptop's battery life. And Nvidia would not give further details on how the new RTX Spark superchip compares to those from the competition. That leaves an open question which could come back to bite later this year if independent testing shows laptops with an Nvidia brain are a power vacuum.

This will not be Nvidia's first run at the market for PC processors. More than a decade ago, Nvidia's Tegra chips powered Microsoft's first Windows-on-Arm device, a tablet with a detachable keyboard called the Surface RT. But the device could not run a range of third-party apps like Google Chrome, Photoshop and many PC games because most of those programs were designed to run on Intel-style chips and not on Arm's.

These days, chips based on Arm's designs have a built-in translator that can run many more programs, which is a promising step forward even if software compatibility for the RTX Spark is still unclear. The bigger question now is whether Nvidia can deliver all that power without battery life paying the price.

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# Opinion

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2026

## Hold the hike

The MPC can afford to wait for more inflation and growth trends before it takes a call on raising rates

**T**O HIKE OR not to hike? That is the question before the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) when it reviews policy later this week. The case for tighter monetary policy is not insignificant. The rupee has weakened nearly 6% this year and inflationary pressures are building as crude oil prices show little sign of easing. Yet, the case for holding rates is stronger. Persistently high oil prices threaten to undermine growth momentum by squeezing household incomes and raising business costs. On balance, therefore, a hike in the repo rate from the current 5.25% appears unlikely for now. Some argue that higher interest rates could help arrest the rupee's slide. Experience suggests otherwise. During the taper tantrum of 2013, rate hikes did little to stabilise the currency. Using monetary policy primarily to defend the exchange rate risks inflicting unnecessary damage on growth at a time when India is seeking to attract investment and capital flows. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is also unlikely to react to currency weakness alone when the underlying pressures stem largely from external factors.

More importantly, the full inflationary impact of higher crude prices has yet to show up in consumer prices. Retail inflation eased to a lower-than-expected 3.5% in April, with core inflation continuing to soften. However, fuel prices have risen by about ₹7.50 a litre since May 15, pushing up transportation costs across the economy. CRISIL estimates the direct impact on consumer price index inflation at around 35 basis points. Additional fuel price increases of ₹8-10 a litre may be required to reduce the losses of oil marketing companies, potentially adding another 35-40 basis points to inflation. Producers are also beginning to pass on higher input costs to consumers. Combined with the risk of El Niño affecting food production, economists now expect inflation to average 5.5-5.6% this year.

The RBI will therefore need to revise its FY27 inflation forecast upward from the current 4.6%, perhaps by 30-40 basis points, while also raising its oil-price assumption to around \$95 a barrel from \$85. Such revisions would signal that the central bank remains vigilant and prepared to act if inflation expectations become unanchored. At its April policy review, the RBI warned that a supply-side shock from higher crude prices could eventually generate broader demand-side inflationary pressures. So far, demand has held up reasonably well, with automobile sales in May remaining robust. In any case, higher crude oil prices, elevated freight costs, and the risk of weather-related disruptions to food supplies are factors that monetary policy can do little to address. Raising interest rates may dampen borrowing and investment, but it will not lower the price of imported crude or increase the availability of food grains. If anything, an aggressive policy response risks compounding the problem by slowing economic activity.

The second-round effects of inflation are still unfolding, and a clearer picture of consumer spending trends is likely to emerge only over the next few months. The central bank will be reluctant to jeopardise growth when many sectors are already grappling with fuel shortages and rising input costs. It may even trim its growth forecast modestly from the current 6.9%. While higher inflation and oil-price projections could appear hawkish at a time when benchmark bond yields remain above 7%, the RBI must reassure markets that liquidity will remain adequate. Preserving financial stability while keeping policy options open may be the most prudent course for now.

## Spelling Bee restored my faith in humanity

**ONE** OF THE surprise joys of parenthood has been watching my daughter learn to read — how she decodes a mishmash of letters, turning them into words and sentences and ideas. It's unlocked a new world for her. For me, it's a magic window into how her mind works and develops.

It's also added a new worry to my ongoing list of fears about the kind of future we're leaving our children — this one about what learning and education will look like as technology continues to infiltrate their lives. The early indications are not good. Research has shown AI can mute the kind of curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills I've watched my daughter flex in real-time, and that it can increase boredom and dependency. Perhaps the biggest risk of all is that we are giving kids the false impression that there is a shortcut to learning how to think. Case in point: In February, Pew reported 59% of teens saying AI to cheat is a regular occurrence at their school.

I found an antidote to my existential angst last week when I tuned into the Scripps National Spelling Bee. The 101-year-old competition might seem quaint and dated, but it is really a celebration of the crucial life skills that we should be teaching kids. They also happen to be many of the same ones AI has the potential to erode: focus and self-reliance, a tolerance for frustration and discomfort. When the contestants are alone at the mic, there is no spellcheck or Google to call on, no Claude to give hints on how to parse Phthartolatrae or vesait. "You cannot outsource your thinking up on the stage," says Mina Kimes, an ESPN NFL analyst who co-hosted the Bee this year.

Kimes might seem like an unusual choice for the role, but she told me that moderating the Bee would have surprised her younger self less than ending up an NFL analyst. She was the champion of multiple elementary school spelling bees as a kid and recently won *Celebrity Jeopardy*, freely admitting to the amount of preparation she had put in. Her goal was to do something similar with the Bee — to highlight not just the spellers' results but all the hard work.

The uninitiated often have the misconception that these nine- to 14-year-olds who make it to the national contest are trying to memorise as many of the some 500,000 words in the dictionary as possible. The best spellers are not mini-computers but deep thinkers, Kimes told me. If I paid close attention to the kids' faces, she said I would be able to see their minds at work as they puzzled out the words.

When I did, I rarely saw a moment of panic. Fan-favourite Logan Bailey was one of the few to admit to the judges just how nervous he was. Then the 12-year-old took a deep breath and nailed the word Jatrochiza. He did it by being what Bee insiders call a "word detective", searching for clues in the word's origin, definition, and part of speech that could help crack it. It requires

learning the roots of hundreds of Greek and Latin words, besides the rules of languages ranging from Japanese to Portuguese. These spellers practise looking for patterns. In 2019, the Bee ended in a controversial eight-way tie. Since then, the organisers have implemented tactics to avoid a repeat. That included a vocabulary round, but words like "cuneiform", "bradycardia", "contrapuntal", and "badinage" failed to eliminate any of this year's finalists. They also faced down more challenging words such as tribal names, place names, science terms, and words with no language of origin. In the finals, geographic terms like *Faestulae* led to the downfall of multiple spellers.

Despite the changes, the competition came down to a spell-off between California's Shrey Parikh and Sarv Dharavane from Georgia, who had the endearing strategy of air-typing on a computer keyboard as he spelled out his words. Parikh won when he correctly spelled a record 32 words in 90 seconds. It was his last year of eligibility, and I nearly cried for him when he was handed the trophy. Dharavane, who is 12, still has a few more shots at the prize and a good chance of winning.

Within the spelling community, there's a saying that you're competing against the dictionary, not one another. You could see the kids living that mantra up. They high-fived and showed genuine excitement and relief when a fellow speller puzzled out an especially tough word. When they heard the dinging bell that signalled an error, every contestant exited the stage with poise and grace. They knew what I only just figured out as the confetti fell on the stage: That at its core, the Spelling Bee isn't really about spelling at all but instead a celebration of our best and most human qualities.



**BETH KOWITZ**  
Bloomberg

## GSDP PERFORMANCE

SHINDE & STALIN STRONGEST ANNUALLY IN BRIEF TENURES, YOGI DELIVERED LARGEST SUSTAINED SCALE EXPANSION

# The biggest wealth creator CMs

**V**IRTUALLY EVERY CHIEF minister is appraised on political appeal. I attempted to reframe them as investment portfolio managers and measured their tenures on the basis of the fund's (state's) GSDP performance based on a restricted data set between 2011-12 and 2024-25.

**Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh:** The Prashant Jain among CMs, Yogi Adityanath emerged as the largest GSDP wealth creator by quantum. He probably does not know businesses and industries from the inside; he probably knows what they need to run effectively. This is the indicative wealth created during his tenure until 2024-25: ~\$154 billion. In eight years, Uttar Pradesh expanded from approximately \$198 billion in 2016-17 to around \$352 billion in 2024-25. Yogi added nearly \$20 billion a year in GSDP value. I would likely to study his portfolio management methods (will he give me time?).

**MK Stalin, Tamil Nadu:** If industrial growth quality and post-pandemic acceleration are taken into account, MK Stalin's mutual fund (Tamil Nadu) would be a case study. He didn't get too much a tenure (four years were considered for this study until 2024-25) but consider his output — ~\$128 billion in estimated wealth creation. Tamil Nadu's GSDP expanded from \$241 billion in 2020-21 (pre-Stalin) to around \$369 billion in 2024-25. Stalin delivered nearly \$32 billion in average GSDP growth a year — an outperformer. He delivered more in one year than some CMs delivered in five years.

**K Chandrashekar Rao, Telangana:** If structural transformation and state-building are prioritised, K Chandrashekar Rao's Telangana achieved a striking economic transformation. He got a straight 10 years as CM; he helped create ~\$101 billion of GSDP wealth. That might sound relatively slow — an average of around \$10

billion per annum — but consider what he inherited following the break from Andhra Pradesh: a state economy of \$75 billion (equivalent to Kerala then), which he more than doubled to \$194 billion — a 159% growth in portfolio. Kerala was a \$147-billion economy in 2024-25 while Telangana had grown to \$194 billion. Salute.

**Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Madhya Pradesh:** Under Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the state became one of India's strong long-term compounders. Madhya Pradesh under him created an estimated \$96 billion in GSDP wealth as the state economy expanded from around \$66 billion in 2011-12 to \$162 billion in 2023-24 (though his tenure commenced earlier, I have used 2011-12 as the starting point of this study). During the 10-year coverage of his tenure in office after 2011-12, he delivered an average of nearly \$10 billion per year — around the same as Rao — no theatrics, just steady portfolio compounding.

**Siddaramaiah, Karnataka:** If Karnataka were an independent country, its economy of nearly \$341 billion would be around the size of Denmark or Hong Kong. Some of this credit goes to Siddaramaiah, who was CM in two phases — from 2013 to 2018 and then for two years until 2024-25 (when this study coverage ter-

minated). Karnataka created an estimated \$136 billion in GSDP wealth during his seven-year tenure covered under this study — nearly \$20 billion a year, almost equalling the great Yogi (who achieved his run rate in eight years). A disclaimer — analysts argue that the big Karnataka driver Bangalore was driven by IT services that ran on a momentum of its own.

**Maharashtra's CMs:** The three Maharashtra CMs of the last decade and a half delivered high quantum (through that may be ascribed to the high base of the Maharashtra economy). During his five-year tenure ending 2018-19, Devendra Fadnis grew the Maharashtra economy by \$89 billion — from \$274 billion to \$362 billion — averaging \$18 billion a year; Uddhav Thackeray grew it by \$60 billion from \$362 billion to \$422 billion in three years ending 2021-22, averaging \$20 billion; Eknath Shinde grew it \$65 billion from \$422 billion to \$487 billion in two years ending 2023-24, averaging — this is the surprise — \$32.5 billion, marginally higher than even Stalin's run rate. I would have assumed that the progressively rising averages of the first two CMs was predictable; each building on the base of the other. But how do you account for Eknath Shinde's outperformance, as he simply climbed "into another box"?

## MUDAR PATHERYA

Chief Positioning Officer and Director, Trisys Communications



**Tamil Nadu and Karnataka deserve mention for industrial depth, export sophistication, and formal sector strength**

In the study, all growth was treated numerically; there is a difference between consumption-led growth, government-spending-led growth, export-led industrialisation, tech-services growth, and manufacturing growth.

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka deserve mention for industrial depth, export sophistication, and formal sector strength. Uttar Pradesh deserves mention for infrastructure scaling, logistics, and public capex. Telangana deserves mention for urbanisation and IT services.

Eknath Shinde and MK Stalin emerged as the strongest annual wealth creators, though across relatively brief tenures.

Yogi Adityanath delivered the largest sustained scale expansion, helping turn the image of Uttar Pradesh around. K Chandrashekar Rao presided over one of India's most striking structural economic transformations driven by technology, infrastructure, and urbanisation.

***Disclaimer:** This analysis used nominal dollar-denominated GSDP and therefore captured both real expansion and inflationary effects. State GSDP growth is influenced not only by the actions of chief ministers but also by inherited momentum, national economic growth, inflation, currency movements, central transfers, global demand conditions, and private sector investment cycles. Nevertheless, policy stability, infrastructure creation, governance quality, industrial facilitation, and administrative execution can materially influence economic outcomes. The numbers that have been used were derived from various sources. They are indicative and may not be necessarily precise right down to the last basis point. The tenures were across different periods and economic realities, so you may say apple years were compared with orange years. All numbers were derived from *Statistics Times*.*

# Enable oldest asset on a digital platform



## SHRIRAM SUBRAMANIAN

Founder and MD, InGovern Research Services

Digital gold platforms are not the threat to formal finance current regulatory anxiety seems to imagine. ETFs, in their current form, can't serve this customer

**INDIAN HOUSEHOLDS HOLD** about 34,600 tonnes of gold worth \$5 trillion, accounting for roughly 65% of non-property household wealth. India accounts for about 26% of global gold demand, second only to China, according to the World Gold Council.

Digital gold platforms have made it simpler and more secure than ever for people to buy and sell gold. They allow individuals to accumulate gold in small fractional quantities through UPI without the burdens of storage, security, or purity verification. This has allowed the product to reach small investors who previously were excluded from formal investment avenues.

Regulatory signals from the RBI now risk creating friction in this ecosystem. Actions invoking the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes (BUDS) Act, 2019, against digital gold platforms equate operational structures with deposit-taking behaviour and produce regulatory ambiguity around legitimate commerce.

The customer buys gold. The platform charges them the going price for the day. The metal goes into an insured, independently audited vault under a third-party custodian. The customer can sell it back at the market rate when they want or ask for it to be delivered as coins or a small bar.

Every purchase move through UPI and transactions above ₹50,000 a year is tied to the buyer's PAN. Each transaction also carries a GST. The full chain, from the buyer to the bar in the vault, is auditable. The same purchase made in cash at a local jewellery store leaves nothing of that record. Questioning the legitimacy of these

platforms — that have been present for over 12 years, with all players operating on identical mechanisms — is a stretch. They sell goods. Ponzi schemes promise returns. When the regulator signals otherwise, households drift back to the local jeweller, where the transaction is invisible to tax authorities, KYC does not apply, and any losses get absorbed by the customer. The tangle exists because India does not yet have a clear law on what digital gold actually is.

State enforcement has, in places, run well ahead of state understanding. Take the Jar Gold matter. The Bengaluru Sessions Court, in an April 4 order, took the prima facie view that the company's operations were sales of physical gold and did not amount to deposit-taking under the BUDS Act. The court also noted that more than 1,500 kg of physical gold had been verified with Brink's India — a highly regarded and audited vault provider — and that there were no customer complaints on record. Police have since challenged the order in high court. Until that is sorted out, digital platforms continue to operate under enforcement risk.

The RBI looks after inflation and monetary stability. The household balance sheet has never been its remit. For most Indian families, that job has fallen on gold.

The RBI, mind you, holds the same view about gold. Its own stash has

climbed to 880.2 tonnes. Gold now accounts for 15.6% of India's foreign exchange reserves, up from 10% a year earlier. The reasons it cites for that build-up — like inflation and currency exposure — are the same reasons households cite for keeping 34,600 tonnes of gold at home.

For retail investors who want a regulated route into gold, the options have thinned. The sovereign gold bond used to be the standard pick. The last tranche was issued in February 2024, and the government has said it's not coming back anytime soon. With gold prices where they are, the scheme just costs the treasury too much to be worth running.

Gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs), the Sebi-regulated alternative, pulled in roughly ₹313 billion in inflows over the first 11 months of 2025, taking cumulative holdings to 86.4 tonnes by November. Compared to 34,600 tonnes sitting in lockers, almirahs, and bank vaults across the country, that figure is trivial. And then the real point of digital gold platforms emerges: Buying an ETF requires a demat account too, which puts it out of reach for the customer setting aside ₹10 or ₹50 at a time. The vast majority of Indians don't have a demat account.

That smaller customer is the one digital gold platforms have actually found. Often without realising it, they are putting away small amounts each day

through UPI, on apps they already use for groceries and rent. They are not the threat to formal finance that current regulatory anxiety seems to imagine. ETFs, in their current form, cannot serve this customer.

Each of these has been solved before. Payment aggregators sit under an RBI framework that requires them to maintain ₹25 crore in net worth, scaling up over three years. Mutual fund schemes are reconciled daily against their custodians, and audit reports get filed monthly. Bank deposits carry ₹5 lakh of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation's cover per depositor. Sebi's SCORES platform handles investor grievances across the products it regulates. The piping already exists and one could be routed to digital gold.

Another parallel is the growth of UPI. In 2017, payments through UPI looked very similar to what digital gold looks like now. A real product that was growing fast, sitting in a category nobody had yet defined. The National Payments Corporation of India iterated rules over the following years. UPI now handles more than 15 billion transactions a month, by far becoming the ubiquitous way Indians pay. The regulator allowed UPI to grow while assembling rules around it.

Digital gold is no longer a niche product. Restricting it through enforcement does not make demand for gold disappear. The household money that would have moved into a digital wallet still has to go somewhere, and it tends to end up at a jewellery shop where nothing is recorded. The regulatory perimeter has to expand to include digital gold.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Graduates need offices

Apropos of "Can't find a job after graduation? Blame WFH" (*FE*, June 3), work from home (WFH), adopted during the pandemic, has continued alongside the hybrid work model. While these models suit experienced employees, they are less effective for newly graduated job seekers. Fresh graduates benefit most from working in an office environment at the initial stages of their careers. It enables

hands-on learning, workplace interaction, and quicker adaptation to professional expectations. Onsite mentoring and observation are difficult to replicate through remote work. However, opportunities that require regular office attendance have become limited as employers increasingly favour WFH or hybrid models. As a result, many graduates face greater challenges in gaining experience, skills, and employment. —PV Prakash, Mumbai

### India-US trade ties

"India's testy relationship with the US" (*FE*, June 3) captures how India-US trade negotiations have become simultaneously indispensable and frustrating. India's insistence on protecting sensitive agricultural and dairy sectors is legitimate, yet prolonged standoffs carry real costs, particularly for manufacturing exporters awaiting tariff certainty. Both sides need pragmatic give-and-take rather than positional

bargaining. India should leverage its growing strategic importance to secure technology access and supply chain partnerships, while showing flexibility on non-sensitive trade items. The interim agreement framework is encouraging, but implementation speed matters. Diplomatic goodwill has a shelf life, and this window should not be wasted on procedural delays. —SM Jeeva, Chennai

Write to us at [feletters@expressindia.com](mailto:feletters@expressindia.com)



**Go and See**

**SANDHYA VASUDEV**

It is said, 'Great minds discuss ideas, average ones discuss events, small minds discuss people.' It is a common tendency to discuss people. Good topics do no harm, but it is best to press the pause button when idle gossip starts doing the rounds, or veer the conversation to positive topics, or at least refrain from discussing further.

Although tempting, it is ill-advised to talk without verifying facts, as gossip tends to spread like wildfire. It may turn out that the same gossip mongers may later gossip about you. Genchi Genbutsu is a core principle of Toyota in lean manufacturing, which translates to 'go and see for yourself'. The Japanese term 'genchi' means actual place, while 'genbutsu' means actual thing.

Managers or administrators visit the site of the problem and learn about it firsthand from operators, rather than relying on reports, which could cause misinformation and miscommunication, delay troubleshooting, eventually affecting the crucial supply chain. This principle could be applied when one hears negative tidbits about a friend, colleague or someone they know.

Whenever possible, let's try to get confirmation or a rebuttal firsthand, instead of speculating and spreading it. Best is, 'gossip dies when it hits a wise person's ears'. Let's be wise and avoid gossip, as it can harm the subject and the person sharing it.

## Trump Control for US-Style Regulation

Exec order step towards responsible AI

Trump has signed an executive order instructing federal agencies to test AI models 30 days before companies officially release them. This reflects the US approach to AI regulation through collaboration with tech developers. The aim is to allow the government to conduct cybersecurity testing before public release. This order, however, marks a shift from Trump's earlier preference for a more hands-off approach to AI oversight, as concerns grow about maintaining the US' lead in the field. China has adopted a more nuanced regulatory framework that combines ideological control with state support for innovation. The EU, meanwhile, employs a risk-based system that classifies AI technologies according to potential harms and imposes corresponding mitigation requirements.

Trump's executive order on voluntary testing may strike a workable balance. The US remains the world's leading AI innovation hub. Anthropic's Claude Mythos is being circulated among select government agencies before release because of concerns about their ability to exploit software vulnerabilities. The need for testing is not in dispute. But the debate centres on how it should be conducted by the Trump regime. Given that many AI-related vulnerabilities are shared across markets, achieving regulatory harmonisation is likely to take time.

AI regulation tends to reflect the structure of the underlying tech market. In the US, private investors drive innovation and are wary of government intervention. China relies more heavily on state-backed development and can afford to place less weight on investor concerns. The EU is primarily an AI consumer market. Its regulatory framework prioritises consumer protection. Over time, however, most AI markets are likely to become increasingly consumer-driven, shifting attention toward safeguarding people and organisations. A broader range of products and applications will be needed to generate market-led forms of AI regulation. Yet, the competitive race to establish AI leadership may be decided well before a mature mass market emerges.



## CHAPATI In an increasingly investment-cautious world, the Indian state has to absorb risk Is the 1991 Model Dead?



**Ashok Malik**

**A**nalysis of India's economic situation hastened to conflate several different themes. The immediate problem is, of course, the Strait of Hormuz stand-off. The rupee's decline in value is its most visible symbol. An energy and commodities shortfall, remittances and exports concerns, amid demand destruction, have heightened fears of inflation and growth shock.

India is not alone. Across Asia and further afield, countries have suffered similarly. Petrol prices have spiked even in the US, which had presumed it was insulated. To be fair, India has managed fuel scarcity better than many others. Take LNG. Interruption in supplies from Qatar and the UAE has significantly — but not entirely — been made up by diversity in sourcing: from the US to Nigeria and Oman.

The Modi government's economic diplomacy has been responsive. Relatively speaking, it has shielded India, at least so far. Not all assessments have been as generous. Some have brought up broader challenges. Others have been opportunistic and selective.

There have been calls for 'reforms' to make India attractive for FDI. But criticism has often been unclear and non-targeted as to what 'reforms' are being recommended. More to the point, even if every possible reform is implemented, is the global market conducive to rapid FDI inflows?

**If industrial policy and taxpayer subsidies are undeniable features of today's economy, shouldn't the public exchequer take some equity and more direct stake?**



**Suit up**

Demand tepidness and uncertain business environment have made capital conservation a pressing imperative. This is true for nations, companies and families alike.

The trendline was apparent even before February 28. Since then, it has accentuated. Other than when politically unavoidable, as in the case of FDI into the US, ambitious investments are being delayed. The only sectors drawing money are the AI ecosystem, including the semiconductor stack, and commodities, driven by critical minerals and metals. India offers limited opportunities here.

FDI caution has been complemented by domestic investment wariness. There are many reasons for this. Repeated, post-2020 external disruptions are among them. There is also an intergenerational affliction that has hit India's traditional industrial families. Younger members are content being passive investors rather than entrepreneurial risk-takers, preferring the offshore family office to the shop floor. Concerns about being hoovered by better-connected national champions offer an additional and legitimate conundrum.

Finally, there is the elephant in the room: the 1991 model is, if not dead, on life support.

The promise and principles of the liberalisation moment are not fit for purpose today. It could be argued that the 1991 reforms were never implemented in their truest social and economic

expanses. Nevertheless, the essential bet that the state would build infrastructure, undertake factor market reforms, and construct an enabling environment for Indian and international companies to compete, industrialise and manufacture for an export market, in a world marked by trade idealism, no longer holds.

Given this investor caution, who takes the risk in key long-term sectors, especially those with a strategic edge as well as challenge: energy, green tech, quantum, semiconductors, critical minerals and mining, even large defence platforms? A role for the state is inescapable. This might run counter to the orthodoxy of the past three decades but, as Keynes famously said, the facts have changed.

If industrial policy and taxpayer subsidies, such as through the PLI scheme, are an undeniable feature of the contemporary economy, shouldn't the public exchequer take some of the equity and, thereby, a more direct stake? When even the US government is acquiring a strategic shareholding in critical corporations, this is a workable proposition.

There are two points to consider: Domestic resilience needs to optimise both a horizontal spectrum and a vertical depth. Patient investment will require the state to absorb risk. There are several models before us, including the PSU approach that built three steel plants in a decade in the 1950s, but subsequently fell victim to bureaucratic and ministerial capture. The Maruti Suzuki example of the

1980s offers another template. B2G technology sharing, as well as regulatory navigation for a project prioritised by the government, nurtured a components ecosystem that became the mainstay of a larger auto industry a decade on. To a degree, these impulses still hold.

Even today, the BPCL refinery in Andhra Pradesh — which will likely bring in a strategic investor from West Asia — is a case study in public assumption of a long-term bet. The Modi government's Bharat Global Port consortium is more likely to put public money behind part-ownership or management of ports in, say, southern Europe — as part of India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) — than a private player, constrained by capacity and near-term return on capital.

If government monopolies were a bad idea, narrow-focused national champions, scaffolded by taxpayer subsidies and limited competition, are not the solution either. India needs industrialisation as well as competition. If private and international investment doesn't create it, intelligent state interventions should engineer it.

Will this lead to the bad old PSU era? Not necessarily. And the fear we can't craft a new model shouldn't inhibit us. Government stakes in strategic SPVs could eventually be dispersed to widely held ownership of professionally-run companies, deploying an IPO and equity market capability absent in an earlier age.

This might not be the only — or even the best — answer, but we need to start asking the question. The 'reform and they will come' architecture is past its sell-by date.

*The writer is partner, The Asia Group, and chair of its India practice*

## Still Suffering from World-Class Delusion

The horrific fire on Wednesday at Delhi's Flourish Stay B&B, which snuffed out at least 21 lives, is yet another damning indictment of India's abysmal safety culture. It lays bare the grotesque complacency of authorities and casual negligence of citizens, both complicit in a system where fire safety is treated as a decorative afterthought more suited for 'delicate First Worlders'.

In a city that flaunts its malls, boutique hotels and rooftop lounges, basics remain scandalously absent. Far too many exits are blocked, alarms ornamental, extinguishers dusty props, and inspections either perfunctory or overlooked. When flames erupt, escape routes vanish, and people are reduced to grim statistics. The Malviya Nagar hotel fire comes three days after a multi-storeyed building collapsed in nearby Saket killing 6 — and 29 yrs after the Uphaar cinema fire in Green Park that killed 59 people. That should have changed mindsets. It did not.

The rot runs deeper than officialdom. Citizens, too, have normalised this decay. We tolerate illegal constructions, shrug at missing fire drills, and accept 'chalta hai' as civic sense. Citizens rarely bother about triflings like valid fire NOCs. Flourish Stay reportedly didn't. The fire, and building collapse before, can be spun as aberrations. But they're the logical consequence of a society that values convenience over caution, profit over protection. Until regulatory bodies enforce standards with teeth, and citizens demand accountability with urgency, Delhi will be an oversized village with 'world-class' delusions. A 'viksit' city or country would use this latest tragedy as a corrective turning point. For, if the national capital can't impose standard safety measures, the scene for the rest of the country is dire.



## India File Needs Deeper Digging



**Seema Sirohi**

Marco Rubio gets an A for sweating it out in the Indian summer, and B+ for making the right noises to quiet the criticism buzzing through Delhi. The visit was necessary for damage control but it will take a lot more to rebuild. Rubio stressed India's strategic importance every chance he got to paper over political difficulties. Sergio Gor even arranged a live call with Trump so POTUS could declare his love: 'India can count on me 100%. ... If they ever need help, they know where to call.' 'Oh really?' was a common thought.

It might be time to look ahead, but the shadow of the past must be handled. Real fixes are needed (GE engine deliveries?), not phone calls to display proximity. The US' stock is down not only on the street but also among younger diplomats. They will carry memories of last year's policy mayhem as tomorrow's ambassadors. Sceptics turned-US fans are sceptics again.

That's the broad picture, but here are some hard facts: The US remains India's most important tech, defence and economic partner; and largest market for exports. In the middle are stuck those whose job is to make it all work. Rubio's reception in Delhi was

polite, not effusive. The Indian establishment is aware the secretary increasingly enjoys Trump's confidence — Rubio has taken over Iran negotiations from JD Vance. The two presidential hopefuls are neck-and-neck for Trump's endorsement for 2028. Last heard, the secretary had a slight edge over the VP.

Rubio's passage to India was important for the present and future. He reportedly spent around 9 hrs with S Jaishankar in meetings and events — enough to get an unvarnished account of India's concerns and some 'India First' pushback. They reviewed progress — or lack thereof — in key areas, including critical minerals, AI, nuclear energy, trade, defence and security.

The two systems have worked closely despite difficulties at the political level. Of the 33 key points in the Trump-Modi joint statement last February, progress is reported on many. Jaishankar announced the signing of a 'comprehensive underwater domain awareness roadmap' that one day may lead to co-production of sensitive underwater systems — an important area for India given Chinese Navy's increased presence in the Indian Ocean.

On the down side, a reciprocal defence procurement agreement, which allows companies to sell to each other's defence establishments, remains elusive, as does India's membership in IEA. Joint attempts to expand India's manufacturing capacity to make precursors for critical medicines is yet to find capital. But both systems understand the

need for a strong partnership, notwithstanding Trump overplaying Pakistan's utility and underplaying the China challenge. As one US official told me, the Pakistan thing is based on 'surface interaction' and Nobel prize nomination. 'US companies are not investing in Pakistan the way they are in India.' Trump's recent demand that Pakistan join the Abraham Accords as part of a wider settlement in West Asia has complicated Asim Munir's 'mediator' life.

On China, India and the US are working on derisking supply chains from Beijing's control and developing new ones. Here's the official US narrative: while Trump manages China with flattery to minimise political fallout, his team is working hard on other fronts. Scott Bessent, treasury secretary and lead on industrial revival plans, has urged partners, including India, to find ways to secure critical minerals and rare earth elements. India has 30 different critical minerals, but it mines only 4. Talk about untapped potential.

Notice that Jaishankar and Rubio signed a bilateral critical minerals framework focused on mining and processing, adding another layer to



**'Visa easy to get, sir?'**

India's membership in two other US-led groups — Forum on Resource Geostategic Engagement (FORGE) and Pax Silica. The idea: key minerals for advanced tech should be mined, processed and sold within trusted networks. A 'trading bloc' of buyers and sellers can emerge to guarantee availability at a pre-determined price.

The Quad foreign ministers' meet, attended by Rubio, Jaishankar, Australia's Penny Wong and Japan's Toshiimitsu Motegi, attracted much attention/derision. A Quad leaders' summit may yet come out of the hat later this year depending on Trump's mood and Modi's inclination to accommodate. Meanwhile, the ministers are managing the store. They have met thrice and made enough progress to irritate Beijing.

The Quad agenda is leaner and meaner. Last week's joint statement repeated past support for a 'free and open Indo-Pacific', but used sharper language against a certain unnamed Asian giant. And India was comfortable signing on. Two announcements stood out: a new initiative on maritime surveillance in the Indian Ocean to better monitor unfriendly traffic and a critical minerals framework.

Bottomline: The non-China world is coalescing to secure critical minerals. It could be a new frontier for US-India relations if Delhi moves faster on exploration, sustainable mining and processing. All must learn about beryllium, gallium, hafnium... and Indium. There's your India connect!

## JUST IN JEST A new 'startup' to make the middle class dodge more physical activity

### The New Sloth SaaS: Servant-as-a-Service

Jugaad — the art of cobbling together clever fixes with whatever's at hand — is rightly getting a bollocking these days. But the latest 'innovation' is less about invention and more about monetising inertia. Enter CarryMen, the 'startup' service offering assistants to shoppers in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar Market to carry their bags from 30 min to 4 hrs. This being the Great Indian Service/Servant Industry, it's bound to be a hit that turns middle-class sloth into a business model.

The genius of India's startup scene is services that eliminate the last vestiges of physical culture pitched as cutting-edge. Domestic help has long been the backbone of middle-class convenience. But, now, apps, dashboards and seed-funding are giving sloth a glossy veneer. So, those who won't lift a finger will happily lift their phones to order someone else to lift their entire body. And if you think CarryMen is the limit, brace yourself. Tomorrow's startups will offer Remote Control-Control, sparing you the trauma of pressing buttons. Key-Finder Pro will have a person not only locate your keys — and reading glasses — but also deliver them while humming bhajans. WaaS, or Walking-as-a-Service, will let someone else rack up your steps while you livestream their progress to your smartwatch. The next frontier? A startup that breathes for you: AfL, or Airbnb for Lungs.

## Not Just Token, But Cap-Mkt Infra



**Srikumar Misra**

Most financial executives have heard of tokenisation. It shows up in conversations about capital markets, stablecoins, private credit and securities settlement. It arrives wrapped in enough jargon to make people tune out. That is unfortunate, because the underlying idea isn't complicated.

Tokenisation is representation of a legally recognised claim on a financial asset as a digital token on programmable rails — in the form of smart contracts on blockchain. A bond remains a bond. A fund unit remains a fund unit. What changes is the plumbing — how ownership is recorded, transfers settle, compliance rules travel with the instrument, rather than sitting in a separate system two time zones away. India understands the first version of this story well. Demat didn't change what a share was, but the form. Paper certificates became e-depository records, friction dropped and securities markets became more scalable.

Tokenisation is the next step — not just electronic record-keeping but programmable record-keeping. A tokenised bond can carry its own transfer restrictions, investor eligibility rules, coupon logic and settlement instruc-

tions. Not in 6 separate systems that reconcile overnight, but in the instrument itself.

None of this is magic. A token is a digital representation of rights. Quality of those rights depends entirely on legal title, custody, regulation and governance. Bad assets don't become good because they are tokenised. But good assets can become far more accessible, transferable and usable.

Tokenisation is no longer a pilot-stage conversation. A recent chart of Andriessen Horowitz (a16z), one of the largest tech VCs in Silicon Valley, showed tokenised real-world financial assets crossing \$30 bn, up 10x in 2 yrs. Tokenised assets now include US treasuries, private credit, gold and even equities. IMF published a structural assessment this year, calling it the most significant architectural shift in financial markets in decades.

Meanwhile, a parallel development has changed the demand side of the equation. Stablecoins — digital dollars issued by regulated entities, backed by reserves — are now a \$300 bn mar-



**It's not a digital but money thing**

ket processing over \$9 tn in annual transactions. This is real money, moving at scale, looking for yield. Today, over 98% of it earns nothing. The only yield on the menu is US government paper at 4.5%.

India sits on a \$7.7 tn financial market. It runs the world's largest derivatives exchange, and has built the most advanced digital payments system on the planet. Its private credit market yields 12-15% with defaults below 2%. Yet, FII outflows have crossed \$22 bn this calendar year, and portfolio allocation to India sits at a 14-yr low.

But FII money is only one pool. Alongside it sits roughly \$300 bn of on-chain capital actively hunting yield — and a large base of overseas, India-aware HNIs who stay out because access is too hard. This is an infrastructure problem. Getting global capital into Indian financial assets still requires navigating FPI registration, correspondent banking chains, multiple custodians, currency hedging arrangements and settlement cycles measured in days. For a \$300 bn digital dollar capital pool accustomed to settling in seconds, that friction is simply disqualifying.

India should be treating tokenisation as a capital-market infrastructure question, not as a digital-asset side theme to monitor from a distance. Rupee stays domestic money. UPI stays domestic payment infrastructure. But regulated tokenised Indian financial assets could open a new access rail for approved global capital, without dol-

larising anything.

India doesn't need to invent a venue for this. GIFT City provides a ring-fenced international financial centre with its own regulator, IFSCA, and settlement environment that operates in foreign currency by design, separate from the domestic rupee system. That is precisely the architecture a tokenised access rail requires: a regulated perimeter where approved global capital can hold and trade tokenised Indian financial assets without any of it touching domestic money.

The zoning exists. What remains is to build on it — a tokenisation framework within GIFT City that lets on-chain capital reach an Indian credit fund in minutes, not months. Singapore, Hong Kong and the UAE are building such frameworks. The question is whether India moves with them.

It has done this before. When the world ran open-outcry exchanges, India built NSE and ended up with the world's largest derivatives market. When banking meant branches, India built UPI. In both cases, the market didn't just migrate to the new rail but expanded. New participants arrived precisely because the friction dropped.

The same logic applies here. India has twice turned a change in market plumbing into a step-change in scale. Tokenisation is the third such opening. The assets yield, demand is on-chain, and the rail is buildable. The opportunity is not to defend against digital capital but to give it a regulated door to come through.

*The writer is founder, Aarna Protocol*

## STEP UP TO THE PLATE

**Maxime Frédéric At Louis Vuitton Paris**

The Maxime Frédéric pastry café within the Louis Vuitton universe feels closer to a curated design experience than a traditional patisserie. Led by pastry chef Maxime Frédéric, known for his refined and de-



tail-oriented approach to modern French pastry, the café reflects his signature balance of elegance, craftsmanship and precision.

The space itself is striking, with lush, tropical-inspired interiors and carefully arranged seating that opens onto one of Paris's most recognisable river views. Before any food arrives, the environment already sets a strong tone, blending relaxation with a sense of luxury styling.

The pastry selection shows clear attention to structure and presentation. Each item feels thoughtfully built, with emphasis on clean shapes, glossy finishes and visual harmony. Subtle references to LV's design language appear in patterns and detailing. Even familiar pastries like eclairs feel elevated. Drinks follow the same aesthetic, often finished with decorative touches that make them feel part of the overall concept. Flavours tend to be gentle and balanced.

Overall, the café works best as an immersive stop where Maxime Frédéric's pastry style, setting and visual storytelling come together in a polished luxury experience.

## Chat Room

**Broach Outrage With Sensitivity**

Appropos the Edit, 'Don't Protest Much Against Legit Protest' (Jun 3), that a casual judicial remark could trigger a viral eruption like the 'Cockroach Janta Party' phenomenon on X reveals how deep-seated accumulated frustrations are seeking unconventional outlets. Humour has historically been society's pressure valve, and often an early warning system. Governments that ignore end up confronting rage. Public patience can evaporate when governance appears detached from ground reality. When digital societies amplify sentiment at lightning speed, parody today can become political mobilisation tomorrow. This urge for satire may not yet be a movement in the conventional sense, but it does measure the widening trust deficit between institutions and younger citizens. Wise governments ought not fear parody to then read between the lines. Beneath laughter could lie gathering lava of discontent.

*R Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai*



### A thought for today

It's tough to negotiate from a position of weakness

ROBERT KIYOSAKI

## More Arm Twisting

US's latest tariff threat is illogical. India should challenge it, but offer no concessions under pressure

Trump's Iran war has cost Americans about \$100bn already – twice the estimated real earnings from his reciprocal tariffs. While it's true that US pocketed an additional \$214bn from tariffs, it's got to refund some \$165bn, since Scotus deemed those tariffs illegal in Feb. Yet, Trump is unfazed. He loves tariffs so much that he's trying to hit dozens of trade partners with new duties, in late June or early July. Which is, coincidentally, close to the July 24 expiry date of his 10% universal tariff.

Knowing this, what should we make of the US move to hit India with a new 12.5% tariff, for allegedly not doing enough to prevent trade in goods made with forced labour? To be clear, US is not saying that India uses forced labour to make US destined goods. Rather, it's arguing that India itself buys goods made elsewhere with forced labour: How is it America's problem? It isn't, but for the sake of tariffs, Trump's admin is using it as a fig leaf. US trade representative Jamieson Greer has said such imports hurt American workers, who are "forced to compete globally on an uneven playing field".

This is stretching Section 301 of the US Trade Act – under which India and 53 other countries stand accused. The law was meant to investigate unfair policies and practices by other countries that hurt US commerce. For example, IPR practices in China. But wagging a finger at EU, India, Canada, etc, for the goods they buy is taking unilateralism too far. It's also hypocritical, because rare earths, some other metals, coffee, pharmaceuticals, aircraft parts, etc, remain exempt from tariffs related to forced labour. Hence, exploitation of, say, cobalt miners, is fine if it suits US.

The 12.5% tariff hasn't been imposed yet. India can request a hearing, and it should. But US intent is already clear. It's oddly timed when the US-India trade deal is in a "commas and full stops phase", per commerce minister Piyush Goyal. It's more than likely that US is using this tariff threat to get some more concessions from India. But India should stand firm. It's better to pay a tariff than to succumb to US blackmail. In fact, the two negotiations should not be mixed. So far, India has said it "remains engaged" with US on both issues – Section 301 and the trade deal. It should stay the course.



## Saheb And Bibi

Trump should call out Netanyahu publicly for prolonging the conflict. He has the cards. Use them

Having the courage to tell a friend he is wrong is hard. It's no different in international diplomacy. Trump's reported expletive-ridden phone call with Netanyahu – although Tel Aviv denies any personal attacks from the American president – shows how complicated the US-Israel relationship has become in the context of the Iran war. Trump publicly still maintains an image of coordination with the Israelis. But the cracks are showing.

It's apparent Tel Aviv's goals for this war are vastly different from Washington's. The latter, despite Trump's contradictory messaging, can be boiled down to denying Iran a nuclear bomb. The former seemingly aim to reorient West Asian geopolitical landscape in favour of Israel. Hence, Tel Aviv appears to be following a three-pronged approach – hit Iran to weaken the regime and its regional sinews, make it impossible to have a viable Palestine state – Netanyahu's ordered reoccupation of 70% of Gaza – and create a buffer zone with Lebanon. The problem: serious economic pain for the world through the Iranian closure of Hormuz.

But Tel Aviv, backstopped by US, doesn't seem to care. And when an Israeli PM seemingly appears to give short shrift to an American president on ending the war, the world suffers. The equation is simple: Iran wants an end to hostilities on all fronts, including Lebanon. Lebanon wants a stop to the war that has killed more than 3,400 of its residents. Palestinians, who have suffered tremendously, want their nightmare to end. Hamas and Hezbollah are hugely weakened and battered. Yet, Netanyahu pursues policies that seem to sync with Israeli radicals dreaming of 'Greater Israel'.

So, Trump – also looking for an exit – now has two problems: the Ayatollahs and Netanyahu. Tehran, with its Hormuz chokehold, is willing to wait for what it sees as a fair deal. That's bad for Trump and the world. Netanyahu wants to continue the war – again bad for Trump and the world. Trump isn't the first US president to be frustrated with Netanyahu. But Bibi is increasingly a stumbling block to peace and global stability. Perhaps it's time for Trump to publicly call out his pal on this. He has the cards.



## Why only Vinesh?

Everyone's wrestling with someone/something

Bachi Karkaria



So Vinesh Phogat ultimately didn't make it past the Asian Games trials, despite tormentor WFI reluctantly allowing our champion grappler to compete in her newly chosen 53kg category. Remember how a heart-breaking 100gm extra disqualified her from the 50kg bout at the 2024 Paris Olympics?

But, helloh, she's not the only one, no? At any given moment, thousands in any gender category are wrestling with Vinesh's same-to-same weight problem. It's minimum demand of the highly competitive Image Olympics. That's why Ozempic-sunken cheeks are today's hottest look.

Actually, grappling has become the top (non) sport; everyone's activity du jour. For se.

Ranveer-Dhurandhar is grappling with Farhan-FWICE. Red-carpet divas with their costume-cages. 'Influencers' with the demands of influencers. The hormonal horny and hoity-toity publishers alike are grappling with doubts over their object of drool: human or pornbot/ AI slop? Gujarat Titans with losing face more than finals. The (un)match was before home crowd and in a stadium named after the state's former CM. Btw, would India losing an international championship there be deemed anti-national?

Sooryavanshi, just 15, must grapple with fame. The rest of GenZ with too little time; GenA with too much. The former with acne; the latter with arthritis and adult diapers. Children grapple all year with homework; their mothers with housework in the help-less month of May.

Kids with the conflicting pulls of parental 'Don't' and peer 'Just Do It'. Students with the fear that the exam they've sweated years for will be cancelled. Delhi Gymkhana with central sarkar; Bombay's Turf Club with state one. Slum-dwellers with bulldozers. BMC with acute problem of 'monsoon preparedness' and chronic encroachment. Public with too much garmi, too little rozi-roti, sadak, pani, fuel, LPG. El Nino is grappling with Iran war for 'Top Global Disaster' crown. Maybe, they've already been Trumped.

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Alec Smart said: "Online Marking System, is Offline Maha Shame."

# Kids Took Charge. Listen To Them

GenZ's ripped the mask off India's horror entrance exam system that students have been forced to obey for years, even as many dreams went bust. Now, they've themselves dealt with what threatens their future. Govt, waste not this moment

Shinjini Kumar



In our family, 'the cow ate my homework' was not a joke. It was a painful story about a very sincere teacher-aunt. She was checking board exam papers one summer afternoon, on her verandah, when a cow chewed some of the papers, taking advantage of her brief absence to fetch a glass of water. 'Average marking' was done, but auntie carried that guilt forever.

For a country where education has been sold to parents and children as religion – karm, dharm and moksh, we did not build the most reliable, scalable or unimpeachable system of education or evaluation. What we did build was remarkable trust. In that sense, education in India is similar to financial services – plagued by problems, but trusted by users and participants alike.

We haven't landed in this complicated situation overnight. For years, we studied with religious fervour for various board and entrance exams, despite hearing stories of cheating or leaked papers. While I was stressing about my Board exams, a neighbour, engaged in the solemn business of getting people across the matriculation vaitarani, joked he could make his goat score 90%.

Probably because of the absurdity of it, we carried on with the stress, setting examples for other children, for whom the only way to come out of their mediocre schools and limited lives, was to crack exams – engineering, medical, civil services, banking, insurance, CA, MBA, UGC-NET and so on.

What we did not count on was the sad reality of the derived aphorism – what happens in Bihar today, happens in India tomorrow. We grew up with rigged exams, results, bribes-for-jobs and yet believed things would get better. Even as things got worse with lack of investment, intent, or massive expansion of a system not designed for scale or integrity, we raised the next generations, the millennials, the Gen Z or the Alpha, forcing our optimism and trust down their unwilling throats.

We knew the system was not good enough. But we

learnt to be indifferent to the plight of the majority, sheltering under the fragile roof of trust, so long as our children could take the way out – IB schools, premium private colleges, education abroad, jobs abroad, entrepreneurship, family office, and so on.

For the rest of India, trust in central boards like CBSE or centralised exams like JEE or NEET continued, even as farmers sold land or mothers crimped household budgets, to send children to private schools and coaching centres. Capital poured into edutech to capitalise on this aspiration. On the other hand, govt efforts to over-centralise and use tech created fresh challenges.



While Boomers gripe about young people's recalcitrance to conform to the system, whether it be office timing, language, clothing or coffee, young people appear to see something that is undeniably a problem – that there is no way this system will support their aspirations of living a healthy, happy or wealthy life. So why not drink that fancy coffee and keep moving on? This tussle plays out everywhere. At home, at work and quite ruthlessly in educational institutions because that is where promise meets reality, time meets purpose and mind, hopefully, meets like-mind.

Yet, many teenagers are not even privileged to be on

a campus. They are in a dystopian Gulag – a space crowded with coaches, roaches, mock-exam papers, applications, depression and prayers – just to see their name in the list.

So, what happens when you find that the exam is rigged? That the paper was leaked, that there will be a retest? How do you hold on to the last shred of optimism your parents gave you – "kiddo, clear the exam this one time, and everything will fall in place"? The leaking roof has caved in. And it's raining not just corruption and inefficiency, but indifference and arrogance.

Media reports of farmer suicides, dowry deaths, mob lynchings, honour killings, financial fraud suicides have, tragically, inured us to the idea of such deaths. Student suicides are a new kind of low, even for us. No marks, no life.

Your lifeboats were sinking with the ship, and the crew was still telling you, 'aal is well.' As a student, you went deeper into the system, only to find your marks weren't yours at all. You encountered a broken payment gateway. You encountered a corrupt tender process. You took charge. Armed with what you have: tech, which does not require passports and licences, to master. Social media that allows you to have a voice. Examples of other young people who made a difference. Supporters in your family or outside. All you need to do is to breach the false prestige of being obedient and content and deal with what threatens your life, here and now.

And that is the story of the young men, Vedant, Nisaraga, Sarthak and the others, including those who turned up to protest and faced detention and custody.

It has taken us many decades to get here. It will not be wished away or resolved with one resignation. It will take all of us. The captain, crew and passengers all need to face the fact that there are holes in the ship. And that the iceberg of AI and cyber threats is coming.

Indian talent is building global companies, but India is ill-equipped to run an exam on which millions of dreams depend. If the young are seeing the problem, help them solve it. Stop brushing it under the carpet. And certainly, stop blaming the students.

Kumar is a former banker and author of 'Busy Women'

## When History Begins Disappearing From The Plate

The version of vegetarianism that seeks to rule the menu, wants to decide who gets to be powerful, and who gets erased. It seeks to rewrite India's public culture and push meat-eaters to the margins

Devdutt Pattanaik



It is becoming increasingly obvious that the Sanatan Dharm being marketed today, is a Hinduism that establishes purity through vegetarian food. The latest evidence is Uttar Pradesh govt releasing a "One District, One Cuisine" list, which does not include a single meat dish. Remember, this is a state where most people, including most Hindus, eat meat.

Meanwhile, in Mumbai, there are growing calls to stop fish vendors from selling on the streets, basically to remove meat from public view. There are cities seeking to ban meat shops and meat-serving establishments within a 15km radius of any Hindu temple. Such a rule would, given the density of temples in our country, effectively impose vegetarianism across vast tracts of it.

A few years ago, when the National Museum planned a Harappan food festival, it was quietly instructed to serve only vegetarian fare. Even though the Harappans are well known to have eaten beef, pork, fish, and a wide variety of meats. History was rewritten on the menu card.

Let us be honest about what this is. This is not compassion for animals, not all of it. This is also the imposition of a belief system, no different in structure from how Islamic countries impose halal or how orthodox Jewish communities impose kosher. Food is one of the most powerful tools to establish identity, and the Sanatani Hindu lobby is now doing through "satvik" what others have done through their dietary codices.

It is true that when you walk into Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, RSS offices, Jain, Vaisnav and Swaminarayan temples, or a Sikh gurdwara, the one common feature is the strictly vegetarian canteen and the vegetarian priesthood. But if wealthy and politically influential vegetarian communities are imposing their food

habits on everyone else, this was not always so. In medieval times, Jain traders served the Sultans of Delhi and the Mughal Badshahs, without imposing their diet on the court.

The popular story is that vegetarianism is rooted in compassion. Gandhi used this language. But this compassion is curiously selective. Often, it does not extend to the meat-eater whose house is bulldozed,



whose shop is shut, whose livelihood is destroyed, or to the forests being destroyed, and tribes being displaced for mines, industries, and gated communities.

The unstated logic of this selective compassion is brutal: People who eat meat are cruel, and therefore deserve no compassion themselves. By this logic Muslims become cruel, Christians become cruel, Dalits become cruel. Adivasis become cruel. And once dehumanised this way, they can be jailed, evicted, beaten, with the conscience of the majority intact. This logic also masks three truths the vegetarian lobby

would prefer we forget.

● One is caste. As the sociologist MN Srinivas showed in his work on Sanskritisation, when lower castes grew rich and sought upward mobility on the varna ladder, they were required to give up meat. Arya Samaj promoted this amongst Jats. Swaminarayan sect promoted this amongst Patels. Founders of both these movements came from vegetarian backgrounds and equated their diet with kindness, which by simple inversion painted the outsider as inherently cruel, hence unworthy of respect and compassion.

● The second truth concerns the equation of non-violence with renunciation. In Jain doctrine, ahimsa was always meant to be paired with aparigraha. Non-possession. The great Tirthankars shed their clothes to demonstrate aparigraha, not just ahimsa. Fasting to death was the ultimate practice, because Jain philosophy teaches that all consumption is violence. Not just eating, but also the consumption of luxuries, of mined diamonds, of forests cleared, of rivers polluted, of labour exploited. But the modern Jain trader and his political allies have amplified ahimsa, while burying aparigraha. They wear the diamonds and fly the private jets, while lecturing the poor about the kebabs.

● The third truth concerns the tantric dimension, the most ignored of all. Across India, fierce goddesses who once received blood – Sachiya Mata in Rajasthan, Sharda, Kamakshi, Mookambika in the south – were turned vegetarian under the influence of Jain monks and Adi Shankaracharya. The logic of this is very particular: Blood offerings grant military power, vegetarian offerings grant wealth. The kings of Nepal kept offering blood and kept their kingdom. The Hindu kings of the Ganga plains, under mercantile pressure, switched to pumpkins. And lost their thrones to invaders, while the merchants stayed rich.

That, ultimately, is what is on the plate today. Not compassion. A very old bargain about who gets to be powerful, who gets to be pure, and who gets to be erased.

## Calvin & Hobbes



## Wars Create Victors, But The Planet Always Loses

Yogi Balkrishna

We have often celebrated victories in war, yet we seldom reflect deeply on the devastation left behind: poisoned rivers, scorched forests, contaminated oceans, darkened skies, and countless living beings displaced or destroyed. Wars do not merely wreck nations and wound humanity; they tear the very fabric of nature that sustains life. The lacerating ecological wounds carry on far longer than political disputes or territorial ambitions. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki inflicted severe immediate environmental damage, marked by the instant devastation of ecosystems, highly toxic radioactive fallout, and pronounced localised climatic disturbances like black rain.

Indic wisdom offers a profoundly different civilisational perspective. The Bharatiya worldview doesn't see nature as a resource to be exploited but as a sacred

manifestation of the Divine. We revere our rivers, such as the Ganga, Yamuna and Narmada, as mothers. We worship the Sun as the deity who gives life and energises the world. In Panchamahabhuta Upasana, we meditate on earth, water, fire, air; and space as the foundational elements of existence. Trees such as Peepal, Banyan, Neem, and Tulsi are worshipped as protectors of life and symbols of continuity, purity and healing.

Ecological reverence is deeply woven into Indic cultural and spiritual practices. Even birds and animals find a sacred association through the vahanas of various deities. Nandi, the bull of Shiva, symbolises strength and patience; Garuda, the eagle of Vishnu, represents courage and higher vision; the lion of Goddess Durga reflects power guided by righteousness; while the mouse of Ganesha reminds humanity that even the smallest life form has

significance in cosmic harmony. Such symbolism cultivates coexistence rather than conquest.

The essence of Vedic wisdom is profoundly expressed in the Shanti Mantra of the Yajurved, *Om Dyaush Saantih*. The Vedic shanti mantra invokes peace not only for human beings but for the atmosphere, earth, waters, herbs, vegetation, and the entire cosmos. It reflects profound ecological consciousness. Peace, in this understanding, is not merely the absence of conflict; it is the equilibrium of existence.

Present-day warfare demonstrates exactly the opposite. Explosions of bombs and missiles release enormous quantities of greenhouse gases and toxic chemicals into the atmosphere, destroying forests, agricultural lands, and biodiversity corridors that may take centuries to regenerate. The oceans, often the forgotten

victims of war, suffer immensely. Naval warfare, oil spills, underwater detonations, and chemical leakages devastate marine ecosystems. Coral reefs are damaged, fish populations decline, and underwater acoustic disturbances disrupt the rhythm of aquatic life.

Air pollution during war reaches catastrophic levels. Burning infra, ammunition residues, and industrial destruction release carcinogenic particles and hazardous gases into the environment. The result is not merely immediate devastation but intergenerational ecological trauma.

Ecological devastation resulting from the ongoing wars endangers humanity and the Earth. It is Mother Earth that loses in every war. Today we are at a critical juncture, and we ought to value the wisdom of Vedic seers that peace is not weakness; it is the highest form of collective intelligence.

World Environment Day is observed globally on June 5

## Sacredspace

An attitude to life which seeks fulfilment in the single-minded pursuit of wealth, in short, materialism, does not fit into this world, because it contains within itself no limiting principle, while the environment in which it is placed is strictly limited.

EF Schumacher



## Editor's TAKE

### The OSM disaster: How students were let down

CBSE's fascination with OSM, without adequate preparedness, has left millions of students in tears

India's education establishment has a peculiar relationship with reform: it announces it loudly, implements it hastily, and then retreats into silence when things go wrong. The CBSE OSM controversy of 2026 is only the latest – and perhaps the most damaging – example of this pattern.

When CBSE introduced On-Screen Marking for Class 12 board examinations this year, it presented it as a leap into transparency and modernity. Answer scripts would be scanned, uploaded to a secure portal, and evaluated digitally by teachers from their own schools – no more physical transport, no totalling errors, no delays. The pitch was impeccable. The execution was not. What unfolded after results were declared on May 13 was, by any measure, a crisis. Students reported shockingly low marks that bore no resemblance to their preparation or performance. Many answer sheets had been scanned with blurred or illegible images, making fair evaluation almost impossible. The re-evaluation portal malfunctioned under load. Teachers, already struggling with a system they had barely trained on – in some cases for just one week – reported screen fatigue, repeated corrections, and mounting anxiety during the high-stakes evaluation period.

The rot, it turns out, ran deeper. The OSM contract was reportedly awarded to Hyderabad-based Coempt Edu Teck – the lowest bidder – over more established players. A 19-year-old cybersecurity researcher then publicly disclosed multiple critical vulnerabilities in the OSM portal, including the potential for unauthorised access to examiner accounts and modification of marks. He had reported these to CERT-In in February; most remained unpatched by May. Meanwhile, teachers in Delhi were issued show-cause notices when Class 12 results slumped at the national level – effectively penalising educators for failures that were structural.

To compound matters, CBSE had simultaneously abolished post-result verification of marks for Class 12 – the very safety net that would have allowed aggrieved students a formal recourse. The way out demands more than an apology. First, CBSE must immediately restore the right to post-result verification and process all pending re-evaluation requests free of cost, given that the fiasco was institutional rather than student-driven. Second, an independent technical audit of the entire OSM process – from scanning hubs to examiner interfaces to data security – must be commissioned and made public. Third, accountability must reach the decision-makers who overrode teacher warnings, not just the vendor. And fourth, any further expansion of OSM must follow genuine piloting, rigorous teacher training, and independent security certification. The implications for children are not abstract. Class 12 scores determine college admissions, scholarship eligibility, and in many Indian families, the entire arc of a young person's life. A wrongly awarded mark – whether too low due to a blurred scan or tampered by a security breach – is not a statistical error. It is a stolen opportunity. CBSE owes its 1.8 million Class 12 students not just answers, but justice.

## DK Shivakumar: Crowning of the Kingmaker

The leadership change, following months of speculation and negotiations, reflects the Congress High Command's attempt to balance competing factions, address emerging political challenges, and prepare the party for future electoral battles



KALYANI SHANKAR

Karnataka is witnessing a significant political and generational transition with D.K. Shivakumar assuming the office of Chief Minister after the resignation of Siddaramaiah. The change comes after the Congress leadership successfully navigated a prolonged period of internal uncertainty and factional pressure. More than a routine change of guard, the transition signals a strategic recalibration by the party as it seeks to strengthen its position ahead of future electoral contests.

Shivakumar's rise is a remarkable political story. Born into a farming family, he has built a reputation as one of the Congress party's most effective organisers and crisis managers. Having won eight consecutive Assembly elections, he has emerged as a formidable political force in Karnataka. Over the years, his ability to negotiate, build alliances and manage political crises earned him the label of the Congress party's "troubleshooter."

His reputation was cemented in 2002 when the Congress-NCP government in Maharashtra faced the threat of defections. Around 40 Congress legislators were flown to Bengaluru and accommodated at a resort to shield them from poaching attempts ahead of a crucial floor test. Then Karnataka Urban Development Minister Shivakumar was entrusted with overseeing the operation. He personally coordinated the legislators' stay and ensured their safe return for the trust vote, helping the government led by Vilasrao Deshmukh survive.

Since then, Shivakumar has repeatedly demonstrated his ability to manage complex political situations. Whether safeguarding legislators, forging consensus among rival factions, or handling delicate negotiations during Rajya Sabha elections and trust votes, he has become the party's go-to strategist during moments of crisis. His extensive political network and organisational skills have often enabled the Congress to weather difficult challenges. Now, the man who helped install governments finds himself at the helm of one.

The Congress High Command's decision followed months of speculation and bargaining. Shivakumar's supporters had argued that a power-sharing understanding reached in 2023 entitled him to the chief ministership midway through the government's term. As pressure mounted, party leaders from different factions travelled to Delhi to press their case. The High Command repeatedly intervened to maintain unity and prevent



SHIVAKUMAR'S SUCCESS WILL BE MEASURED NOT ONLY BY HIS ADMINISTRATIVE PERFORMANCE BUT ALSO BY HIS ABILITY TO KEEP THE CONGRESS UNITED AND ELECTORALLY COMPETITIVE

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The Pioneer

public discord before finally settling on a leadership transition.

Three major factors appear to have influenced the decision. The first was Siddaramaiah's advancing age; at 80, questions about succession had become increasingly relevant. The second was the growing challenge posed by the BJP, which has been working to regain political ground in the state. The third was the need to honour internal commitments and maintain organisational cohesion within the Congress.

Siddaramaiah leaves office with a substantial political legacy. Known for his commitment to social justice and welfare policies, he played a key role in strengthening the Congress' support among backward classes, minorities and other marginalised communities. Reflecting on his journey after stepping down, he noted that he never imagined a village boy like himself would one day become an MLA, minister and Chief Minister. His story continues to resonate with many supporters across Karnataka.

However, Siddaramaiah's continued influence may also present challenges for the new administration. His loyalists remain a significant force within the Congress legislature party and are expected to seek a meaningful role in governance. As part of the transition, discussions have reportedly centred on accommodating several of his supporters in the cabinet

and ensuring adequate representation for his political camp.

So far, the transfer of power has been remarkably smooth. Siddaramaiah himself proposed Shivakumar's name, which was seconded by senior Congress leader Parameshwara. Although the legislature party formally left the decision to the High Command, the observers eventually announced Shivakumar as the consensus choice, paving the way for his election as Congress Legislature Party leader.

Yet the real test begins now. Shivakumar must not only run the government but also manage competing interests within the party. Preventing the emergence of rival power centres while maintaining cordial relations with Siddaramaiah and his supporters will require political skill and patience. The Congress also faces the challenge of synchronising government performance with organisational strategy.

The road ahead is demanding. Karnataka Assembly elections are scheduled for 2028, followed by the Lok Sabha elections in 2029. Shivakumar's success will be measured not only by his administrative performance but also by his ability to keep the Congress united and electorally competitive. For a leader long known for solving other people's political problems, the challenge now is to govern effectively while shaping the future of both the party and the state.

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## PICTALK



Flamingos forage in a waterbody, at Seawoods in Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra. PHOTO: PTI

## What the death of great teaches us



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

### 2ND OPINION

The passing of celebrated personalities around the world draws millions into mourning - flowers laid at memorials, heartfelt tributes pouring in, and a collective sense of loss that transcends borders. These moments of grief reveal something profound: that certain individuals carve themselves so deeply into human hearts that their absence feels like a wound to the world itself.

Yet beyond the tears and tributes lies a deeper invitation - one that most of us decline. Each such departure is, in truth, a mirror held up to our own lives. If we were wise, we would pause and ask ourselves: Am I living meaningfully?

Am I leaving something worthwhile behind? These events carry within them the quiet whisper of a higher

order, nudging us toward self-reflection and moral awakening. Seen rightly, the death of a great soul is not merely an ending - it is a rung on a ladder, an opportunity to rise higher in our own consciousness and conduct.

Sadly, human nature in this age is deeply lethargic. The jolt of grief stirs something noble within us briefly. We feel moved to be better, kinder, more purposeful. But this feeling, like white froth on murky water, quickly fades. The noise of daily ambition and petty preoccupations returns, and we sink back into our familiar slumber, unchanged.

And yet, the lesson remains, patient and enduring. No matter one's worldview or philosophy, one truth stands undeniable: a life devoted to love, compassion, and selfless service to the suffering leaves the deepest and most lasting impression on humanity.

Wealth, power, and fame erode with time - but genuine kindness and devoted service to others etch themselves permanently into the memory of the world.

This is why millions weep for those they have never personally met. They are not mourning a body - they are mourning a spirit that elevated them.

This very observation raises a searching question. If a human being is nothing more than flesh, blood, and brain, then whom exactly do we mourn when that body lies lifeless and cold? To whom do we pray for

peace? Why do virtues like compassion, love, and selflessness feel so distinct - so often in conflict - with our purely physical impulses and desires? Does not a person sometimes willingly sacrifice their very body

for a moral cause, suggesting that something within us stands apart from and above the material?

When one considers these questions honestly, alongside the vast body of accounts relating to near-death experiences, out-of-body states, and reincarnation, a compelling conclusion begins to emerge. The true actor behind the drama of life is not the body but the soul - a non-material, conscious entity that wears the body as a costume and uses it as an instrument to act, experience, and evolve. The body enables sensation; the soul gives meaning.

Embracing this truth transforms everything. Sorrow loses its stranglehold. Pettiness loses its appeal. Life gains urgent and beautiful purpose. Most importantly, this truth reminds us that our time here is not guaranteed. We must not postpone the good we intend to do, the love we mean to give, or the service we hope to render. Death teaches us, above all, to truly live - and to live well, beginning now.

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The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist

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## VIJAY MUST FOCUS ON GOVERNANCE, NOT POLITICAL POINT-SCORING

The recent "thanksgiving rally" of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay in Tiruchi was a missed opportunity to reassure citizens about the government's priorities and future course of action. Many expected the Chief Minister, while thanking the voters of Tiruchi East who first elected him to the Assembly before he retained Perambur, to outline key policy initiatives and provide timelines for implementing manifesto promises. More importantly, the rally could have been used to address pressing issues confronting the State, particularly the growing concern over incidents of sexual violence. Citizens expected concrete measures and administrative plans to tackle such challenges. Instead, a significant portion of the 20-minute speech was devoted to

political rhetoric, personal rebuttals, criticism of opponents, and responses to comments about his attire. The event appeared more like a party campaign gathering than a platform for governance. Political exchanges may energize supporters, but they do little to inform the public about the government's roadmap. Leadership demands a focus on policy, institution-building, and accountability rather than personal confrontations. Tamil Nadu deserves a clear vision backed by action plans and measurable outcomes. As CM, Mr. Vijay must rise above partisan politics and demonstrate the maturity, restraint, and administrative focus expected from the holder of the State's highest elected office.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

## Heatwaves demand urgent action

The vast difference between the officially reported figure of around 800 heat-related deaths annually and independent estimates ranging from 3,000 to 30,000 highlights a serious flaw in India's approach to recording heat mortality. By counting only deaths classified as "heatstroke," authorities overlook thousands of fatalities caused by heat-triggered cardiac arrests, kidney failures, and respiratory complications.

The issue is also one of social justice. The populations most vulnerable to extreme heat – farmers, construction workers, street vendors, and daily-wage earners – often have little choice but to continue working in dangerous conditions. Many of the states most exposed to heatwave mortality are economically weaker and lack the resources needed for effective adaptation.

Three reforms deserve immediate attention. First, heatwaves should be recognised as a notified national disaster, enabling access to emergency funds and mandatory response mechanisms. Second, mortality surveillance systems must record excess deaths associated with extreme heat rather than only heatstroke cases. Third, restrictions on outdoor work during severe heat alerts should be legally enforceable. The evidence is clear; what is needed now is decisive action.

M. BARATHI | BANGALURU

## Celebrating girls' success in STEM

The announcement of JEE Advanced results is always a moment of celebration, reflecting the hard work and aspirations of thousands of students. This year's results are particularly encouraging for women in science and technology.

With 10,107 female candidates qualifying in JEE Advanced 2026, the examination recorded its highest-ever success rate for girls, with nearly one in five female candidates clearing the test. Yet, this achievement also highlights a deeper challenge. While women account for nearly half of India's STEM graduates, their representation in the workforce remains disproportionately low at around 27 per cent. Their presence in research and development is even smaller, and female faculty representation in many premier institutions continues to lag behind.

Societal attitudes and workplace barriers continue to limit opportunities for women even after they have proven their academic excellence. India must move beyond celebrating examination results and focus on creating workplaces that encourage women to remain and grow in STEM careers. Policymakers, employers, educational institutions, and society must work together to ensure that their aspirations are not hindered by outdated prejudices or structural inequalities.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

## Safeguarding integrity in the Armed Forces

The recent court-martial proceedings involving two Army officers are a matter of concern, particularly because similar cases have emerged over the past year. Although the armed forces remain among the country's most respected institutions, such incidents remind us that no organisation is entirely immune to the risk of corruption. Most military officers serve with distinction and integrity. However, assignments involving procurement, contracts, and large financial transactions can create opportunities for misconduct if adequate safeguards are not in place. Preventing corruption requires both strong systems and ethical leadership. Officers appointed to sensitive positions should be selected after careful evaluation of their integrity, reputation, and professional conduct.

Performance assessments should place greater emphasis on ethical standards alongside administrative competence. At the same time, procurement processes should become increasingly transparent and technology-driven. Digital monitoring, automation, reduced human discretion, and robust audit mechanisms can significantly limit opportunities for wrongdoing. Swift investigation and accountability are equally important to deter future misconduct.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



## The menace of illegal infiltration: A threat India can no longer ignore

The problem of illegal infiltration is multi-dimensional – economic, social, political, and administrative – demanding a comprehensive, coordinated national response



**ASHWANI MAHAJAN**

The Election Commission of India (ECI) recently undertook a significant initiative called the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) to clean up electoral rolls across the country. The exercise aimed at correcting longstanding deficiencies - including the wrongful inclusion of foreign nationals, failure to remove deceased voters' names, duplicate entries, and discrepancies caused by frequent migration. Where foreign nationals appeared on the rolls, their names were automatically deleted, as they were unable to furnish proof of citizenship. After resolving objections, a cumulative total of 52 million voters were removed from electoral rolls across 12 states and 3 Union Territories.

Despite facing strong opposition from several political parties, the SIR process received the Supreme Court's stamp of constitutional validity, effectively silencing critics. While this cleansing of voter rolls marks a commendable step forward, it represents only one piece of a far larger puzzle. The more pressing and complex challenge - that of physically identifying and expelling illegal foreign infiltrators from Indian soil - remains very much unresolved.

For decades, illegal Bangladeshi infiltration has been steadily escalating across various parts of India. This is not a new or isolated problem; it is a deeply entrenched crisis that has, unfortunately, been repeatedly politicized rather than addressed with the urgency it demands. It is worth noting that developed nations - including the United States and several European countries - are enacting increasingly stringent laws against illegal immigration and pursuing enforcement with firm resolve. India deserves no less. Recently, Union Home Minister Amit Shah constituted a high-level committee to address the issue of illegal infiltration and the resulting demographic changes.

The move comes against the backdrop of the alarming scale of Bangladeshi infiltration in West Bengal - a state that shares a long and porous border with Bangladesh. For years, critics alleged that the previous state government under former Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee extended tacit patronage to illegal infiltrators.

With the BJP now in power in West Bengal, there are clear signals that the government is prepared to adopt a firm, uncompromising stance on this issue.

### Numbers That Tell a Disturbing Story

While no definitive official figure exists, the numbers cited over the years are staggering. In 2004, the UPA government stated in Parliament that approximately 12 million Bangladeshis were residing illegally in India - though the government later hastily distanced itself from this figure, dismissing it as based on hearsay.

By 2016, Minister Kiren Rijiju of the NDA government placed the number at 20 million - a figure 70 percent higher than the UPA's own estimate from just twelve years prior. By 2017, the government acknowledged that obtaining precise data on the number of infiltrators was virtually impossible.

Regardless of the exact figures, the trajectory is unmistakably alarming. Opposition parties have occasionally acknowledged the severity of the problem even while in power, but have made no meaningful efforts toward a lasting solution.

Rather than evaluating this issue through the narrow prism of electoral politics, it must be approached from the perspective of national interest and long-term social stability.

The economic fallout of illegal infiltration is both direct and devastating. India already faces the enormous challenge of generating sufficient employment for its vast and young population. When illegal Bangladeshi workers willingly accept wages far below market rates, Indian laborers - especially from vulnerable communities - are effectively pushed out of the workforce. This displacement is visible across both the domestic sector and industrial employment.

A significant share of India's economy operates through the unorganized sector - comprising small shopkeepers, street vendors, hawkers, scrap collectors,



construction laborers, and market workers. In virtually all these spheres, Bangladeshi infiltrators are increasingly cornering economic opportunities, often through well-organized syndicates.

This directly undermines the livelihoods of Indian citizens who depend on these very sectors for their survival. Since these infiltrators operate almost entirely within the informal economy, the government collects no tax revenue from their economic activities.

Worse still, earnings made in India are illegally remitted back to Bangladesh, bleeding the Indian economy further. Adding insult to injury, many infiltrators exploit welfare schemes meant exclusively for India's poor - obtaining free rations, subsidized electricity, water connections, and even bank accounts - using fraudulent documents. This misuse results in a loss of crores to the national exchequer every year.

The pressure on public services in infiltration-prone areas is mounting at an alarming pace. Healthcare facilities, schools, sanitation systems, and subsidized food distribution networks in affected regions are strained beyond capacity. Illegal procurement of Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and voter identity cards has created a governance nightmare.

Distinguishing between genuine citizens and illegal infiltrators becomes increasingly difficult when fraudulent documentation is widespread, thereby compromising internal security and administrative integrity. Demographic shifts triggered by large-scale infiltration also generate serious social tensions. Border districts in particular witness cultural and linguistic imbalances as migrant populations grow disproportionately.

Competition over land, employment, and welfare resources routinely sparks conflicts between local communities and migrant groups. Crime rates - including human trafficking, organized criminal activity, and illegal land encroachment - tend to be significantly higher in areas with heavy infiltration. The political consequences are equally troubling. Illegal infiltrators have, on numerous occasions, influenced election outcomes by being fraudulently registered as voters - directly undermining the integrity of Indian democracy.

The appeasement of minority vote banks by certain parties has only deepened this problem, eroding sound political values and rewarding illegal presence over legitimate citizenship. The problem of illegal infiltration is multi-dimensional - economic, social, political, and administrative - and demands a comprehensive, coordinated national response.

The government's current initiatives, if pursued with consistency and resolve, hold the potential to significantly reduce the crisis threatening India's socio-economic and democratic fabric. The time for half-measures and political hedging has long passed. What India needs today is political will, administrative efficiency, and national unity in confronting this challenge head-on.

## Clean tech, dirty habits: India's sustainability paradox



**SHWETA THAKUR NANDA**

In a world overflowing with viewpoints, conservation discussions often gravitate towards renewable energy, green hydrogen, smart cities, electric vehicles, battery storage, and carbon markets. These technological breakthroughs and innovations are presented as solutions that will shape our environmental future.

They deserve the spotlight. However, what often gets overlooked is that we cannot consume our way out of climate change. The real challenge is behavioural.

Ecological deterioration and climate change are often debated as problems created by industries, governments, and macro-level financial systems. That is true, but only partially. We cannot ignore how environmental degradation is also the cumulative result of our everyday choices and practices that we, as a society and as communities, have normalised over time.

For instance, disposable plastic continues to be viewed through the prism of convenience rather than as a harmful pollutant. Indians are increasingly using personal vehicles for travelling short distances - even to a salon or a gym. We leave public places dirty while keeping our homes spotless. We compulsively buy fast fashion despite knowing its environmental toll. These seemingly harmless individual choices collectively form a large ecological footprint.

Consider this data point: globally, 92 million tonnes of textile waste is generated every year, according to the UNEP. And India is one of the largest textile and apparel markets in the world, and the third largest exporter in this sector.

The challenge is not only to build sustainable infrastructure in a country like India, but also to build planet-positive habits. Clean technology and dirty habits will not give us a sustainable future.

But there is a silver lining. India has demonstrated in the past that behaviour change is possible at scale. The eradication of polio required convincing millions of families to embrace vaccination. The adoption of LPG connections under clean cooking initiatives required changes in household behaviour. The change in sanitation practices was achieved by shifting cleanliness from a private chore to a collective civic



duty. Alongside social change, India has also achieved financial revolutions through behaviour change. Consider how UPI and QR codes have transformed our financial transactions. In May 2026, 23.2 billion UPI transactions were carried out in India - a 24% year-on-year growth, according to data from the National Payments Corporation of India. As per NPCI, Indians carry out an average of 748 million daily transactions worth 796,465 crore. From humble vegetable vendors to luxury showrooms, from essential medicine stores to places of worship, our digital payment system has metamorphosed from a niche practice into a mainstream habit.

These examples underline that meaningful change happened not only because policies existed, but because of behaviour change. Essentially, people seldom change behaviour out of fear or risk. It happens when the alternative behaviour makes their life easier, socially desirable, culturally accepted, and at times economically rewarding.

Environmental action requires a similar shift. Where environmental campaigns fall short is that the majority of messaging around ecological conservation is hinged on guilt, fear, or risk. People are constantly cautioned that climate change is an existential threat and that pollution is catastrophic. None of it is untrue. Yet fear, threat, or guilt rarely bring about the desired behaviour change. People gradually become indifferent.

Can carrying a steel water bottle be seen as modern rather than frugal? Can waste segregation become as socially expected as wearing a seatbelt while driving? Can carrying cloth bags to buy groceries be celebrated rather than invite raised eyebrows from neighbours? Can reusing clothes or taking public transport indicate civic maturity rather than economic limitation? Can we conserve water not as a sacrifice, but as responsible citizenship?

Social norms matter because human beings are deeply influenced by what they observe around them - they connect with and mirror their peers. Is it not the same principle on which the creator economy is flourishing?

So, when planet-positive behaviour becomes more visible and admired, and its adoption is celebrated, change will happen faster.

India's upwardly mobile middle class will play a crucial role in this transition. Rising income is changing consumption patterns. The question now is whether a resource-intensive lifestyle or planet-positive choices will be seen as symbols of growth, status, and societal maturity. Slight nudges often accomplish results that regulations alone cannot. That is why public policy should consciously adopt behavioural insights.

The real transition will not happen in laboratories, industries, or boardrooms alone - it will happen in kitchens curbing food waste, in offices reducing consumption, in gated communities managing waste responsibly, and in people choosing how they shop, travel, and use resources.

Technology will remain vital in mitigating ecological challenges. But technology alone cannot build climate resilience - it equally depends on changing our habits: the way we live, consume, and care.



**DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN GENUINE CITIZENS AND ILLEGAL INFILTRATORS BECOMES INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT WHEN FRAUDULENT DOCUMENTATION IS WIDESPREAD, THEREBY COMPROMISING INTERNAL SECURITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE INTEGRITY**

The writer is a National Co-convenor, Swadeshi Jagran Manch & Former Professor, PGDAV College, University of Delhi

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## Cervical cancer prevention: Why linking HPV awareness matters



**CHARU PRAGYA**

On the Menstrual Hygiene Day (May 28), Delhi CM Rekha Gupta raised a very powerful voice by promising No more silence on Menstruation. While many political leaders and public figures treat menstrual hygiene as a welfare issue and focus on just the distribution of sanitary pads, she is trying to institutionalise the apparatus and position menstrual health as a public health matter.

In her article, the Delhi CM also linked menstrual hygiene to cervical cancer awareness. "This (menstrual hygiene) will be directly linked to awareness of HPV and cervical cancer. Cervical cancer remains one of the most common cancers among Indian women, and it is also one of the most preventable. By connecting menstrual health to HPV awareness, we treat a girl's reproductive health holistically," she argued.

India needs to treat health as a continuous journey instead of just focusing on building cure infrastructure. While all the new hospitals, the increase in the number of medical seats, colleges, and Jan Aushadhi Kendras are essential to ensure that no one loses lifespan or healthspan due to unfortunate incidents, the

focus should be on minimising the need for the same in the first place.

A good parallel would be the city transport infrastructure - the European cities initially focused on improving the road and metro infrastructure for city commute, but could never keep up with the growing population and its needs - later they realised that the solution lies in eliminating/minimising vehicle commute altogether and redesigned the city for pedestrian and cycle traffic. And the result of this is that European cities are cleaner, the population is healthier, and the quality of life is much better. Similarly, we need to minimise the need for healthcare infrastructure by focusing on preventive healthcare.

According to the WHO, cervical cancer is the 2nd most common cancer after breast cancer among women in India. Cervical Cancer is primarily driven by Human Papillomavirus (HPV), and our country accounts for roughly 20% of the global cervical cancer burden against 18% of the global population. Cervical cancer is preventable through vaccination administered between the ages of 9 and 14 before any exposure to the virus.

Adolescence represents a narrow, vital developmental window. Treating menstruation, reproductive education, and cancer prevention as completely separate may make sense from a curative point of view, but from a preventive lens, all of this could be dealt with a holistic strategy. When a young girl learns



about her reproductive system in early teens, this is the right time to introduce her to the preventive vaccination framework, also.

Many authoritative studies have pointed out that schools are the basis for preventive healthcare interventions. Sensitisation about HPV and the vaccination to prevent the same will end the pandemic and will make our coming generations healthy and productive.

For too long, India has focused on curative

healthcare despite being a low-per-capita-income country. While we see the 'prevention is better than cure' slogan in almost every other clinic and hospital, preventive healthcare has not been the focus of the community or the policymakers. India has one of the highest out-of-pocket healthcare expenditures (OOPHE) in the world at 43%. It was even higher, 64 per cent a decade ago, but thanks to the Modi government's focus on healthcare infrastructure and

improved spending, the ratio has decreased significantly. However, in a lower-middle-income country, people cannot afford to pay 43% OOPHE, which means the majority of India's population is one medical bill away from being pushed below the poverty line.

The people of the United States, with a per capita income of around 90,000 dollars (30 times that of India), can afford to pay OOPHE, and most of Europe has fully public healthcare, but given India's stage of development, both of these models are unsustainable for us. Thus, we have to focus on preventive healthcare in a big way if we want to have a healthy country that can reap the benefits of the demographic dividend by participating in the economy. Various studies have shown that health is directly linked to productivity, and as the cases of obesity, diabetes, breast and cervical cancer increase, the productivity of our young population will go down. If this demographic window is lost, India risks becoming old before becoming rich, and unless the country focuses on preventive healthcare to improve the healthspan and lifespan of the population, this risk will linger on. Therefore, our political leaders and public figures need to work on this on a war footing.

The writer is National Media Panelist, BJP

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**The Statesman**  
*Incorporating and directly descended from  
the Friends of India -founded 1818*

**Heritage queried**

The controversy surrounding the Delhi Gymkhana Club is no longer only about one institution in Lutyens' Delhi. What began as a dispute over a government lease and a security-related eviction notice has widened into a debate about privilege, heritage and the place of inherited institutions in a democratic republic. The government may insist that the Gymkhana case is exceptional, tied to security and land-use considerations. Yet the questions it has raised extend far beyond one club. For more than a century, clubs such as the Gymkhana occupied a distinctive place in urban India. Some emerged during the colonial era. Others evolved around military cantonments, administrative capitals, commercial centres or princely patronage. Their histories differ, as do the arrangements under which they occupy land.

Some stand on government property; others trace their origins to estates, trusts, endowments or princely families. Their histories are often more complex than public debate assumes. Yet legal distinctions alone do not explain why the present controversy has resonated so widely. The deeper issue is legitimacy. Modern India is increasingly asking questions that earlier generations rarely raised. Why should exclusive institutions continue to enjoy privileged access to valuable urban spaces? What public purpose do they serve? How should historical prestige be weighed against demands for greater access and accountability? These questions are reasonable.

Many legacy clubs were built around restricted membership systems and social hierarchies that reflected a different era. In a country transformed by social and political change, inherited privilege is bound to face greater scrutiny. At the same time, there is a danger in reducing every historical institution to a question of real estate or exclusivity. Cities derive their character not merely from roads, office towers and security zones but from continuity. Institutions that survive political transitions often become repositories of collective memory. They preserve architectural traditions, civic habits and historical experiences that cannot easily be recreated once lost.

The fact that an institution originated within an unequal social order does not automatically erase its cultural significance. The challenge, therefore, is not whether old institutions should be questioned. Democratic societies must periodically re-examine inherited arrangements. The more important question is how that scrutiny is conducted. If legacy institutions are to be reassessed, the principles must be transparent and consistent. Otherwise, public debate risks slipping into symbolism rather than reform. A republic confident in its democratic values should be capable of distinguishing between preservation and privilege, between heritage and exclusion, and between reform and erasure. The Delhi Gymkhana controversy has brought these tensions into the open. Whether the club ultimately survives in its present form may prove less significant than the larger conversation it has triggered. Across India's cities stand numerous clubs carrying layered histories - colonial, princely, administrative and post-independence. Their futures cannot be decided solely by nostalgia. But neither should they be judged solely by the impatience of the present. The true test is whether India develops a coherent philosophy for dealing with inherited elite spaces, not just a single address in Delhi.

**Accepting reality**

Five years after Myanmar's military seized power and plunged the country into a prolonged civil conflict, a new reality is emerging across Asia. Whatever reservations governments may harbour about the legitimacy of Myanmar's political order, few can afford to ignore the country any longer. The significance of Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing's trip to India lies not merely in the diplomatic optics of a state visit. It reflects a broader recalibration in regional geopolitics. Nations that once hoped international pressure would compel a democratic transition in Myanmar are increasingly confronting a more uncomfortable fact: geography often outlasts ideology. For India, Myanmar is not a distant foreign policy concern but an immediate strategic neighbour. The two countries share a long and porous border. Instability in Myanmar has direct consequences for India's northeastern states, affecting migration, security, insurgency management and cross-border commerce. No government in New Delhi can formulate a serious regional strategy while treating Myanmar as a diplomatic outpost.

This is not the first time India has balanced democratic ideals with strategic necessity. During the Cold War and afterwards, successive governments engaged regimes of varying political character when national interests demanded it. Myanmar presents a similar dilemma. Publicly emphasising inclusive politics and reconciliation remains important, but engagement has become unavoidable if India wishes to influence outcomes rather than merely comment on them. There is also a larger geopolitical calculation at work. China's footprint in Myanmar has expanded steadily over the past decade through infrastructure projects, energy corridors and strategic investments. For Beijing, Myanmar offers access to the Bay of Bengal and a valuable alternative route that reduces dependence on maritime chokepoints farther east. Any vacuum left by other powers is unlikely to remain vacant for long.

India's response appears increasingly shaped by this reality. Engagement with Myanmar is no longer simply about border management; it is about preserving strategic space in a region where competition among major powers is intensifying. The logic is straightforward. Isolation may satisfy moral instincts, but it rarely produces influence. Dialogue, economic engagement and security cooperation, however imperfect, provide leverage that distance cannot. The changing international environment reinforces this trend. Western sanctions and diplomatic pressure have not fundamentally altered Myanmar's political trajectory. At the same time, global attention has shifted to other crises. As external pressure weakens, regional actors are assuming greater responsibility for managing the consequences of Myanmar's internal conflict. None of this means that concerns about democracy, human rights or political freedoms have disappeared. Rather, it suggests that governments are increasingly separating their long-term aspirations from their immediate strategic requirements. The lesson is clear. Asia's geopolitical landscape is entering a phase where pragmatism is eclipsing symbolism. Myanmar's future remains uncertain, but one conclusion is already evident: regional powers have begun adjusting to the government that exists, not the one they would prefer. For India, that adjustment is less an endorsement than an acknowledgement of reality.

**Acres of Privilege**

*While politicians in Western democracies navigate housing markets just like their constituents, Indian lawmakers are shielded by an antiquated culture of privilege. Transitioning toward a consolidated, transparent salary package - where Indian MPs are paid a realistic, taxable market-rate salary and held financially accountable for their own housing - could reduce the drain on the public exchequer and foster a more egalitarian, accountable democracy*



ensure that lawmakers from diverse economic backgrounds have a secure base to perform their legislative duties, it has transformed into a symbol of entrenched elite status.

By moving against the Delhi Gymkhana Club, the government has unwittingly opened a Pandora's box, prompting the public to ask a highly uncomfortable question: if a 27-acre social club must be surrendered for national necessity, why should single-family political mansions remain untouched?

Thus, the government's eviction of the iconic club has sparked a broader debate over who holds prime Lutyens' real estate. This assertion of state power has inadvertently shifted the spotlight onto the massive, sprawling government bungalows occupied by Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Sprawling bungalows of Ministers and MPs stand as a unique historical anomaly, contrasting sharply with the compact, heavily regulated housing provided to Ministers and members of national legislative bodies in other major democracies.

In the United States, only the President and the Vice President are provided official residences (The White House and Number One Observatory Circle respectively). Cabinet members and other high-ranking officials do not receive government housing. They live in their own homes, which are heavily fortified and upgraded for security by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. This eliminates the concept of state-owned "sprawling estates" for the majority of the executive branch. As regards Congressmen, the US does not provide free housing for them. Lawmakers must arrange and pay for their own accommodations in Washington, DC, utilizing their salaries to rent or purchase property in an exceptionally expensive market. Dozens of U.S. lawmakers live out of their Capitol Hill offices during legislative sessions. They convert their workspaces into makeshift bedrooms by using pull-out sofas, air mattresses, or pull-down beds. Each congressional office includes an attached private bathroom. To take a shower, lawmakers typically walk to the dedicated Members' gym located in the basement of the Capitol complex. In the UK, a few senior British ministers are provided with official residences. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have official residences (10 and 11 Downing Street respectively). 1 Carlton Gardens, a townhouse located in central London, is traditionally used as the Foreign Secretary's residence. While the government maintains a few other properties, these are typically smaller, apartment-style, and strictly used as temporary city bases for members of parliament whose constituencies lie outside London. Admiralty House in London is used for government functions and also has flats occupied by some senior ministers.

British MPs are not provided official residences. Instead, MPs whose constituencies are outside the London area receive an accommodation budget to help cover the cost of maintaining a second home or hotel stays. While British MPs can claim parliamentary expenses to cover the "additional costs" of

maintaining a second home for work in London, these are strictly audited, capped, and fundamentally intended to offset necessary expenses rather than provide lavish estates. Germany champions a highly decentralized, austere approach to ministerial accommodation. The Chancellor is provided with an official residence (the Federal Chancellery), but it is essentially a functional workspace with a small living area. Federal ministers generally live in their own homes or rent apartments in Berlin. If they relocate for government work, they are given housing allowances, but they are not given expansive, state-maintained bungalows. The German political ethos strictly avoids visual displays of aristocratic opulence.

German lawmakers are responsible for finding their own accommodations while in Berlin. While they are provided with an allowance to cover the costs of a second residence at the seat of government, they must rent privately, ensuring their standard of living remains aligned with that of working professionals. France provides official residences for its leaders, but these properties are grand offices and historical national monuments rather than sprawling personal compounds. The President resides at the Élysée Palace and the Prime Minister at the Hôtel Matignon. Similar to Germany, other cabinet ministers do not receive sprawling private residences. They are expected to live in standard, private accommodations, or utilize small, strictly utilitarian departmental apartments.

French parliamentarians receive a standard salary that covers all their living costs. They must secure their own Parisian apartments. The state does not own or maintain vast, rent-free residential enclaves for its legislators. Federal government ministers in Canada do not get government-provided bungalows or official residences. Only the Prime Minister is provided with an official residence (24 Sussex Drive in Ottawa). Due to structural and safety issues, the building is currently uninhabitable and the PM has been living at the nearby Rideau Cottage.

The only other individuals provided with official government residences in Canada are the Monarch's representatives: the Governor General (Rideau Hall) and the ten provincial Lieutenant Governors. All Cabinet Ministers must arrange and pay for their own housing. Members of Parliament in Canada do not get free government-owned housing. If they must maintain two residences (one in their constituency and the other in Ottawa), the government provides expense allowances to offset these costs. MPs whose constituencies are located outside the National Capital Region can claim up to \$28,000 annually for housing expenses in Ottawa (such as rent, mortgage interest, or hotels).

In China, government ministers and members of the legislature generally do not live in designated official houses; instead, most senior state officials and civil servants are responsible for securing and owning their own housing, with the exception of the very highest-ranking political leaders. The highest-tier officials, such as Politburo Standing Committee members, are typically

accommodated in secure, state-managed compounds or villas, such as the Zhongnanhai complex in central Beijing or Jade Spring Hill in the western suburbs.

Cabinet-level ministers heading State Council departments are not automatically assigned government-owned homes. Many either live in properties they have purchased, or in traditional, older government-allocated housing or apartments tied to their respective ministries. Regular members of China's National People's Congress (NPC) receive fully paid state-funded accommodation in Beijing while attending the annual "Two Sessions" legislative meetings, though they do not receive permanent government-provided housing. The roughly 2,900 NPC deputies serve on a part-time basis and remain in their normal, day-to-day careers outside of these meetings. During the annual sessions in March, the state covers all travel, dining, and hotel costs, typically housing delegates in specific state guesthouses or designated hotels across Beijing.

While politicians in Western democracies navigate housing markets just like their constituents, Indian lawmakers are shielded by an antiquated culture of privilege. Transitioning toward a consolidated, transparent salary package - where Indian MPs are paid a realistic, taxable market-rate salary and held financially accountable for their own housing - could reduce the drain on the public exchequer and foster a more egalitarian, accountable democracy.

The disparity between the Indian system and those of the US, UK, Germany, France, Canada and even China exposes a fundamental divergence in political philosophy. In India, a government bungalow operates as a tangible display of state power - a vestige of colonial-era administration where authority was meant to be imposing. The maintenance of these massive properties requires a significant diversion of public funds, a reality that sits uncomfortably in a developing nation fighting inequality. By insulating lawmakers from the housing and living realities faced by the electorate, the nominal-rent system threatens to disconnect representatives from public grievances. Because housing is highly subsidized, the government loses massive amounts of potential revenue, and the highly coveted Lutyens' bungalows have historically been used as tools of political patronage.

Summing up, the controversy surrounding the government's recent decision to reclaim the Delhi Gymkhana Club land has reignited a much broader national debate regarding entrenched elitism and state privilege. For critics, the club's decades-long occupation of prime real estate at a nominal rent is emblematic of an archaic entitlement culture. This friction has led prominent commentators to argue that India must move beyond the imperial-era mindset of granting sprawling, subsidized bungalows and perks to Ministers, MPs, and even top bureaucrats.

Furthermore, the entitlement mentality often outlasts a lawmaker's tenure, leading to long-term unauthorized occupation and rent disputes. In a modern, democratic society, public land and state resources should be redirected toward national security or broad public welfare, rather than functioning as private enclaves for the Ministers and MPs. Evicting the Delhi Gymkhana Club while allowing ministers and MPs to continue occupying their acres of privilege would unfairly target an exclusive private enclave for consuming prime public land while ignoring sprawling, taxpayer-funded estates retained by the political class.



**PRABHU DAYAL**  
*The writer, a retired IFS officer, served as India's Ambassador to Kuwait and as Consul-General in New York. He is a member of the Delhi Gymkhana Club*

On 22 May 2026, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs issued an eviction order directing the historic 113-year-old Delhi Gymkhana Club to vacate its 27.3-acre Lutyens' Delhi premises by June 5. The government cited an urgent necessity to reclaim the land for "strengthening and securing defence infrastructure," governance-related needs, and "vital public security purposes". In response, club members and staff mounted a legal challenge. While the Delhi High Court declined to grant an immediate stay on the eviction, it mandated that the government must follow due legal process and provide prior notice before taking any forcible possession of the iconic property. The government's eviction order has ignited a fierce debate, pitting the preservation of colonial-era heritage and elite club culture against the state's prerogative to reclaim prime public land for defence and national security. While the Gymkhana members protest the abrupt takeover of the Lutyens' Delhi property and its impact on 14,000 members, proponents of the move welcome the repurposing of highly subsidized land away from exclusive privilege toward broader public use.

Ironically, this eviction order has drawn critical attention to the sheer extravagance of political housing in Lutyens' Delhi. While the Gymkhana Club is a social asset utilized by thousands of members, military veterans, and civil servants, Lutyens' Delhi bungalows are the personal, taxpayer-subsidized domains of individuals. The juxtaposition is glaring: the government invokes "public purpose" and strategic necessity to dismantle a historical social institution, yet it hardly exercises the same urgency when it comes to reclaiming or rightsizing the expansive, sprawling acreages assigned to Ministers and MPs. In Delhi, holding public office is inextricably linked to grand, estate-style living. Historical bungalows in the capital feature thousands of square feet of living space, sprawling lawns, and extensive staff quarters. Ministers and Members of Parliament pay only a nominal "licence fee", along with highly subsidized utilities and generous allowances, while the actual market value of these properties is astronomical.

This arrangement often creates a severe psychological divide between the political class and the everyday citizens they represent. While the intention behind this perk was to



**The economic path to climate justice**

As the world pursues decarbonization, the concept of a "just transition" has become ubiquitous, particularly when describing the shift away from fossil fuels in emerging and developing economies. Emission targets at the global and national levels are viewed as the main drivers of the energy transition, and the climate policies developed to meet those targets must balance environmental and social objectives. But decarbonization is not always the product of a planned emissions-reduction pathway. In fact, with the cost of renewables continuing to fall, many emerging and developing countries

now see phasing out fossil fuels as a matter of economic survival and energy security. For example, in January 2024, Ethiopia banned the import of petrol and diesel vehicles with immediate effect. The move was striking precisely because it was framed not as a climate commitment, but as a way to reduce its annual fossil-fuel import bill of more than US\$5 billion, which consumed a huge share of the country's scarce foreign-currency reserves. With the country constructing Africa's largest hydroelectric dam, it made little economic sense to remain dependent

on expensive fuel imports to power transport. Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) quickly filled the market gap created by the ban; the streets of Addis Ababa are now teeming with BYD cars.

Tax exemptions and import duty waivers for EVs, coupled with the rising costs of second-hand internal-combustion-engine vehicles, have accelerated this shift in consumer behavior. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which was officially opened in September 2025, produces enough surplus hydropower to run these EVs cheaply. Crucially, economic and energy-security concerns, not a formal

emissions-reduction framework, were responsible for such rapid decarbonization. A similar pattern seems to hold in Pakistan. The country's swift uptake of solar power reflected factors that created an opportunity for disruptive change, not green advocacy or a national climate plan.

In 2022, a massive flood left roughly one-third of the country underwater and caused more than \$30 billion in economic damage, straining government budgets, reducing household incomes and undermining the state's ability to operate public utilities. With energy costs rising, there was a clear need for an alternative to diesel generation.

**Letters To The Editor** | ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

**Essence of India**

Sir, The article "Travails of traditional culture" (31 May) penned by a history professor is a timely lesson to all those who view Hinduism as merely the religion of the Hindus, instead of a philosophy or a way of life that underscores the value of humanism, liberalism and religious tolerance. India is a multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious country that unites 147.6 crore people. There are echoes of Tagore's Bharat Tirtha in the article's main thrust. India, to the poet, is like a vast ocean of humanity embracing the pioneers, migrants and foreign invaders in different periods of



history and allowing them space to assimilate into Indianness the essence of which is "unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation." In fact, pluralism is the foundation on which rests the very edifice of Indianness.

Unfortunately, the political vocabulary of our country has changed substantially. The core political issues these days focus

more on the ugly heads of provincialism, a by-product of supposed regional economic discrimination, and sectarianism, fallout of perceived demographic imbalance, than on alleviation of poverty and generation of employment.

Leaders across the political spectrum have a responsibility to see that India's traditional image is not sullied.

Yours, etc., Ardhendu Chatterjee, Durgapur, 1 June.

**Uncalled for**

Sir, This refers to the report "Internal conflicts within TMC reach Lok Sabha,

Kakoli writes to Speaker PM against Kalyan" (May 29). It is most unfortunate that two veteran TMC leaders Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar and Kalyan Banerjee are at loggerheads, which prompted the former to write to the Speaker. In the fitness of things, the matter ought to have been resolved across the table after taking the TMC supremo into confidence. But Kakoli chose openly to be critical of the party. This behaviour is not befitting of a seasoned politician, even admitting the fact that she faced misogynistic behaviour from her own party leader.

Yours, etc., Arun Gupta, Kolkata, 29 May.

# A linguist beyond borders

BIPASHA BHATTACHARYYA

It was on 1 June 2026, in the little Scottish village of Dirleton, a few hours away from the home of the Nobel Prize-nominated Esperanto poet, William Auld, that I received news of the untimely passing of the celebrated linguist, Esperantist and polymath, Probal Dasgupta. Professor Dasgupta had been fond of joking about most everything and I had initially believed that this too was some sort of joke. For someone who had spent most of his life studying constructed languages, the idea of constructing his own death would certainly have amused him. The flood of social media posts and the exchange of messages among Esperantists and linguists from across the world soon confirmed that this was no joke. Probal Dasgupta passed away in his sleep in the early hours of June 1, at the age of 72, leaving behind unfinished conversations with those who loved and admired him.

While he was admiring of his historian father, much of Probal Babu's time in Ithaca was spent in the company of his mother, Manashi Dasgupta. Her own doctoral thesis at Cornell, 'Some Determinants of the Judgement of Interestingness' focused on intended and received aspects of human communication and desirability. In Probal Babu's words, Manashi proposed 'that we imagine narratives about people we meet; perceiving a half-story that leaves us intrigued – and interested in the protagonist'. This belief in the ability of language to create different selves poised for different kinds of communication would be reflected in Manashi's later Indian Council of Philosophical Research-funded research on an intrinsically production-based need that guided most friendships. Manashi's understanding of psychology as a communication-based discipline, as well as her knowledge of the international language Esperanto inspired young Mukur. Many years later, he would narrate to me the events of a day in Ithaca in 1960 on which his mother's frustrated use of the Bengali word 'baari' – meaning both house and a physical blow – had caused the seven-year-old Mukur to burst into peals of laughter at the image of his mother trying to hit her head with a big house. It is difficult to be surprised that he later became a linguist.

After a B.A. in linguistics from Sanskrit College, University of Calcutta in 1974 and an M.A. from Deccan College, Pune in 1977, he returned to New York for a PhD on 'Questions and Relative and Complement Clauses in a Bangla Grammar' at New York University, supervised by Lewis Levine and Ray C. Dougherty. His subsequent academic career in the United States, Australia and India combined rigorous scholarship with meticulous, hands-on student mentoring. His 1993 monograph *The Otherness of English: India's Auntie Tongue Syndrome* brought him international acclaim. In it he argued that Indian usage of English was not unlike the universal and particular usage of appellatives like 'masi' (maternal aunt by blood) or 'mami' (maternal aunt by marriage).

In the same way that these endearments were both reserved for

bona fide relatives and simultaneously used indiscriminately as honorifics for women of certain age groups that one encountered in passing, English in postcolonial India remained both affectionately intimate and dispassionately alien when juxtaposed against immovable 'mother' tongues. His *After Etymology: Towards a Substantivist Linguistics*, co-authored in 2000 with Alan Ford and Rajendra Singh, questioned the usefulness of seeking linguistic meaning in a search for origin-myths, which were often born of a Victorian obsession with racial anthropology. Beyond the historical origins of elements of language lay a need to question the structures that constituted it in real time. Language, for Probal Babu, was thus very much a question of the here and now.

The ingenuity of his scholarship came with the ability to bring an existing structural reality into conversation with a hopeful future. It is this sustained hopefulness that guided his lifelong passion and interest in the international language Esperanto. Created in 1887, by the Lithuanian Jewish ophthalmologist L.L. Zamenhof in an imperial Russian, riven by anti-semitism, Esperanto (literally 'the language of hope') and its practitioners believed in international unity through a common language for the people of the world. The hopeful origins of the language would give way to countless thematic organisations – for vegetarians, Boy Scouts, philately, police forces and pacifists—before the creation of two major organisations, the Universala Esperanto-Asocio (Universal Esperanto Association, U.E.A. with national membership, in 1908), and Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda (World Anational Association, S.A.T. in 1921). Probal Babu, who had learnt the language as a child, would go on to serve as the President of the UEA from 2007 to 2013. It was in his capacity as the foremost Esperantist in what is now called the 'global south' that I first met him, in 2020.

Amidst a global pandemic that confined many of us to our homes, under Probal Babu's guidance, I learned Esperanto and began serious work on a MA dissertation that focused on the life of the Indian Esperantist, engineer, musical enthusiast and playwright, Lakshminiswar Sinha. Based in Shantiniketan, Sinha himself had learnt Esperanto on a study trip to



Sweden in 1929, encouraged by Rabindranath Tagore. Probal Babu had known Sinha well. What had begun as a request for an interview, led to the creation of a study group around the translation of Sinha's Esperanto memoir '*Jaroj Sur Tero*' (My Years on Earth), a group that included the Professor of Russian Sajal Dey and the musical polymath and then-graduate student Moushumi Bhowmik. Probal Babu also introduced to me to comrades from around the world, who 'toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me'. My PhD on Esperanto's history in South Asia completed earlier this year was, in many ways, an extended conversation with him. Our conversations did not always end in agreement. Probal Babu, a linguist with an encyclopaedic knowledge of Esperanto's histories, was not always interested in the meandering paths taken by historical questions. Yet, he was always interested in taking individual trajectories seriously, and in inspiring others to not throw away the self in favour of a durable collective.

His generosity towards the most banal of interrogations and capability to gauge potential was astounding to witness in action. In December of 2020, I remember receiving a calm phone call from him, requesting me to look at some 'old letters in Esperanto between an American and Siberian'. It turned out that these 'old letters' were written by someone who had known Nadezhda Krupskaya, wife of Vladimir Lenin, whose family had been participants in an Esperanto publishing firm set up by Leo Tolstoy. When I told him of these astounding

connections, he simply said 'Yes, Esperanto letters often reveal connections at this level'. That he will not be able to read the final products of these labours is a sadness that seems unbearable now.

Obituaries are meant for the living; not the dead. In this function, they carry the burden and joy of re-telling facts and stories of the once living without attempting to betray confidences. Perhaps in the re-telling of stories and facts, we attempt to detach ourselves from the movement of a person who is to the stagnancy of a person who was, in effect killing this person twice. In this case, the ability to tell a few stories of Probal Babu forces me to accept that he is no longer merely a message away.

In one of his own dystopian Esperanto stories, a character named after me appears in the year 2047 as a singer in the Rock quartet Mola Kulteno (Soft Culture), consistently producing music that subtly alludes to the forgotten Iron Curtain. His last piece, beginning with a re-telling of the significance of the Dreyfus Affair to the Esperanto movement, sent to me on the day before he passed, still lies in my inbox, unopened. To say that I shall miss him is inadequate. He was my teacher and mentor, my best reader, my dearest friend. His humour, brilliance and love for science fiction, green curry and mixed metaphors will keep me company in these dark times in memory of a world in which hope does not die.

(The writer is the Joseph Bell Writer in Residence at the Royal College of Edinburgh Surgeons and the University of St. Andrews.)

## 100 Years Ago

### OCCASIONAL NOTE

MR. Lloyd George spoke in the coal debate yesterday—a debate that is hopeful for some early move towards a settlement—and spoke as the titular leader in the Commons of the Liberal party. It is plain that he cannot long continue to occupy that position. The correspondence between the Earl of Oxford and half a dozen of the most representative and influential men of the party can have only one sequel, and that a further division in the Liberal ranks. Mr. Lloyd George will have to go. It remains to be seen how many followers he can take with him, now that men like Viscount Grey, Sir John Simon, Mr. Walter Runciman and Sir Donald Maclean have declared that they stand with the Earl of Oxford and have no confidence in Mr. Lloyd George.

### News Items

#### ORIGIN OF CATTLE DISEASE

### IMPORTED CARCASSES (BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)

RUGBY, JUNE

COLONEL GUINNESS, Minister of Agriculture, addressing the Council of Agriculture in London to-day, stated that the important discovery had been made that the new outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Scotland was traceable to foreign pigs imported for curing at the British curing factories.

"There have been seven outbreaks of the disease in the vicinity of the bacon factory at Carlisle, and they are all traced to virulently infected carcasses of pigs brought from Belgium through Holland.

"Apart from the carcasses at Carlisle, we have another case of infection at Carlisle and a shipload, including infected carcasses, has arrived at Leith. An embargo has been placed on the landing of that cargo, and it has been sent back to the port of origin.

"We have long suspected that the foot and mouth disease must be brought to this country by foreign meat, and especially offal. For the first time we have obtained definite evidence. It must be remembered that at the Ministry of Agriculture we have no machinery, in the ordinary case, for inspecting meat cargoes at ports, but now that we have traced back this outbreak I think it is absolutely imperative that we should take action to minimise a recurrence.

"At the same time this matter raises issues of great importance affecting foreign countries as well as ourselves, and I must get the approval of my colleagues to any action which may be taken."

### TURCO-SYRIAN TREATY

### CONVENTION OF AMITY SIGNED

CONSTANTINOPLE, JUNE

GENERAL Sarraut and Tewfik Rushdi Bey have signed the Turco-Syrian Convention of Amity negotiated by M. de Jouvenel some months ago.—Reuter.

### 2,000 DEATHS IN CYCLONE

### BIG DISTRICT SWEEP BY FLOODS

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT)

RANGOON, JUNE

THE full extent of the cyclone in the Akyab District on May 22 and 23 is yet unknown as telephonic and other communications to the stricken centres has broken down.

On Monday the Deputy Commissioner of Akyab wired that the latest estimate of the dead was 1,000 to 1,500, due mostly to the floods. To-day he wires that, the list of deaths in Maungdaw township alone has now reached 2,764.

There are further considerable losses in the Buthidaung township.

### TELEGRAPHIC DELAY

### INDO-BURMA LINES BADLY DAMAGED

RANGOON, JUNE

THE Post-Master-General, Burma, in the course of a communication to the local papers in connexion with the recent storm at Akyab, says:—The cyclone which struck the Arakan Coast on the morning of May 23, has caused very extensive damage to Indo-Burma Telegraph lines north of Akyab. Information so far received shows that several high masts carrying wires across rivers and creeks between Buthidaung and Kuridy have been completely wrecked, and that long stretches of ordinary telegraph lines have been levelled to the ground. Buthidaung and Maungdaw post offices have been completely destroyed and several linenmen's houses have been blown bodily away.

Strenuous efforts are being made by the Post-Master-General's staff to get communication through on one or two wires, but the progress is much hampered by the flooded state of the country and difficulty in obtaining labour. It will be some time before the Arakan route can be completely restored.

Traffic is being despatched by the Assam route as well as by wireless to Madras, though atmospheric conditions at present are unfavourable for high speed wireless work.

# Sugar export ban reflects a policy problem

SHREY MADDAAN

India's sugar policy is slipping into a familiar pattern. When production rises, exports are encouraged. When supply tightens, exports are restricted. As ethanol targets expand, sugar availability comes under pressure again. The government's latest export ban is being presented as a temporary measure to contain prices and protect domestic supply, but it also reflects a deeper problem: export controls are increasingly becoming the default response whenever competing policy goals begin to collide.

The call to ban sugar exports until September comes amid concerns over domestic supply, inflation risks, and uncertainty linked to the Iran war. Officials are trying to keep domestic sugar prices from rising further, even as higher global oil prices already put pressure on consumers' pockets. As a widely consumed household staple, sugar is often at the centre of efforts to contain food inflation.

But the latest ban also highlights how India's sugar sector is caught between competing priorities. On one hand, the government wants stable domestic sugar prices. On the other hand, it wants to aggressively expand ethanol blending to reduce dependence on imported crude oil. Both goals rely on the same raw material: sugarcane.

That balancing act becomes harder when production weakens. This year, unseasonal weather in key producing states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka reduced sugar recovery rates, lowering overall output expectations. At the same time, continued diversion of sugarcane toward ethanol blending has further pressured domestic sugar availability. With closing sugar stocks projected to fall to their lowest levels in years, exports have once again become the adjustment mechanism.

The logic is simple. Restrict exports, retain more supply domestically, and limit price pressure. But repeated interventions also create distortions that are harder to reverse over time. India has

imposed sugar export restrictions multiple times since 2022 whenever supply concerns resurfaced. That pattern creates uncertainty across the sector. Mills negotiate export contracts for just one month, only to face policy reversals the next. Traders struggle to plan shipments. Buyers are beginning to treat Indian supply as unreliable. Markets can adapt to changing prices. Constant policy shifts are far harder to absorb.

The impact does not stop with exporters. Once export channels close, financial pressure on mills builds quickly, particularly for operators already facing higher cane procurement costs and heavy investments tied to ethanol expansion. And when sugar mills face financial pressure, farmers usually feel it next.

Delayed payments to sugarcane farmers, commonly known as cane arrears, have long been one of the industry's biggest structural problems. Restrictions that reduce mill revenues risk worsening those delays further. That, in turn, pushes farmers toward alternatives that offer quicker returns.

In many sugar-producing states, farmers already view jaggery as a more reliable alternative because payments are quicker and returns can often be better than supplying cane to mills. Local jaggery processors frequently offer immediate cash, unlike mills, where payments can stretch for weeks or even months. If more sugarcane gets diverted toward jaggery production instead of sugar processing, the same supply pressures the government is trying to contain today may return even more sharply next season.

Thailand's sugar sector offers a useful contrast. Periodic export controls and price interventions have often been used to stabilize domestic supply, but they have also created uncertainty for producers, exporters, and mills trying to plan ahead. The problem is not the intervention itself, but the frequency with which short-term controls are used to manage structural issues. Over time, those pressures do not disappear; they simply shift elsewhere in the supply chain.

The sugar sector already operates under heavy administrative influence,

from cane pricing to export quotas and ethanol diversion targets. Each additional intervention may temporarily solve one problem, but it often creates pressure elsewhere in the system.

That is increasingly visible in India's sugar market. Ethanol expansion reduces sugar availability. Lower sugar stocks trigger export restrictions. Export restrictions weaken mill revenues. Financial stress delays farmer payments. Farmers then divert cane elsewhere, tightening future supply again.

The result is a sector that constantly shifts between surplus and shortage management, without addressing the underlying instability. None of this means governments should ignore inflation concerns or domestic supply risks. But repeated intervention is not the same thing as long-term stability. The broader issue is not whether India should restrict sugar exports during periods of stress. It is whether constant policy reversals are gradually replacing a coherent market strategy altogether.

(The writer is Indian Policy Associate, Consumer Choice Center.)

## Crossword | No. 293480

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**Yesterday's Solution**

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

**ACROSS**

1 Storm all but hurtled around prison (9)

6 Student no longer in thrall to enthusiast (5)

9 Branch of society unfavourable about knight—here's the evidence (7,3,5)

10 Distribution of aid taking years, sadly? it wouldn't surprise me (1,4,3)

11 Revoking barrel regulation will bear fruit (6)

13 Soldier about to enter Reading after riot (9)

15 Completely eradicating foremost seasonal plant (5)

16 Rich husband setting limits to one's fidelity (5)

18 A lot to teach boy about love (9)

21 Concern expressed with a later surprised comment? That's rich (6)

22 A friend with a lot of regular business in Arab city (3,5)

25 Not suffering with repeated washing, but avoiding psychological interpretation? (6-9)

**DOWN**

1 Riding a horse in short bursts? (7)

2 All are drunk with English beer (4,3)

3 Botanist leaves, having gathered agave fibre (5)

4 Circus acts are unusual—one's bringing in the top people (10)

5 Italian poet, losing head, getting upset—a source of disturbance in Italy (4)

6 Biblical tribe and Biblical prophet heading off Biblical monster (9)

7 Sedative mercenary carried around Romania (7)

8 Begudge losing second railway, putting in again? (2-5)

12 British overlooking rail network? It's accommodating many (5-5)

14 Attacking the man, representing him a demon (2,7)

16 Ball carried by soccer team employed in targeted manner (7)

17 Fierce changes involving climate, ultimately—how's the Arctic in summer? (3-4)

19 Origin of outcry supported by Times over a former acid compound (7)

20 Opening secured by the German fishing-boat (7)

23 Dirty work that has to be done to protect Society (5)

24 Determination to see power slipping from grasp with time (4)

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

## CBSE in a spot

Flawed marking system under scrutiny

**T**HE Union government has set the ball rolling to clean the mess in the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). It has replaced the board chairman and secretary and ordered an inquiry into the procurement of services for the On-Screen Marking (OSM) system. This is a rare admission that something did go wrong on a large scale. It's worrisome that the digital evaluation system malfunctioned. What's worse, repeated warnings were ignored — and students ended up paying the price. Initially, the CBSE projected the OSM controversy as a matter of technical glitches, cyberattacks and isolated complaints. However, it has now come to light that the board's own dry run in January reportedly highlighted serious flaws: marks being altered erroneously, evaluation schemes not matching the software interface, frequent system freezes, unsaved progress and even the possibility of assigning marks to blank answers. Participants allegedly warned that the system required at least a year of further testing before nationwide implementation. Those red flags appear to have been brushed aside.

The adverse consequences were borne not by administrators or vendors, but by students who had appeared in the high-stakes Class-12 exams. Allegations of unchecked answers, blurred scans, mismatched answer sheets and inconsistent evaluation have dented public trust in India's examination system. When students cannot be certain that the answer sheets being evaluated are their own, the credibility of the entire process comes under a cloud.

The remarkable role played by Sarthak Sidhant, a 17-year-old student who presented his findings before a parliamentary committee, must be commended. He pointed out anomalies in the CBSE's tendering process for online marking. This is a wake-up call for the beleaguered board. The probe must go beyond procurement procedures to fix responsibility for the premature use of a flawed system.

## Regulating AI

US treads cautiously, but it is a step forward

**I**T may be a watered-down version of an earlier draft, but US President Donald Trump's executive order marks his administration's biggest step toward regulating artificial intelligence. It's a reversal of the anything-goes approach that was designed to help American tech companies beat China. Under the new order, tech companies would voluntarily give the government a window of up to 30 days to review their new AI models before releasing them to the public. A clearing house would also review security vulnerabilities discovered by the AI models. On the face of it, the light-touch scrutiny falls short of what was on the table — bringing leading models under government control, and a mandatory vetting process as tech companies could not be trusted to police themselves. Amid strong counter-arguments of how this could dull America's technological edge, Trump is taking a more cautious line on AI. It is imperfect, but still a step in the right direction.

The urgent need for a formal oversight process to balance AI safety and innovation has become a global talking point ever since Anthropic's announcement of its new AI model. Mythos, the company said in April, is capable of identifying and exploiting cybersecurity vulnerabilities and this could lead to a 'reckoning'. As governments and businesses clamour to secure software systems and inject guardrails, the mounting fears over how AI would affect jobs and its all-pervasive misuse are slowly changing public perception. The powerful technology is increasingly being viewed as a force of harm rather than good, articulated resolutely by no less than the Pope himself.

For India, a big lesson from the US strategy is to similarly hire more cybersecurity and AI professionals. Ensuring stronger digital systems in institutions running key infrastructure is of paramount importance.

## ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, JUNE 4, 1926

## Administration of criminal justice

**T**HE delay in issuing the "Note on the Administration of Criminal Justice in the Punjab during 1924" is quite in keeping with the dilatory methods of our courts of law. The note relates to 1924, but was not submitted by the Registrar of the High Court to the Government until July 17, 1925. The note was forwarded by the local Government to the Government of India on September 30, 1925; and was published about eight months later. It is by no means an ideal arrangement that the note could not have been published for nearly a year after it had been sent to the Government; and we hope steps will be taken to expedite the publication of these annual reports, which lose much of their value by being held up for nearly a year and a half after the period to which they refer. The total number of offences reported during the year was 184,782, as compared with 178,562 in the preceding year, showing an increase of 6,220. The cases found by the criminal courts to be true, i.e., other than those dismissed under Section 203 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) or in which the complaint was held to be false or frivolous, amounted to 111,161, which was 66 per cent of the total number, the percentage for the preceding year being 65. There was an increase of 4,782 'true cases' as against last year's figures. The total number of cases reported under the Penal Code rose from 121,861 to 123,444 and the 'true cases' under that Code, including offences reported during and pending from the preceding year, rose from 77,220 to 77,691; 4,805 of these were cases pending from the previous year.

## The perimeter of Viksit Bharat

The human architecture of Indian power



**LT GEN SS MEHTA (RETD)**  
FORMER WESTERN ARMY  
COMMANDER AND FOUNDER TRUSTEE,  
PUNE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

**A**N earlier piece in this series, "The Covenant and the Contract", argued that military service constitutes a covenant, not a transaction. This piece extends that argument into the strategic architecture of a rising India.

India's journey towards Viksit Bharat rests upon visible investments. Highways and rail corridors. Ports and logistics networks. Digital infrastructure. Semiconductor missions. Manufacturing ecosystems. The ambition is clear: a developed nation by 2047.

Beneath these visible investments lies an invisible foundation without which none of them can endure.

Every national ambition assumes something rarely discussed: that the Republic will remain secure. That its borders will hold. That its sea lanes remain open. That coercion will be deterred. That India's rise is protected.

These assumptions are presumed. They are nevertheless indispensable and are underwritten every day by the Armed Forces of India.

This reality acquires greater significance as the strategic certainties of the post-Cold War era weaken. Great-power competition has returned. Regional conflicts are multiplying. Technology is compressing decision cycles. Artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber warfare and information operations are transforming the character of conflict.

India sits at the centre of this changing geometry — not as a bystander but as a principal stabilising power of the Indo-Pacific.

Economists can calculate expenditure. Deterrence is far harder to quantify. Sovereignty, stability and investor confidence do not emerge by accident. They are secured before they are enjoyed.

The perimeter protects the covenant. The covenant protects the Republic.

The covenant is the quiet agreement between the Republic



**COMMITMENT** : As technology becomes more sophisticated, volunteer service for unlimited liability becomes more precious.

and its citizens: that businesses will invest with confidence and aspirations can be pursued without fear. Standing upon that perimeter is the Indian soldier — soldier, sailor and air warrior.

Few democracies impose a comparable burden. The same institution that watches the Saltoro Ridge and the heights of Eastern Ladakh also guards deserts, jungles, island territories and maritime approaches spanning the Indian Ocean. No single terrain defines the Indian military. Every terrain does.

Military service is unlike any other profession in the Republic. Its defining feature is not hardship. It is unlimited liability.

The possibility of injury, disability, captivity or death is not an occupational hazard. It is an accepted condition of service.

That acceptance is carried not by the soldier alone but by every family that watches a young officer disappear into a posting in Siachen or a counter-insurgency grid, and waits.

Unlimited liability. Volunteered. Contemporary conflicts have clarified both the power and the limits of technology. Ukraine has demonstrated the transformative reach of drones, precision strike and networked intelligence. Iran, Israel and the United States have similarly underscored the growing role of autonomous systems and stand-off capabilities. Operation Sindoor has shown that India too can project calibrated force across contested space, striking with speed and discrimination while holding the threshold against escalation.

Yet these same conflicts have reinforced an older truth. Technology can disrupt, punish and shape outcomes. By

## The Armed Forces do more than defend territory. They underwrite national confidence &amp; ambition.

itself it struggles to deliver political closure. Objectives involving the control of territory, the reassurance of populations and the restoration of stability continue to depend upon volunteer boots on the ground.

Recent conflicts reveal a paradox. As technology becomes more sophisticated, volunteer service for unlimited liability becomes more precious. Autonomous systems can extend reach and reduce exposure, but they cannot replace the legitimacy, reassurance and permanence that human presence provides.

The future battlefield may become increasingly autonomous. The future outcome will remain profoundly human.

Nations can procure platforms. They cannot manufacture willingness to serve. In an age fascinated by autonomy, commitment remains the scarcer strategic resource.

That willingness underwrites the Republic's military strength. It cannot be taken for granted. It must be sustained.

If commitment is a strategic resource, then the institutions that sustain it become matters of national strategy rather than personnel administration.

The Armed Forces operate through a deliberately young and

selective command pyramid. This is not an administrative flaw. It is an operational necessity.

Yet a large majority of officers encounter structural ceilings long before the end of their productive professional lives.

Scientists benefit from Flexible Complementing Schemes. Medical professionals have Dynamic Assured Career Progression. Organised Group A Services receive Non-Functional Upgradation. The military alone remains dependent upon promotion-linked advancement within a steep and intentionally selective pyramid.

The pressure will intensify as India deepens jointness through integrated theatre commands, placing officers with identical responsibilities within the same operational structures.

Some will come from streams defined by unlimited liability. Others will not.

Where the administrative architecture of the latter permits structured progression and that of the former does not, the disparity will no longer be abstract. It will be visible across the same table, every working day.

The challenge is sharper because in the military, pay and status are not separate ledgers. Rank is worn. It is seen across the table, in the corridor and at every morning briefing.

When financial progression diverges, status diverges with it. An officer benefiting from a more generous administrative architecture is seen to stand higher.

In a service where identity and rank are inseparable, that visibility becomes a daily institutional statement about the relative worth of unlimited liability.

The answer is a Military Specific Framework founded on a

simple principle: command must remain selective; progression must become structured.

The design imperative of a military is a steep spire. At its apex stand those entrusted with command, selected through rigorous competition because the edge cannot carry unlimited numbers. Yet beneath that apex stand many of proven merit who carry the flag with distinction but cannot ascend further simply because the pyramid narrows above them.

For generations they have accepted this reality in the spirit of *Naam, Namak* and *Nishan*.

But no institution can assume that ethos alone will indefinitely absorb widening disparities.

Great institutions rarely weaken suddenly. They weaken incrementally when sustained performance ceases to earn visible recognition. Perception shapes motivation, retention and career choices. By the time indicators reflect the change, the damage has already taken root.

The purpose of reform is not to alter the pyramid. It is to ensure that those who uphold it do not become its unintended casualties.

Command appointments must continue to be earned through rigorous selection, but financial progression need not remain hostage to command vacancies.

A carefully designed framework can preserve operational selectivity while ensuring that officers who serve where the margin for error is zero and accountability is total are not institutionally diminished simply because the pyramid narrows above them.

Its purpose is to preserve competitiveness, dignity and motivation.

Viksit Bharat will be built by millions of Indians in laboratories, factories, farms, ports, startups and classrooms across the nation.

Yet every one of them operates behind a perimeter held by others.

The Armed Forces do more than defend territory. They underwrite national confidence and ambition.

Technology can accelerate decision-making and extend reach, but it cannot replace professional judgment, courage and leadership. The decisive question is no longer whether nations possess advanced systems. It is whether they can continue to inspire citizens to stand behind them and, when necessary, stand in harm's way as volunteers answering a calling greater than themselves.

*The author led a tank squadron to Dhaka during the Liberation War in 1971*

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Soldiers are the army. No army is better than its soldiers. — Field Marshal KM Cariappa

## In praise of the humble crow

MA KRISHNAPRASAD

**T**HE peacock captivates us with its colourful plumage. We are amazed to hear the parrot speak like a human. The rooster commands respect when it crows at the crack of dawn. Our hearts melt at the sight of the dove, the universal symbol of peace. In stark contrast, the crow is unfortunate — it seldom receives the admiration and appreciation it deserves.

It takes patience, an open mind and careful observation to treat this bird on a par with other avian species.

The crow feeds on things most of us would not even bear to look at. Unlike pigeons and sparrows, crows rarely invade our homes or build nests inside them. Instead, they dwell on treetops and atop signal posts.

There are people who regard the crow as a harbinger of gloom and doom; some others think that it heralds the arrival of a guest. I did not believe in its "premonitory" powers until a sad incident made me review my opinion.

Several years ago, my father was in hospital in a critical condition. One day, my mother went to the terrace to hang up a sari on the clothesline. Suddenly, a crow swooped down from nowhere and pecked her hard on the head. She began bleeding profusely. As we dressed her wound, she feared that something terrible must have happened. Right then, the telephone rang. A caller from the hospital informed us that my father had passed away about 15 minutes earlier.

"Even if a crow merely brushes your head with the tip of its wing while flying overhead, it means bad news is on the way," my grandmother used to say.

One cannot assume that the crow will readily consume whatever is offered. The proverb, "You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink," applies equally well to crows. You may place food before a crow — especially *pinda*, an offering made to departed souls — but you cannot compel it to eat. According to popular belief, if a crow refuses the offering, it suggests that the deceased harbours a grievance or that some offence has been committed.

My problems during "Shani Dasha" prompted me to consult our family astrologer. He advised me: "To please Shani Dev, praise the crow to the skies." I have done the needful!

*The writer is a Chennai-based freelance contributor*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## No lessons learnt from past crises

**A**propos of 'Subsidy alert on the fertiliser front', during the 1973 global oil crisis, inflation rose to roughly 30% when Indira Gandhi was in power; the Janata Party government faced the same situation in 1979; Manmohan Singh's government also suffered politically due to oil-price turbulence during 2011-13. No political party appears to have found long-term solutions. The measures taken over the years, such as ethanol blending, renewable energy, local fertiliser manufacturing and creating reserves of fuels, are not sufficient to absorb the global oil shocks.

RAJESH GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

## Practical education important

**R**efer to 'Train teachers to raise the bar'; training should focus on practical needs rather than superfluous programmes that add to their workload. Greater emphasis must be laid on making students aware of disaster management, first aid, counselling, communication and social skills. In the wake of NEET paper leak and CBSE's erroneous evaluation systems, there is a greater need for education that nurtures critical thinking, emotional resilience and character. AI can assist learning, but experienced teachers remain the cornerstone of meaningful education.

VIJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

## Process becomes punishment

**W**ith reference to 'Custodial torture', it is like the process becoming the punishment. It negates the inherent spirit that holds the scales of justice in balance. The custodian of the law stands placed in an advantageous position, while the accused stands helpless. Investigative agencies have not been able to grow out of their old ways of torture to extract the truth.

ABHYAM SHARMA, PATHANKOT

## Law enforcers turn tormentors

**R**efer to 'Custodial torture'; physical torment is not merely an abuse of power; it is an attack on the very foundations of democracy. A society committed to justice cannot tolerate violation of human dignity by those entrusted with enforcing the law. While measures like CCTV surveillance and judicial oversight are important, lasting reforms within law enforcement agencies require transparency. Ensuring the protection of constitutional rights in custody is essential for preserving public faith in the justice system.

GAURAV BADHWAR, ROHTAK

## Empathy key to law enforcement

**A**propos of 'Erosion of empathy amid policing pressures'; while one cannot ignore the immense pressures under which police personnel function, insensitive behaviour towards victims and their families cannot be justified. It undermines confidence in public policing. The need for meaningful police reforms has been discussed for decades, yet tangible improvements remain limited. Empathy in policing is not a weakness; it is a vital component of effective and credible law enforcement.

COL SS CHAUHAN (RETD), MOHALI

## The vigilant, intelligent Gen Z

**R**efer to 'Govt shunts out CBSE Chairman, Secy; forms panel to probe OSM'; the Gen Z is proactively emerging as a major force with the Cockroach Janta Party playing a crucial role in giving it a voice. Senior officers remain confined to their ivory towers and ignore ground realities. The 17-year-old student Senthil Sidhant's presentation before the parliamentary standing committee on education proves that the young generation is quite vigilant, intelligent and intolerant of administrative lapses.

VINAY KUMAR MALHOTRA, AMBALA

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: [Letters@tribunemail.com](mailto:Letters@tribunemail.com)

# Tough road ahead for BJP in Punjab



**JAGRUP SINGH SEKHON**  
EX-PROFESSOR, GURU NANAK  
DEV UNIVERSITY

THE results of the recent urban local body elections in Punjab have raised serious questions for the BJP ahead of the 2027 Assembly elections. The party won only 172 of the 1,977 seats contested. This outcome is a significant setback for a party that recently wrested West Bengal from the Trinamool Congress and has set its sights on coming to power in Punjab.

The results suggest that the BJP will need to rethink its strategy in order to become a major political force in Punjab. Despite possessing a strong organisational network, inducting several prominent leaders from the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party, and projecting known Sikh faces within its ranks, the party has failed to create the political momentum required to expand its influence in the state.

One reason may be that the BJP's broader political agenda does not resonate with a significant section of Punjab's electorate. The state has suffered from religious and

communal tensions, both before and after Independence. The memory of those experiences continues to shape the state's political consciousness and influences voter preferences.

The BJP's struggle in Punjab is not new. Its predecessor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (1952-1977), also failed to secure substantial support in post-Independence Punjab, even when Hindus constituted a majority before the state's reorganisation in 1966. In the Assembly elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962, the Jana Sangh won only two, nine and eight seats respectively, with a vote share of 5.6%, 8.6% and 9.7%. The party could not significantly consolidate Hindu support despite controversies surrounding the Punjabi Suba movement.

Following the reorganisation of 1966, Punjab became a Sikh-majority state. This development created greater political space for the Shiromani Akali Dal, which became a major challenger to the Congress. In the 1967 Assembly elections, the Congress won 48 of the 104 seats but failed to form the government. A coalition led by Akali leader Justice Gurnam Singh came to power with the support of Opposition parties, including the Jana Sangh, which won nine seats and around 10% of the vote.

This period was marked by political instability. The coalition governments formed in 1967 and later in 1969 could



**GAMBIT:** The elevation of Kewal Dhillon as Punjab BJP chief is aimed at winning over Sikh voters.

not complete full terms because of defections and internal divisions. In the 1972 Assembly elections, the Congress returned to power under Giani Zail Singh, while the Jana Sangh failed to win a single seat despite contesting from 33 constituencies.

The post-Emergency period marked a turning point in Indian politics. Opposition parties united against the Congress and formed the Janata Party, into which the Jana Sangh merged. In the 1977 Lok Sabha elections, the Janata Party, in alliance with the Akali Dal, won three of Punjab's 13 parliamentary seats with a vote share of 12.5%. In the subsequent Assembly elections, the Janata Party won 25 seats with nearly 15% of the vote, and a SAD-Janata Party coalition government was formed

under Parkash Singh Badal. The collapse of the Janata Party led to the formation of the BJP in 1980. In that year's Assembly elections, the saffron party contested 41 seats but won only one, securing 6.5% of the vote. Punjab entered a turbulent period marked by militancy and political instability. The state eventually came under President's Rule in 1983.

In the 1985 elections, the BJP won six seats with about 5% of the vote. In 1992, elections were conducted under the shadow of terrorism and witnessed a low voter turnout. The BJP again won six seats, while its vote share rose to 16.5%.

A major shift occurred in 1996 when the BJP entered into a long-term alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal. The alliance remained intact until

**BJP's electoral success in Punjab over the years has largely depended on alliances rather than its own strength.**

# Military jargon cripples serious thinking



**REAR ADMIRAL RAJA MENON (RET'D)**  
EX-ASST CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF

MODERN military and strategic discourse is increasingly burdened by a creeping affliction: the substitution of clear thought with fashionable jargon. What masquerades as innovation is often little more than repackaging of long-understood principles in language designed to impress rather than illuminate. The result is not intellectual progress, but intellectual fog.

Take the term "layered defence." It is now presented as if it were a novel doctrinal breakthrough. But when, in the history of warfare, has defence ever not been layered? From the Roman legions with their successive lines of infantry, to medieval fortifications with moats, walls and inner keeps, to the elastic defence-in-depth of the Second World War — layering has always been intrinsic to survival.

It is not innovation; it is amnesia. Similarly, "multi-domain operations" is offered as a revolutionary

concept integrating land, sea, air, cyber and space. Yet war has always been fought across multiple domains. The Blitzkrieg combined armour, artillery, infantry and airpower in tightly coordinated operations. Naval warfare has long depended on intelligence, logistics and air cover.

Then there is "cyber warfare," often described as an entirely new frontier. While the tools are undoubtedly modern, the underlying concept — penetrating, disrupting and manipulating the enemy's information systems — is not.

During the Second World War, the Allied Ultra programme broke German codes, providing decisive intelligence that shaped operations across theatres. A favourite seems to be the new term, "cognitive warfare". Have we forgotten the massive success of the BBC in retaining Britain's soft power for decades after its economic decline, or the long-drawn success of the Russian and East European VOA (Voice of America) radio broadcasts that kept the idea of freedom alive and contributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall?

A favourite is "hybrid warfare", the ultimate example of military jargon which is a catchword for using everything including the kitchen sink. This term replaced what has always been diplo-



**LEXICON:** The test of any concept is not how impressive it sounds, but whether it sharpens judgment.

matic and foreign intelligence meddling and used to describe any protest or fake news on X (Twitter). But the more sophisticated would shun "hybrid warfare" and use "grey zone warfare" that would perplex the audience even more. The term "dropping bombs" is considered crass and has been replaced with "kinetic warfare", a term which would dazzle most civilian audiences when it actually means "breaking things".

Bureaucracies reward what looks like new thinking, or at least the appearance of it. New terminology creates the impression of fresh thinking, justifying financial outlays, reorganisations and doctrinal publications. It also sig-

nals apparent agreement with global trends, particularly those emanating from the US, where defence establishments are prolific producers of jargon.

Complex terminology creates an aura of expertise that discourages scrutiny. A good example is the sly answer to questions of the treatment of the prisoners in Guantanamo, to which the answer was — "enhanced interrogation". Got it? Jargon distances strategic discourse from both historical understanding and common sense.

If policymakers believe they are confronting entirely new forms of warfare, they may neglect the enduring principles that govern con-

flict: logistics, morale, leadership and adaptability. Worse, they may overestimate the transformative impact of technology while underestimating the resilience of adversaries. Another one that comes to mind is the alleged invention of a new strategy by China called "A2AD" against the maritime dominance of the US in the West Pacific; it turns out to be a rewording of "sea denial", an old, well-established concept.

India, in particular, should be wary of using jargon as a substitute for rigorous thinking uncritically. Its strategic environment demands clarity, not fashion. The country has repeatedly suffered from strategic surprise — not because it lacked jargon, but because it misread emerging world scenarios. Clear thinking must also be rooted in history.

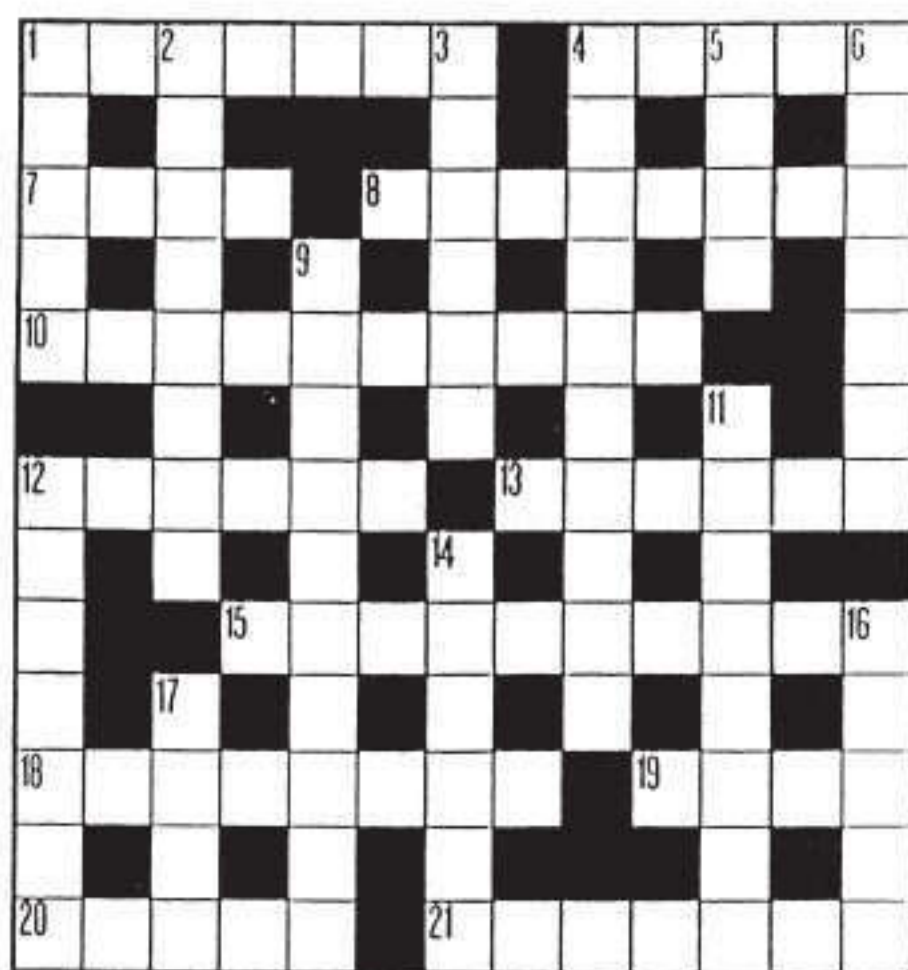
This is not an argument against innovation. New technologies — especially in cyber and space — require adaptation. But adaptation must be grounded in continuity. The past does not become irrelevant simply because the vocabulary changes. There must be a clear articulation of what is new; otherwise, it only causes confusion upwards and downwards. Quite possibly, other fields such as economics and diplomacy may be indulging in the same thing. One term comes to mind to

describe the tumult going on in the world where the established order has been upended, ideas of what constitutes power are fuzzy and long-established alliances are breaking. There is a suggestion that all this somehow becomes crystal clear if one says that the world has become "multipolar". So, that is solved.

Words should clarify, not conceal. In the end, the test of any concept is not how impressive it sounds, but whether it sharpens judgment. Jargon that merely rebrands the obvious does the opposite. It dulls the mind, obscures the past and leaves us less prepared for the future. The political and business world is not immune to this disease either. Here, the most misused word is "strategic", used indiscriminately before any political visit, deal, agreement or talks, as with any new commercial investment, whether it is in nuclear reactors or cosmetics.

Why, then, does this jargon proliferate? Part of the answer lies in institutional incentives. Bureaucracies reward novelty, or at least the appearance of it. New terminology creates the impression of fresh thinking, justifying budgets, reorganisation and doctrinal publications. It also signals alignment with global trends, particularly those emanating from the US.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Person treated as a dupe (4-3)
  - 4 Lose one's head (5)
  - 7 Slightly open (4)
  - 8 Go on a spree (4,2,2)
  - 10 Gradually and deliberately (4,2,4)
  - 12 Reason for action (6)
  - 13 Industrial action (6)
  - 15 Lost in thought (10)
  - 18 Lively (8)
  - 19 Change of direction (4)
  - 20 Old-fashioned (5)
  - 21 Ardent enthusiast (7)
- DOWN**
- 1 Disorder (5)
  - 2 Ridiculous distortion (8)
  - 3 Fanciful humour (6)
  - 4 Current (7-3)
  - 5 Brief informal letter (4)
  - 6 Take prisoner (7)
  - 9 Unconcealed and honest (5,5)
  - 11 Suspicion (8)
  - 12 Temporarily lost (7)
  - 14 Be present at (6)
  - 16 Pupil slow to learn (5)
  - 17 Examine minutely (4)

**Yesterday's Solution**  
**Across:** 1 Nightmarish, 9 Lectern, 10 Taunt, 11 Vary, 12 Faithful, 14 Dapper, 16 Come to, 18 Isolated, 19 Blue, 22 Elite, 23 Bargain, 24 Hostilities.  
**Down:** 2 Incur, 3 Heed, 4 Manual, 5 Rotation, 6 Scuffle, 7 Slave-driver, 8 At a loose end, 13 Decadent, 15 Proviso, 17 Verbal, 20 Leave, 21 Brat.

## SU DO KU

**YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION**

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

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## FORECAST

CITY	THURSDAY FRIDAY		19:21 HRS 05:21 HRS
	MAX	MIN	
Chandigarh	38	26	
New Delhi	39	28	
Amritsar	35	26	
Bathinda	39	26	
Jalandhar	35	26	
Ludhiana	37	24	
Bhiwani	37	26	
Hisar	37	26	
Sirsa	38	29	
Dharamsala	34	19	
Manali	23	14	
Shimla	25	16	
Srinagar	27	12	
Jammu	33	20	
Kargil	27	09	
Leh	22	06	
Dehradun	36	21	
Mussoorie	26	15	

TEMPERATURE IN °C

## CALENDAR

- JUNE 4, 2026, THURSDAY**
- Shaka Samvat 1948
  - Jyeshtha Shaka 14
  - Jyeshtha Parvishite 21
  - Hijari 1447
  - Krishna Paksha Tithi 4, up to 11:31 pm
  - Shukla Yoga up to 9:03 am
  - Ultrashadha Nakshatra up to 3:42 am
  - Moon enters Capricorn sign 7:42 am

# INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



**Par Ridder**  
General Manager

**Mitch Pugh**  
Executive Editor

**Chris Jones**, Editorial Page Editor

# Chicago Tribune

Founded June 10, 1847

**Stacy St. Clair**, Managing Editor

DIRECTORS OF CONTENT

**Amanda Kaschube**, Sports and Audience  
**Todd Panagopoulos**, Visuals

## EDITORIALS

# Springfield spins its wheels. Not necessarily a bad thing

There are two ways to look at the spring legislative session just concluded in Springfield.

One is through the lens of disappointment. Urgent issues were left unaddressed, famously including the needs of the Chicago Bears, but also a looming and worsening energy supply-demand imbalance, a lack of action to spur desperately needed new housing, and the need to make life more affordable for cash-strapped Illinoisans.

The more positive take is that the legislature left town without doing any major policy damage.

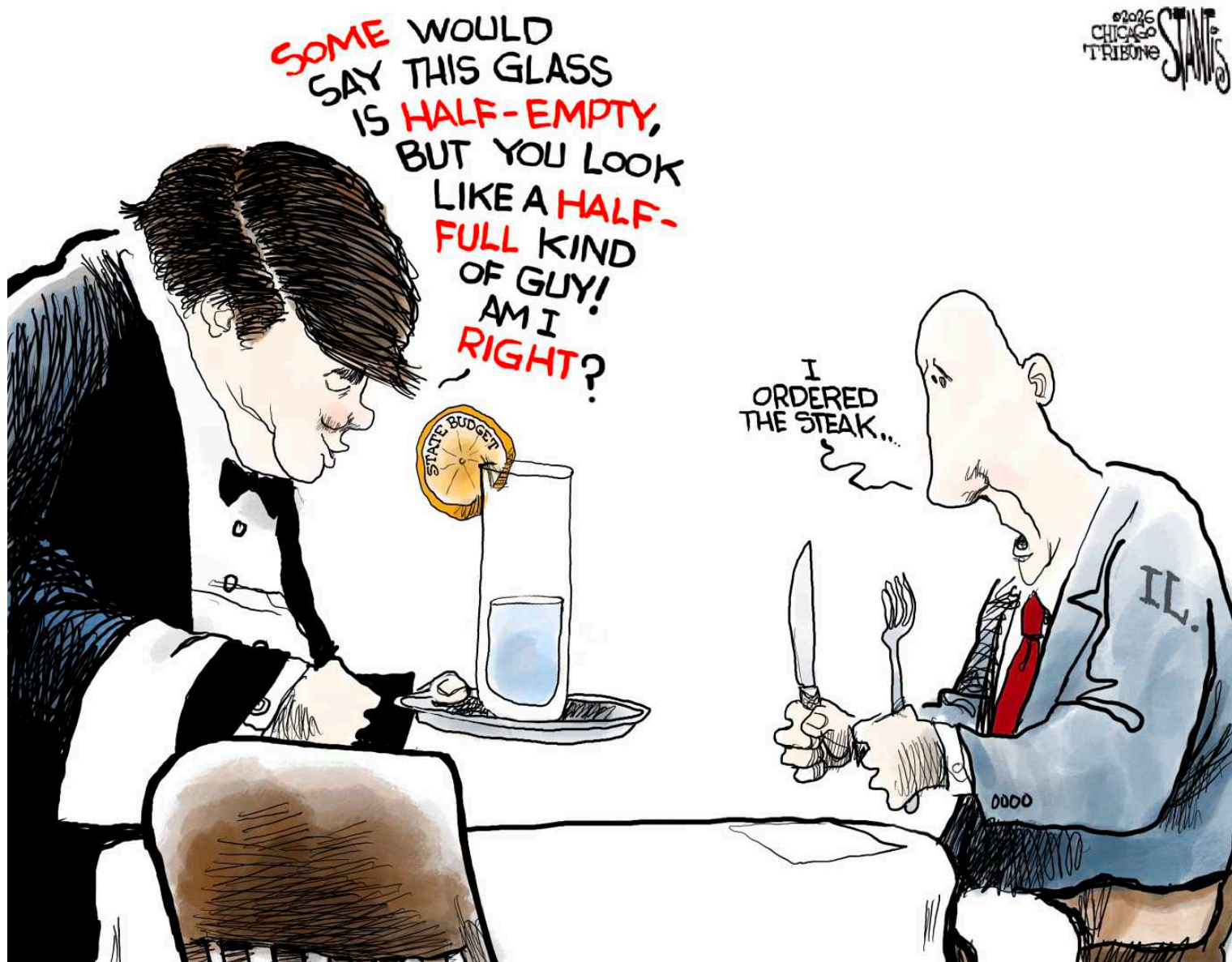
There were no crushing new taxes on individuals and corporations. Rebuffed — for now — were progressive lawmakers who pressed for a constitutional amendment to tax millionaires and thus send more affluent Illinoisans packing for warmer and tax-friendlier climes.

Gov. JB Pritzker's "maintenance" budget was largely endorsed by lawmakers, who actually improved parts of it. For example, local governments across the state got to share fully in the benefit of naturally rising income tax revenues, obtaining another \$60 million for their budgets (\$12 million for Chicago alone). To balance the state's ledger, Pritzker had proposed to keep the municipal share of state income tax receipts flat, which only would have exacerbated the property tax albatross holding back growth in so many local communities.

Our view is that, while we appreciated that the budget was approved with minimal drama, the impression left by the past few months is of a state gently adrift. Precious little leadership was in evidence, as Democrats in the supermajority had the luxury, if you can call it that, of squabbling among themselves — and in the end agreeing to disagree — over how to address many key issues confronting the state. Republicans, as usual, were mainly bystanders, although we were pleased to see Peoria Rep. Ryan Spain, a Republican House budgeteer, praise Democrats for being "more open than past years about the annual spending plan."

For Pritzker, his final spring session before asking the voters for a third term was underwhelming. The governor's top two priorities were to make a deal to keep the Bears in Illinois and to pass a series of ambitious measures to provide for more housing throughout the state.

The outcome for the Bears in Illinois is, charitably and barely,



SCOTT STANTIS/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

still a work in progress. The housing package stalled over objections from local governments over having much of their zoning authority superseded by the state.

In neither case did Pritzker play much of a leadership role, or at least not one that the public could easily see. His strategy seemed to be to lay out the broad parameters of what he wanted and then hope that lawmakers would follow suit. With the Bears, state lawmakers representing Chicago and Mayor Brandon Johnson effectively killed the plan to keep the team from moving to a suburb. In the case of the housing bills, something like the reverse happened: suburban officeholders effectively killed the initiative to protect their powers and to reassure their residents that unsuitable developments wouldn't be constructed in quiet residential neighborhoods without recourse to local officials.

Nor did anyone make the case (that we heard anyway) that all of

ers easily cleared Pritzker's call to ban cellphones in public-school classrooms. There were important measures passed to regulate the use of artificial intelligence in various ways. The General Assembly finally cleared a licensing process for hemp makers after several years of inaction that allowed the sale of highly intoxicating THC-infused products in convenience stores, gas stations and numerous other retail outlets.

In terms of affordability, the watchword that Pritzker, House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch and Senate President Don Harmon all said from the outset would be their guiding light during the session, the steps that were taken were modest at best. Lawmakers paused a scheduled automatic increase in the gas tax that will save drivers 1.3 cents per gallon. Please keep the volume down on your whoops of joy.

And those losing or seeing sharply reduced SNAP bene-

fits under GOP policies enacted in Washington, D.C., will get a one-time payment of \$400 each to help compensate for the loss — at a cost of \$70 million to state taxpayers. For those in such circumstances, that truly can be a real difference-maker.

A handful of narrow tax increases — including a digital ad levy and tax on social media platforms, both of which could well be scotched by the courts — helped cover the cost of this maintenance budget. But by Democratic Party standards in Springfield, this was not a tax-heavy budget.

We think most people will remember the 2026 spring session by what didn't happen. Given the heightened interest in the Bears, voters who ordinarily would tune out the annual doings in the state capital got a lesson in how Springfield operates — or doesn't — under complete Democratic Party control.

Did they like what they saw?

## Illinois finally gets phones out of the classroom

After failing to advance similar legislation last year, Gov. JB Pritzker on Sunday pushed across the finish line a bill to limit cellphones in our schools.

Pritzker deserves credit for sticking with the issue. This sensible education reform, which takes effect beginning in the 2027-28 school year and applies across Illinois public and charter schools, is something to celebrate.

That's because, first and foremost, limiting screen time is essential if we want kids to, you know, learn something in school.

We've long encouraged Springfield to pass this legislation. Screens in education are one

factor increasingly under scrutiny as educators and parents search for explanations for this generation's academic struggles, which became most pronounced during COVID-19 but have lingered even after years back in the physical classroom.

As a reminder, all is not well in too many Illinois classrooms. Just over half of students in grades three through eight met reading standards as of last year, while fewer than 4 in 10 high schoolers reached proficiency in math on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness and ACT exams. Phones, of course, are not the sole reason for these issues, but allowing kids

to carry smartphones around at school all day is not helping matters.

For those parents worried about losing access to their student, take note: This is a "bell to bell" ban on phone use for elementary and middle school students, meaning no phones during the entire school day. High schoolers can check their phones during lunch or breaks if a district decides to allow it. And there are exceptions for students who require devices for medical needs, English learners or kids who need them to fulfill an individualized education program.

One fair critique is that this is

an unfunded mandate on school districts. That's because to comply with these requirements, schools will have to develop systems for storing phones during the school day, which can carry real costs. For example, Elgin-based School District U-46 spent more than \$170,000 last year on 6,625 phone-storage pouches and the accompanying 120 magnetic bases needed to lock and unlock them, the Tribune reported.

Unfortunately, this is an essential investment in education in an age where nearly every high schooler has a smartphone.

Analog learning — good old-fashioned pencil and paper —

is superior for long-term memory and eliminates the temptation to multitask, leading to deeper conceptual understanding. Research shows that writing on something other than a keyboard has many benefits for younger students, especially kids learning to read, triggering mental connections that make it easier to pick up this essential skill. Typing is faster, but handwriting hammers home lessons and facilitates deeper learning.

The phones are a nuisance and an obstacle, plain and simple.

Schools can't eliminate every distraction, but they can deal with this one.

### ON THIS DAY 86 YEARS AGO AND NOW THE MILITIA

The President has asked congress for authority to call the National Guard and the reserves into active service at his discretion. The request was buried at the end of his latest message to congress seeking another billion dollars for the army and navy. ... Why a matter of such great importance was kept from the country as long as possible is Mr. Roosevelt's secret.

... Mr. Roosevelt need not have made his melodramatic appearance before congress on May 16 nor to have followed that with a supplementary demand for further armament credits as if the whole bill could not have been presented at once. He knew that congress and the country were in full accord with him on the need for preparation. ...

He has, of course, denied that his object is war, but so did his political mentor, President Wilson, in similar circumstances. Now he has followed Mr. Wilson again in preparing to call the National Guard. ... Mr. Roosevelt offers only the vaguest explanation of his request. Units of the Guard may be required, he says, "to maintain our position of neutrality and to safeguard our national defense." The words can mean anything or nothing.

... Mr. Wilson in 1914 had opposed making long term loans to the allies, but eventually changed his policy and permitted them. Mr. Roosevelt, who had been enthusiastic for the arms embargo, similarly changed his mind and demanded and obtained its repeal.

The parallel all along the line is close. ... Why did he

avoid stating precisely why he wants the right to summon the Guard? It is to be hoped and expected that congress will insist upon an answer before any such authorization is granted. If Mr. Roosevelt knows of any great danger immediately impending he has no right to keep the facts to himself. The country should share the knowledge if only that it may be mentally and emotionally prepared for eventualities.

The people of this country want to stay out of the war. ... As long as Mr. Roosevelt refuses to tell why he wishes the power to summon the Guard, the duty of congress is to withhold the authorization. If the danger is real, congress will not hesitate to act.

Tribune editorial board, June 3, 1940

## OPINION

Pope Leo XIV stands at the window of his studio during the noon Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square on May 31 at the Vatican. **ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

## Pope Leo XIV's apology for slavery is a start. Now the church must seek atonement



**Laura Washington**

Pope Leo XIV's apology for the Roman Catholic Church's sins of slavery is long overdue. With that apology must come atonement.

Last week, Leo apologized for the Holy See's role in legitimizing slavery and for having failed to condemn it for centuries, calling the Vatican's record "a wound in Christian memory, one from which we cannot consider ourselves detached."

Experts have deemed the move, which called out the church's role in propagating the slave trade, as "historic." It arrived in the Pope's 43,000-word encyclical, "Magnifica Humanitas."

"Past popes have apologized for Christians' involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade," The Associated Press reported. "But no pope had ever publicly acknowledged, much less apologized for, the role that past popes played in giving European sovereigns explicit authority to subjugate and enslave 'infidels.'"

In the encyclical, Leo wrote: "It is impossible not to feel deep sorrow when contemplating the immense

suffering and humiliation endured by so many in stark contrast to their immeasurable dignity as persons infinitely loved by the Lord. For this, in the name of the church, I sincerely ask for pardon."

It could not come soon enough. As the AP story noted, "Black American Catholics, activists and scholars have long called for the Holy See to atone for its role in the colonial-era trade in human beings, beyond generic apologies for the involvement of individual Christians."

This lifelong Black Catholic bears no illusions about the sins of my church. African American Catholics have long been discriminated against and excluded by our church and community.

I have lived it in small but painful ways, as a child growing up in a segregated Chicago. In the all-Black elementary schools I attended, the nuns would favor the children with the lighter skin and straighter hair for special attention and praise. The rest of us were shamed by omission.

I recall my brother's tales of getting singled out for corporal punishment by the white priests and brothers at his all-boys Catholic high school. And I remember how in the 1960s many "good Catholic families" fled their Chicago neighborhoods the minute a Black family moved in. Some of those good Catholics were behind racist

attacks on the newcomers.

I have seen it, writ large. Today, African Americans remain far from full participants in the church's hierarchy and power.

Leo's apology is a start, but much is left undone. "For many Black Catholics and descendants of enslaved Africans, the apology may land as both historic and unfinished," reports The Grio, a news website that focuses on Black politics and culture.

There is much unfinished business ahead. For starters, there is one urgent mission the pope must take on the road to atonement. He must act on his mea culpa by crusading against the racist and bigoted policies of President Donald Trump.

The Trump administration has removed references and artifacts that preserve the nation's racial history from museums and libraries. Trump's social media feed and rhetoric overflow with racist diatribes. He nods to white supremacy and welcomes the embrace of white supremacists.

Where is my church?

"We are living in a time when self-professed Catholics are not only turning a blind eye to evil, but have elected and are supporting President Donald Trump, who is against diversity, against immigrants, against the poor, and seeks to destroy the multiracial democracy that was hard fought and won by the sweat and blood of

African Americans and progressives in the United States," Alessandra Harris wrote last year in the *National Catholic Reporter*.

Harris, a Black Catholic who frequently writes on racial issues, noted that 59% of white Catholics voted for Trump in the 2024 presidential election, according to PRRI, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public opinion research organization.

Trump has portrayed himself as a messianic figure. He is an egomaniac, but clearly also threatened by this pope.

The pope should take every opportunity to hammer away at Trump's oppressive words and actions that aim to reverse the hard-fought decades of legislation, sacrifice and protest that have battled the racism and bigotry wrought by slavery.

The world's most powerful politician is assiduously attempting to reverse racial progress and erase America's stain of racism. The world's most powerful religious leader can — and must — step up to condemn and combat him.

And all good Catholics should be right there with him.

*Laura Washington is a political commentator and longtime Chicago journalist. Her columns appear in the Tribune every other Wednesday. Write to her at LauraLauraWashington@gmail.com.*

## Trump the builder is even better at demolition



**Steve Chapman**

Donald Trump takes great pride in the buildings he has constructed, and not without reason. He's erected a number of skyscrapers in New York and elsewhere. "The thing I do best in life is build," he says, and we can all agree that building is not the worst thing he does.

I was pleasantly surprised at the 2009 completion of the Chicago Trump Tower, which was a great improvement over the homely structure that formerly housed the city's second-greatest newspaper. I enjoyed looking at it right up until the day when he spoiled the shimmering vertical lines by adding his name in giant letters.

It was in keeping with his destructive nature. If there's anything Trump does better than building, it's wrecking. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's slogan "Move fast and break things" could serve as the central theme of this presidency.

The most visible example is the East Wing of the White House. He said he would renovate it, only to decide to raze it so he could add a mammoth ballroom.

But he may not get what he wants. A federal judge ordered a halt to the construction unless and until Trump gets congressional approval — though an appeals court allowed it to proceed for the moment. Senate Republicans have



Construction continues for the upcoming UFC match alongside the ballroom addition on the South Lawn of the White House on May 28 in Washington. President Donald Trump is hosting a UFC match on the White House grounds to mark the 250th anniversary of the U.S. **ALEX WONG/GETTY**

rejected Trump's demand for \$1 billion to pay for supposed security enhancements on his planned party venue and bunker.

Not all of his destruction is physical, which doesn't make it less harmful. One of his first actions in his first term was to shred the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, reached after years of arduous negotiations and signed by the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China, as well as Iran. It was designed to severely restrict Iran's nuclear activities for years to come.

Renouncing the accord was the impetus for Tehran to resume enriching uranium to a high purity and building advanced centrifuges. The prospect of an Iranian nuclear weapon, of course, was one of the reasons Trump gave for launching his ill-fated war.

That war, which consisted of

a massive bombing campaign, has showcased his penchant for pulverizing things. But so far peace has not risen from the ashes.

The chief consequence has been to put a stop to free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, which has inflicted punishment on American consumers and the world economy. And no end is in sight. Starting a war, the president has discovered, is much easier than winning one or even escaping one.

His Department of Government Efficiency was grossly inept at promoting efficiency and saving money but good at smashing things, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Trump tried to shut down the U.S. Institute of Peace, and when courts blocked that attempt, the

administration did the next worst thing — renaming it the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace.

He also plastered his name on the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. It was an attempt to exalt himself, but the actual result was to utterly degrade a prestigious institution.

A parade of performing artists canceled appearances. Donors also fled. He then announced that the center would close for two years, ostensibly for renovations. Last week, a federal judge ordered the removal of his name from the building and put a hold on the closure.

Trump's response was to post one of his trademark threats: "The Kennedy Center will soon be closed, probably never to open again." Would anyone be surprised if bulldozers showed up to knock

it down?

He even wants to extinguish one of his own creations — a concert on the National Mall that was planned for June 25. After several artists withdrew, a furious Trump said the concert should be replaced with a Make American Great Again rally.

He's done his best to cripple the Federal Reserve for failing to slash interest rates. He tried to fire Fed governor Lisa Cook, and his Justice Department launched a vindictive investigation of chair Jerome Powell. It went nowhere and had to be dropped to get the Senate to confirm Kevin Warsh as Powell's successor.

The list of other things Trump and his subordinates have undermined, harmed or ruined is long and ever-growing — including the NATO alliance, the global trade order, the Environmental Protection Agency, the nonpartisan ethos of the U.S. military and the independence of the Justice Department. Not to mention the rule of law and the Constitution.

The cumulative damage from all these attacks is impossible to measure, and Trump doesn't care to try. His approach brings to mind the wisdom of the English writer G.K. Chesterton, who suggested that before you tear down a fence, you should consider why it was built.

*Steve Chapman was a member of the Tribune Editorial Board from 1981 to 2021. His columns, exclusive to the Tribune, now appear the first week of every month. He can be reached at stephenjchapman@icloud.com.*

## OPINION

# Although we wanted the same result in Elián González case, Raúl Castro was never an ally

By Jeffery M. Leving  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The indictment of Raúl Castro is a powerful statement, reinforcing that there is no statute of limitations on murder charges, and supports my belief that Castro's Battle of Ideas was a failed concept.

Castro, 94, is the brother of former Cuban leader Fidel Castro, and served as Cuba's president from 2008 to 2018. He then led the Communist Party of Cuba until 2021. Castro was indicted earlier this year by a federal grand jury in Miami in connection with the Cuban military's downing of two Brothers to the Rescue planes nearly 30 years ago. Charges against him include conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals, multiple counts of murder and destruction of aircraft.

News of the indictment led large crowds to gather outside the Freedom Tower in downtown Miami, waving Cuban flags and chanting "Libertad" as they celebrated what they considered a long-awaited step toward justice.

The Battle of Ideas was launched by Fidel Castro in late 1999, using the Elián González case as its catalyst. González was a 6-year-old boy at the center of a custody dispute that drew international attention. His mother took him from Cuba and attempted to enter the United States illegally, without his father's knowledge. Elián's father, Juan Miguel González, had not consented to the departure.

Some may recall that I played a key role in what became a high-profile custody battle. My interest at the time was the same as it has been throughout my career — keeping fathers in the lives of their children. In the González case, I was retained by Manuel González, Elián's great-uncle from Cuba, who wanted Elián returned to his father. After a tough legal battle, our side prevailed and Elián was



Raúl Castro waves a Cuban national flag during a May Day parade at Revolution Square in Havana on May 1, 2025. RAMON ESPINOSA/AP

*While some may assume Raúl Castro and I were on the same side because we both wanted Elián returned to Cuba, the motivations could not have been more different. As stated, my interest was only to reunite a child with his father; Castro's interest was clearly a lot more self-serving — using the case to assert national sovereignty at a time of internal economic strain.*

reunited with his father. Elián later became an industrial engineer and said that he was happy with the outcome.

Unfortunately, Fidel Castro used the case as the genesis of what he

deemed the Battle of Ideas — a political mobilization campaign that was little more than a propaganda tool for his government. Raúl, then Cuba's minister of the revolutionary armed forces and

second-in-command to Fidel, helped shape the campaign.

The key components of Castro's campaign were daily rallies, forced media saturation, forced youth assemblies and marches, diplomatic pressure and an ideological revival that ultimately lasted several years after Elián was returned to Cuba.

While some may assume Raúl Castro and I were on the same side because we both wanted Elián returned to Cuba, the motivations could not have been more different. As stated, my interest was only to reunite a child with his father; Castro's interest was

clearly a lot more self-serving — using the case to assert national sovereignty at a time of internal economic strain.

In the decades since, the evidence suggests Elián became a productive member of Cuban society, a testament to the influence of growing up with his father. I strongly believe time has also revealed that Raúl Castro's political ideology was bankrupt.

*Attorney Jeffery M. Leving, a specialist in fathers' rights, is a recipient of a 2023 Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award presented by President Joe Biden.*

## Voice of the people

### Chicago Stars

The recent Ryan Field editorial states "this moment (should) mark a formal end to the grousing over this stadium, which is here to stay," ("New Trier vs. Evanston at a mint Ryan Field? What a tantalizing fall prospect?" May 28).

I agree, and the Chicago Stars, Evanston and Wilmette should vigorously re-engage in good faith discussions about use of the facility for a defined, multi-year period starting in 2027. The Stars can be both a sporting and community asset for the North Shore.

If the Stars use temporary, artificial turf Martin Stadium next year, you will have a striking visual of high school/college male football players enjoying new, natural grass Ryan Field while professional female soccer players endure separate and unequal facilities. Is this truly desirable in Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky's beloved, progressive Evanston?

When the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team's collective bargaining agreement expressly prohibits players from playing on turf due to injury potential, how can the Stars compete for world-class talent in a league with unrestricted free agency and no draft?

The on-field challenges of the Stars are partly tied to inferior, uncertain and poorly located stadium facilities like their former home, the taxpayer funded boondoggle, SeatGeek Stadium in Bridgeway.

As a village trustee in neighboring Riverwoods, I appreciate the Stars' low-impact reuse of a former Walgreens property in Bannockburn for their new, privately developed training facility which opens next year.

If the Stars played at natural grass Soldier Field for a few years until a purpose-built soccer stadium like the one in Kansas City is built, you would simply re-create a problem that the Chicago Sky had until recently of training facilities being located too far away from their stadium.

The 2024 Wilmette and Evanston intergovernmental agreement can be adapted to mitigate potential impacts from the fifteen Stars' home games a year. Presently, average attendance of a Stars game is below that of a concert or Northwestern football game.

The San Diego Wave's agreement with San Diego State University for the use of Snapdragon Stadium should be obtained through a public records request. This can serve as a useful point of comparison for the poten-



Chicago Stars forward Ludmila 14 protects the ball from Orlando Pride defender Emily Sams 6 during the second half at Martin Stadium in Evanston on Sept. 7, 2025. EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

tial negotiation of Evanston-related issues such as property taxes and other payments.

In their March message, the Stars correctly emphasized civic unity. Robust community engagement from Laura Ricketts down to the players and staff can show that the Stars will be responsible neighbors at Ryan Field.

— Andrew Eastmond, Riverwoods

### New owners

It is time the Chicago Bears have an owner who can financially afford to build and own its own stadium. It would be great to work a deal where the city and state would be partners allowing a facility to be built in Chicago with access to McCormick Place and all of Chicago's downtown hotels, attractions and restaurants. Everyone wins. We just need to remove the poor McCaskeys from the equation.

I read once, "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die."

Surely there is a billionaire who can rescue our beloved Bears from the hapless McCaskey clan to be the new owner and build the grandest sports venue in the United States, if not the world.

— Gary L. Hynes, Wilmette

### No mystery

Though it's been consistently

presented as mysterious, where the new Bears stadium is going has been obvious for years.

It's important to understand upfront that this is not your grandfather's NFL. The world's most valuable professional sports league has for decades gotten an increasingly smaller proportion of its revenue from tickets, concessions and other local sources. In fact, only the Dallas Cowboys make more locally than they do nationally. To accomplish that, they purpose built what I call "Jerry World," a behemoth sitting between Fort Worth and Dallas, operating as a giant money vacuum to reap the rewards of Texans' notorious appetite for football.

But Dallas is very much an outlier. For every other franchise, the most valuable lever an owner actually controls is in what they can build and own around the stadium. The Cubs figured this out at Wrigley Field. The Bulls and Blackhawks are doing it right now with the \$7 billion development rising around the United Center. The stadium is just the anchor; the real money is the land.

Which brings us to the Bears, and to the one fact that explains everything: The McCaskeys aren't rich the way other NFL owners are rich. Their fortune is the team and brand. They can't write a Walton-sized check and never could. So that turns the whole question into a single test: Can the Bears own and capture the value they create around the stadium?

And how much public investment and subsidy (what they charmingly refer to as "tax certainty") should anyone provide to get around 70,000 people in town for nine games a season, when it's going to benefit the team's bottom line first and foremost?

Run every option through that test and the answer was never in doubt. The lakefront is off-limits to development; the Lakefront Protection Ordinance is what killed the Lucas Museum on the exact parcel the Bears initially proposed, where they'd rent from the city and own nothing. The Michael Reese and other sites were developable, but somebody else owned the land and would have pocketed the upside. Indiana is dangling a free stadium on an isolated slag dump — a prospective building with absolutely nothing around it worth owning.

And then there's Arlington Heights: 326 acres the Bears already own and is dead simple to repurpose. No demons here, no magic, no mystery. Just the inevitable grind of economic forces and frustrating leverage games between private and public interests.

— Phil Nicodemus, Chicago

### Hoosier Bears

The Bears moving to Arlington Heights so close to O'Hare

airport will surely be a traffic nightmare. Moving the Bears to Hammond, Indiana might not be a bad idea regardless of what Maria Pappas thinks. It's right next door to Chicago and it will bring lots of development to Northwest Indiana. It's more a blue collar working man's neighborhood and it might even help the South Side of Chicago. The Hoosier Bears has a nice ring to it. Who needs more tax breaks for the billionaires?

— Andrew Kachiroubas, Chicago

### The right decision

While I can understand the passion of Bears' fans who desperately want their team to remain in Illinois, I do believe the Illinois General Assembly made the right decision not to provide massive tax breaks to Arlington Heights to keep the Bears in our state. Let's face it, while Illinois' economic condition has improved, the state still faces some major financial issues, some far more important than helping the Bears. Also, from a purely economic perspective, a football stadium doesn't make sense. The vast majority of attendees at NFL football games come from the Chicago area. The Bears play eight regular season games and two pre-season games, so there is not a huge opportunity to generate revenue for the city or state. Therefore, there should be more funds provided from private investors; however, annual cash flow is not that attractive as most money is made when the franchise is sold, and the McCaskeys have shown no desire to sell. The primary drawback to Hammond, Indiana is it's not easy to reach from many parts of the Chicago area. Emotional appeals may still cause the Illinois legislature to change its mind, which in my opinion would be a mistake.

— Dan Schuchardt, Wheaton

### Note to readers

The Obama Presidential Center is opening on June 19. Do you have memories of former President Barack Obama you'd like to share? (Sincere thoughts only.) Send a letter of no more than 400 words by Thursday, June 11 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name and city/town.

Submit a letter, of no more than 400 words, to the editor here or email letters@chicagotribune.com.

For online-exclusive letters, go to [www.chicagotribune.com/letters](http://www.chicagotribune.com/letters). Email your letter submissions, 400 words or less, to [letters@chicagotribune.com](mailto:letters@chicagotribune.com). Include your full name, address and phone number.

## OPINION

## Don't Blame Jill for Joe 2024



## BUSINESS WORLD

By William W. Jenkins, Jr.

A lot more people are responsible for Joe Biden's decision to run for a second term than Jill Biden, whose delight in being first lady and desire to remain so are evident in her new book.

The two parties have a single magnum focus to their existence, the four-year presidential cycle. They don't spitball—they engage in ruthless strategizing worthy of the Pentagon war room. And in 2024 Joe Biden had only one path. He needed Donald Trump to be his opponent, and he needed a version of Mr. Trump that would let Mr. Biden sidestep the biggest risk to his campaign, a televised debate.

The advisers widely reported to be behind the Biden strategy were Mike Donilon, Steve Ricchetti and Anita Dunn. On March 24, 2022, with a war raging in Europe, at a NATO summit Mr. Biden signaled publicly to every Democratic official in the U.S. that he would be “very fortunate” to have Mr. Trump for a 2024 opponent. Never mind that the election was still 967 days away, or that a president usually considers it unseemly to meddle in the other party's nomination.

Nine days later, a staged front-page New York Times

leak had Mr. Biden criticizing his attorney general, Merrick Garland, for not criminally charging Mr. Trump. We can suspect the leak was staged for two reasons. Lacking was any Times effort to require that Mr. Biden had used the words attributed to him. Also lacking was any effort to determine if the leak was authorized. Instead, the paper enabled a White House deniability charade with a quote insisting Mr. Biden didn't involve himself in the “investigative priorities or decisions” of the Justice Department.

On May 23, 2022, and again on Nov. 18, 2022, an attorney working with Georgia county prosecutor Fani Willis met with White House officials. Ms. Willis had employed her boyfriend to help an election case against Mr. Trump at a princely \$250 an hour, which they soon were spending on vacations in Napa and the Caribbean.

Ms Willis's lack of concern was telling. She seemingly viewed her prosecution of Mr. Trump was a service to the White House. She was entitled to a gratuity.

Ten days before the Times leak, the New York Daily News savaged new District Attorney Alvin Bragg for dropping a Stormy Daniels-related investigation. Now Mr. Bragg revived the probe. When charges came down, I had my pick of analysts on the cable business channels (where out-

right partisan lying is frowned upon) all drawing the identical conclusion: “The indictment would improve Mr. Trump's chance of winning the nomination while weakening his chance of winning the general election.” Exactly the formula Mr. Biden needed.

## The question matters because we need to know if President Trump is a fluke.

But then things went wrong. The criminal cases against Mr. Trump bogged down. Mr. Biden's Justice Department investigated Mr. Biden himself for mishandling intelligence documents. A special counsel publicly reported that Mr. Biden had acted improperly but was too old and forgetful to prosecute. The ultimate pitfall opened beneath the campaign when polls started showing Mr. Biden losing to Mr. Trump. Now he couldn't duck the fatal television debate by citing his presidential dignity and Mr. Trump's felon status. You know the rest of the story.

Every book writer, every political journalist, fails when they fail to say the truth about the 2024 Biden campaign, a selfish, cynical roll of the dice that was always more likely to end in a Trump election than a Biden second term. The truth was breathed

only once in the mainstream press during the campaign that I saw, when the Times noted the Biden White House's exultation after Mr. Trump stormed to victory in the GOP Iowa caucus. To Mr. Biden's aides, the paper said, Mr. Trump's success was Mr. Biden's “pathway to a second term.”

I bring this up not for backward-looking reasons. It goes to every question by our NATO and Asian allies, and others around the world, about the future of U.S. leadership after Mr. Trump. Is he really representative of a U.S. electoral majority or merely representative of the uncanny incompetence of enemies, from James Comey in 2016 to Joe Biden in 2024? An all-suffusing misplaced sense of propriety shouldn't stop us from seeing the truth. Mr. Trump's presidency, even its useful accomplishments, owes all to the unnatural, self-sabotaging moronitude of his opponents.

In 2024, his narrow victory (115,000 votes in three states would have changed the outcome) followed when the rival party, in effect, defaulted to a cardboard cutout with no features that it called “not Trump.” Such an election isn't a mandate for a revolution. Mr. Trump might yet have won the country's backing for what he was doing. He had every opportunity. But so far his approval ratings show something more closely resembling the opposite.

BOOKSHELF | By Judge Glock

## The Soul And the Market

## The Permanent Problem

By Brink Lindsey

Oxford, 248 pages, \$29.99

Critics once argued that capitalism bred poverty and squalor. As that critique ran up against reality, intellectuals pivoted to attack the supposed spiritual poverty of capitalism, which they claim is alienating us from one another and from nature.

In “The Permanent Problem,” Brink Lindsey contends that capitalism has “delivered” in providing mass abundance, but now that “the task is to convert material plenty into widespread spiritual riches, it is floundering.” It has isolated us and attached us to an impersonal and degrading consumer market. The solution, the author suggests, is to foster small, independent communities that produce more of their own goods. It is a drearier and less-plausible dream than Mr. Lindsey admits.

The book catalogs an array of familiar social problems. Political squabbling, loneliness, declining fertility and, of course, Donald Trump are presented as indictments of modern life in general and capitalism in particular. “We're getting fatter and dumber, and our mental health is deteriorating,” the author writes, which is what “a half century-plus of mass-affluence consumerism has brought us.”

After diagnosing a profound crisis of capitalism, Mr. Lindsey, a senior vice president at the think tank Niskanen Center and the author of “The Age of Abundance” (2007), suggests changes that seem picayune. He recommends more community gardens, co-housing (apartments with some shared spaces), rooftop solar panels and neighborhood daycares. He believes these will help “reverse the blight of social disintegration” and provide “freedom from the state as well as the market.”

One wonders if Mr. Lindsey thinks capitalism is preventing people from organizing community gardens. If their adoption isn't universal, one struggles to understand why we should demand that people plant them. And how many in the author's crowd have done their part to restore civilization by moving into co-housing units, spaces typically reserved for impecunious 20-somethings? Perhaps the simplest explanation for the limited impact of these practices is that they work for some people but not for others.

Similar desires for small-scale production have a long history. John Ruskin, a Victorian art critic, raged at how the division of labor broke down traditional communities and turned people into automatons. William Morris, in the novel “News From Nowhere” (1890), imagined a world in which people returned to small-scale gardening and gave up shoddy consumerism. In the 1960s and '70s, communal radicals and intellectuals such as E.F. Schumacher, in his book “Small Is Beautiful” (1973), made similar demands.

Mr. Lindsey takes pains to differentiate himself from these previous critics. He says his vision comes with “a decidedly new twist” because it is not reactionary and really will deliver abundance. He notes that “complaints about the evils of consumerism have long been a staple among intellectuals, but I see evil only in its excesses.” In fact, no critic has attacked all consumption of all goods, only the goods the critic considered unnecessary.

The author ties his root-and-branch critique of capitalism to a plea to “make modern life much more affordable than it is at present,” which he hopes will open more opportunities for enlightened leisure. The other term for making things more affordable is economic growth—something that is ineluctably in conflict with a vision of producing more goods outside the market.

## Critics allege that capitalism causes spiritual poverty. They misunderstand the proper role of an economic system.

Housing is an area of particular focus for Mr. Lindsey, since he rightfully notes that it is beset by bad regulations and high prices that inhibit family formation. He suggests more people could “build their own housing.” Beyond the fact that this would make housing immeasurably more expensive, these personal homebuilders would still have to buy the nails, lumber, shingles and—since the author is not a Luddite—communications and electrical wiring, HVAC systems and other complex goods from the market. Here, as elsewhere, the solutions the book proposes do not create the sort of independence the book imagines necessary.

The book claims that “we can encourage” more small-scale activities, but who “we” is and what “encourage” means is sometimes vague. Calls to reform have had limited effect in the past, leaving only one plausible means of encouragement: the government. The author recommends a domestic service corps, modeled on the military, to build infrastructure; he also proposes a new Homestead Act whereby, instead of allowing people to develop untitled land, the government gives “people the resources they need to build new and better lives on their own.”

Presumably the government will take resources from those still “immersed in the capitalist system” and give them to people pursuing a more bountiful and beautiful life. Mr. Lindsey assures the reader that a government redistribution of goods will help people declare independence from both government and market. The stunning contradiction is not resolved or even addressed.

The permanent problem is not the one that the book poses: It is, in fact, that intellectuals keep insisting that an economic system deliver spiritual bliss. It can't and it shouldn't. There are existing means to a more spiritual life. The issue is that these are means to which most intellectuals are allergic.

Capitalism can make us wealthy but it cannot, and never claimed to, make us whole. We would all do well to tend our own garden, community or otherwise, but railing against the market at which we bought our seeds will not make it blossom.

Mr. Glock is the director of research at the Manhattan Institute and the author of “The Dead Pledge: The Origins of the Mortgage Market and Federal Bailouts, 1913-1939.”

## Where Conservatives and Liberals Can Agree



## POLITICS &amp; IDEAS

By William A. Galston

In the Journal on Monday, former Vice President Mike Pence clarified the difference between conservatism and populism. Conservatism in America is defined by its commitment to the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Populists “follow urges, not principles,” and pursue an agenda “stitched together by opinion polls, personal grievances and performative outrage.”

At its best, conservatism doesn't try to freeze the status quo or move us back to some imagined golden age. Rather, it identifies the aspects of a tradition that are enduringly good and seeks to conserve them. In the U.S., this means dedication to the principles of the Declaration and the rule of law embodied in the Constitution. In this sense, we should all be conservatives.

Dedication to these documents demands openness to change. The principles provide standards for judging practices and, when necessary, reforming them. Slavery violated the principle that all men are created equal, and excluding African-Americans from the franchise violated the 15th Amendment.

At its best, liberalism in America focuses attention on the gap between principles and practices and mobilizes public support to close these

gaps. In this sense, we should all be liberals.

So defined, conservatism and liberalism stand on common ground. This doesn't mean conservatives and liberals will agree in practice. How the Declaration's principles are applied to specific policies is always up for debate, and the language of the Constitution can be interpreted in different ways. But as long as all parties regard our founding documents as the authoritative basis for political argument, our house will remain united.

In our polarized times, it was inevitable that the Declaration would spark controversy. Left-leaning progressives at the New York Times in 2019 launched the “1619 Project,” which argued that the year enslaved Africans arrived in Virginia, not 1776, represented our nation's true birth year. In the project's lead essay, Nikole Hannah-Jones claimed that “one of the primary reasons the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery,” a contention that the Times was forced to modify in response to protests from leading historians.

More surprising, at least to me, was the debate over the Declaration that erupted on the political right. Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration's lead author, regarded the English political thinker John Locke as one of the three greatest men who ever lived. In a letter Jefferson wrote a

year before his death, he named Locke a major contributor to the “American mind,” to which he gave expression in our founding document.

Beginning roughly a decade ago, Patrick Deneen and Yoram Hazony, two scholars who influenced what became the national-conservative movement, denounced Locke as a source of America's ills. Locke's liberalism, they claimed, encouraged the hyperindividualism and hypercritical rationalism that had undermined America's natural communities, traditions and common good.

## America's founding documents are worth defending from the far left and the far right.

These views shaped the outlook of Vice President JD Vance, the Republican leader most attuned to the emerging new right. The first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, defined America as dedicated to the Declaration's creed that all men are created equal. By contrast, Mr. Vance argued in a speech to the Claremont Institute last July that the creedal definition of what it means to be an American was underinclusive because it would reject many people the Anti-Defamation League “would label as domestic extremists, even though those very Americans had their ancestors fight in the Revolu-

## In 1930, There Was No ‘E’ in ‘Mail’

By Bob Greene

Postmaster General David Steiner has a headache of a job. He has told Congress that within a year or so the U.S. Postal Service “would be unable to deliver the mail” unless something is done to remedy its fiscal woes.

The USPS faces daunting pension obligations and the costly burden of carrying letters six days a week to every address in America, even while the public's use of the service plummets. For a piquant glimpse of why the troubles may ultimately be unsolvable, Mr. Steiner might dig up a copy of Michigan's Grand Rapids Press from Nov. 13, 1930.

On page 20 that day was the kind of local feature that ran regularly in many newspapers and captured the essential role the mail played in Americans' daily lives—a role that, in our get-it-to-me-right-now digital age, has been per-

manently diminished.

The feature was headlined “Air Mail Schedule.” It listed, as a public service, the time a city-hopping propeller plane full of mail would arrive from Pontiac, Mich. (6 a.m.), and one from Kalamazoo (10:20 a.m.)—and when two planes would pick up outgoing mail and depart for Kalamazoo and

## An era when letters traveled no faster than an airplane.

connecting flights “west, south and north” (5 p.m.) and for Pontiac and the “night planes east” (6:55 p.m.).

The only way for people to correspond (except via truncated telegrams) was by U.S. mail. This is why mail delivery was treasured on a visceral level. Airmail, for the price of a separate stamp, would get a letter to its distant destination a few days

faster than one carried by train.

That Grand Rapids feature warned: “Airmail patrons must have postal matter in the post office at least 40 minutes before scheduled leaving time to make the mail plane.” Otherwise, the intended recipients would have to wait an extra day or more.

If this sounds like something from another world, in a sense it is. In the years before email and social media made delivering written words instantaneous and all but effortless, those mail planes—Charles Lindbergh was an early pilot—were a lifeline for Americans yearning to know how their loved ones were faring. For this reason the postal service was beloved.

Airmail as a separate class of service, introduced in 1918, disappeared in 1977 when the postal service switched entirely from the rails to all-air. Speed always triumphs.

So Mr. Steiner has his work cut out for him, in this era

when mailing an envelope is the slowest way to reach someone. Yet electronic alacrity aside, there remains something lovely about what once was irreplaceable and now is increasingly abandoned. Consider these words, adapted from a poem by Charles W. Eliot called “The Letter,” and carved 112 years ago into the stone exterior of a post office building in Washington that today houses the Smithsonian National Postal Museum:

“Messenger of Sympathy and Love / Servant of Parted Friends / Consoler of the Lonely / Bond of the Scattered Family / Enlarger of the Common Life / Carrier of News and Knowledge / Instrument of Trade and Industry / Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance / Of Peace and Goodwill Among Men and Nations.”

Tweet that.

Mr. Greene's books include “Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen.”

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

# Republicans Can Kill the Retribution Fund

President Trump is retreating from the proposal to set up a \$1.776 billion “anti-weaponization” fund as a settlement of his lawsuit against his Internal Revenue Service. “We’re not moving forward with the fund. Period,” acting Attorney General Todd Blanche told Congress Tuesday. Not moving forward? That isn’t dead for good, and it isn’t enough.

Republicans in Congress can kill the idea forever, however, by barring money for its use. That would be good policy and politics. The “settlement” between Mr. Trump and his own Administration, diverting \$1.8 billion of tax money to political allies, possibly including Jan. 6 rioters, would be an ugly precedent. The courts have blocked the payouts for now, and the Justice Department said Monday it will “abide by” that.

Even if Mr. Trump publicly swears off the idea, he could have a change of heart later. The way to ensure the fund is more than mostly dead would be for Congress to put a stake through it. The Senate could add language to the GOP’s immigration reconciliation package. The House could move a two-page bill by Republican Brian Fitzpatrick and Democrat Tom Suozzi to halt payouts.

On the legal merits, this settlement and proposed \$1.776 billion fund are different from a normal case against abusive government. Mr. Trump was wronged by the IRS contractor who stole and leaked his tax records in 2019, during the first Trump Administration. He had four years under President Biden to sue the IRS and make a claim for monetary damages. Yet he waited until this year, after voters put him back in office, to bring a case seeking \$10 billion.

Mr. Trump could have considered his 2024 election victory as just compensation. Or he

could have followed the example of Citadel CEO Ken Griffin, who also sued over the leak of his tax details. Mr. Griffin settled for a public apology, plus an assurance that the IRS “has made substantial investments in its data security to strengthen its safeguarding of taxpayer information.” No money changed hands.

Instead Mr. Trump wants to parley the IRS’s failure into a \$1.8 billion fund to pay off MAGA friends, people who have no legal claim against the tax agency, because their information was never leaked. The money would be controlled by five commissioners, all of whom would be fireable by Mr. Trump. While the Obama Administration made some outrageous settlements, wait until the next Democrat follows this model.

Voting to cut off Mr. Trump’s slush fund would also be healthy for Congress’s public image and role as a separate branch of government willing to check presidential excess. If Republicans act together, their swing-state candidates will be able to point to this as an example of independence from Mr. Trump, while it will be more difficult for the President to single out Maine Sen. Susan Collins or others as targets of his anger.

Ending the fund legislatively might also help put to rest the judicial actions on the \$1.8 billion settlement that might otherwise run for weeks or months. The federal judge in Florida has ordered Mr. Trump to answer whether the dismissal of his lawsuit against the IRS was “premised on deception” and whether “the case should be reopened because the Court was the ‘victim of a fraud.’”

Mr. Trump has no shortage of wild ideas, but the \$1.776 billion retribution fund is one of his worst. The best outcome now would be for Republicans in Congress to unite to kill it.

**The public will cheer if the GOP stops a rotten \$1.776 billion deal.**

# The Real Problem With Platner

Maine Democrat Graham Platner’s bid for Senate has looked like it may have a half-life near the bottom of the periodic table, with unsavory revelations about his personal conduct. So what’s his master plan to pull his campaign out of a stall? Ginning up the progressive base with toxic insinuations about the Jews, apparently.

“Senator Collins is bought and paid for by Benjamin Netanyahu, and she votes accordingly,” Mr. Platner’s campaign account posted on X.com on Monday. The complaint is that Ms. Collins receives donations from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

But so what? “Unsurprising that Jewish Americans are supporting the candidate who does not have a Nazi tattoo,” as GOP Sen. Tim Sheehy put it in his own post. Mr. Platner has said his now infamous chest tattoo was a drunken mistake and that he didn’t realize the symbol was associated with Nazis. But he’s hardly helping his case by implying that Israel controls American politicians.

Meanwhile, Democrats have dismissed Mr. Platner’s seemingly infinite library of inappropriate text messages and internet posts as a distraction from the price of gas and healthcare.

**To deflect from his character woes, he links Collins to Netanyahu.**

“Maybe as a nation we focus on issues more important than the Platner marriage,” Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont told the press. In a euphemism for the ages, Arizona Democrat Ruben Gallego said Mr. Platner had “lived a very, you know, real experience.”

Voters still consider character and judgment in their political choices, no matter President Trump and his own shortcomings. But the blame-Bibi tweet is a reminder that the biggest problem with Mr. Platner isn’t his indiscretions but his worldview.

It’s also a testament to Democratic cynicism and intellectual confusion that they’re hanging onto Mr. Platner. Mr. Trump is a fascist, the party says, so Democrats should line up and vote for a deeply troubled candidate—all to throw out Ms. Collins, who may be the biggest GOP check on Mr. Trump’s ambitions in Congress? Gotcha.

The conventional wisdom is that Democrats are more bloody-minded than Republicans and willing to throw bad candidates overboard to avoid losing an election. Will they stick with Mr. Platner? Their choice will also be a measure of how willing the Democratic Party is to indulge the ugly anti-Israel sentiment curdling in American politics.

# Now Jill Biden Tells Us

Jill Biden is out promoting her new memoir, and as for regrets she doesn’t have a few. Only one really: In retrospect she wishes her husband hadn’t run for a second term. “As I look back,” the former first lady told NBC, “would I want to put Joe through the hurt and the pain that we felt during that time? Never. Never. I mean, it was so hurtful.”

Democrats are furious at this ex post admission, and we can see why. Mrs. Biden has finally seen the light, two years later. Yet she won’t admit in the interviews or book excerpts we’ve seen that she played a crucial role in urging her husband to run again. By every account and our own reporting, she liked the White House and celebrity life and wanted Mr. Biden to serve until January 2029.

Even now Mrs. Biden denies that she saw signs of cognitive decline in Mr. Biden as President. When pressed on CBS, she said he was “definitely aging” and “slowing down” but was “the essence of the same Joe Biden.” Apparently she didn’t see, or didn’t want to see, what Americans told pollsters they could see with their own eyes.

Or what special counsel Robert Hur in 2024 told the country he saw in his interview with the President over Mr. Biden’s handling of classified documents: a “sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory.”

Thus Mrs. Biden says it was a shock when Joe performed so poorly in that fateful late June debate with Donald Trump. “As I watched it, I thought, ‘Oh my God, he’s having a stroke,’” she told CBS. “And it scared me to death.”

Yet that isn’t what she told the public after the debate. She said then that her husband had done “such a great job” and “answered every question.” The first couple also tried to keep the second-term dream alive despite the growing calls from Democrats after the debate that he had to drop out.

Three days after the debate Mrs. Biden told

the magazine *Vogue*, in connection with a glamorous cover shoot featuring her, that the Bidens “will not let those 90 minutes define the four years he’s been President.”

As for what she said after the debate, she now says: “I’m his wife. I’m not going to get out on the stage there and say, ‘Joe, you really screwed that up.’ I mean, and we have all of our supporters there.”

The truth is that the Bidens clung to the Presidency like life itself until it became impossible to do so. They only pulled the plug when Nancy Pelosi and others threatened to go public and stage a coup if they didn’t drop out first. We use the word “they” here deliberately because of Mrs. Biden’s role.

This was a monumental act of selfishness, and the Democratic Party paid the price. Without a competitive primary, the party reacted to Mr. Biden’s late withdrawal by rushing to anoint Vice President Kamala Harris as the default nominee.

The party’s 2024 candidate switcheroo was a political debacle of historic proportions. Mr. Biden asked voters to keep him in office until age 86, and Democrats fell into line in a protective phalanx until close to the end. The only dissenter was Dean Phillips, the former Minnesota Congressman who predicted that Mr. Biden would lose if he ran and the only serious candidate to challenge Mr. Biden in the primary. He was a prophet without a party.

Mrs. Biden seems to bear a grudge against Ms. Harris because she sought Joe’s immediate endorsement. As we advised at the time, Democrats could have benefited from a competitive party convention to choose a nominee. The country would have been riveted to the event as a rare actual political drama.

But the original sin was Joe Biden’s decision to run for a second term, abetted and encouraged by Jill. They won’t admit it, but they both deserve outsize credit for helping Donald Trump win a second term.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# SAT Alone Can’t Fix Student Preparedness

As your editorial “The Academy Rethinks the SAT” (May 29) makes clear, students’ math preparedness is a serious concern. It’s one I share. Yet your piece fails to mention what the University of California system is doing to address it.

In response to concerns raised by faculty and the effects of pandemic-era instruction disruptions, I asked our faculty Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools in March to examine UC’s admissions policies and identify new collaborations with California’s K-12 schools and higher education. They are building on the faculty board’s previous work on admissions requirements and engaging K-12 education leaders to strengthen student preparation in the coming academic year and beyond.

The UC system has also implemented a range of strategies to support student success, including expanded educational preparation programs, mathematics support courses and other academic interventions. The result is that the UCs have some of the highest first-year retention rates and the highest two- and four-year graduation rates in the nation for students from all educational backgrounds.

Faculty remain committed to ensuring qualified California students

from all backgrounds can thrive at UC campuses. But college readiness is about far more than admissions standards. It also requires a clear focus on improving instruction across California’s entire education system.

AHMET PALAZOGLU  
*Chairman, University of California Academic Senate Oakland, Calif.*

You make a strong case for using the SAT and ACT in college admissions, based on the UC system’s experience since 2020. Another strong argument for using standardized tests is that high schools throughout the country have neither uniform grading standards nor uniform curricula. A student whose class rank is around the middle or even lower in a very selective high school—whether public, private or parochial—but who achieved high standardized test scores is very likely to be qualified to attend a highly selective college.

The fact that prior SATs and ACTs are published as well as sample tests with detailed solutions from private test prep companies means that any student, no matter his income, can prepare. These books can be bought online inexpensively or borrowed from libraries without cost.

ERIC H. SILVERMAN  
*Highland Park, N.J.*

# Want to Get Kids Outside? Try Going Dutch

In his op-ed “Indoor Childhood Is Bad for America” (May 26), Ben Sasse correctly diagnoses the cultural and psychological toll of sheltering our children from the physical world. But I have to challenge his assertion that there is no policy solution to this crisis. There is a remarkably straightforward one, and the Journal’s photo editors inadvertently highlighted it.

The image accompanying Mr. Sasse’s piece features a mixed-age group of children riding bicycles freely through a protected bike lane in what looks to me a lot like the Netherlands. Decades ago following child traffic fatalities, Dutch citizens demanded change. The government responded with a massive, nationwide policy initiative: building a comprehensive network of protected bicycle paths parallel to sidewalks and mostly separated from vehicle traffic.

The results are transformative. When I visited the Netherlands while my wife worked there, I noticed few school buses. Many Dutch children

didn’t need them; they could bike to school independently. After school, they could safely explore their neighborhoods and communities with the freedom that a bicycle provides.

This infrastructure unlocks the very independence Mr. Sasse champions. It mirrors my own childhood in the 1980s and ’90s in the U.S., when my friends and I spent entire summer days on our bikes, bound only by the rule to be home by dinner. Yet even then, our independence was strictly limited by where the safe pavement ended.

Today, too many American children cannot safely leave their culs-de-sac. Their neighborhoods are surrounded by four-lane highways with no sidewalks let alone any bike infrastructure. The indoor childhood isn’t a natural cultural shift; it is in part a policy choice. Many children stay inside simply because we have left them no other safe choice.

LICK LUBECKI  
*Pittsburgh*

# Stablecoins Aren’t Modern Day Wildcat Notes

When Greg Ip warns that stablecoins risk a financial crisis because they are “private money,” he understates what Congress has already done (“Capital Account: Why Stablecoins Put Economy at Risk,” U.S. News, May 26).

The Genius Act imposes real requirements with real consequences. Payment stablecoins serving Americans must be backed one-for-one by low-risk reserve assets, including cash and short-dated Treasuries. They must be segregated from issuer assets, independently attested and subject to federal supervision. Interest-bearing stablecoins are prohibited.

The free-banking comparison doesn’t hold. Nineteenth-century wildcat notes circulated in an era when collateral requirements, where they existed at all, were routinely evaded and unenforceable. This led to bank-issued currency that had volatile, inconsistent valuations, which won’t occur with stablecoins. The Genius Act provides regulators with a robust arsenal of tools to ensure that stablecoins maintain their one-to-one peg.

Stablecoins’ path to regulation and integration is already under way as agencies implement the Genius Act.

CORRECTION

In the movie “Pressure,” RAF Group Capt. James Stagg outranks Lt. Col. Irving Krick. A May 29 review of the film, “Not Quite Like Ike,” misstated the relationship between them.

Free Expression

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**Louise Perry / Ben Sasse/**  
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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



“They gave me Xanax for the co-op interview.”

OPINION

# Energy Markets Limit the Hormuz Shock

By Daniel Yergin

Before the Gulf crisis, about 70 oil and natural gas tankers traversed the Strait of Hormuz every day. During May, four did. This cessation of normal traffic through the strait has brought to life the nightmare scenario for world energy—Iran seizing control of the maritime choke point. On a net basis, about 15 million barrels a day have disappeared from supply, for a total loss of about 1.2 billion barrels over three months.

As the conflict heads into its fourth month, the oil market is at a juncture. So far prices have been modulated in financial markets by expectations of an imminent settlement and buffered in the physical

**The world's supply of fuel is much more diversified than it was during the energy crises of the 1970s.**

market by the drawing down of inventories. But inventories are shrinking. If the strait opens soon, prices will come down—though not to the low \$60s a barrel seen at the beginning of the year when an oversupply loomed. If the strait remains mostly closed, the draining of inventories will likely send prices back up over the next few months, straining the world economy.

Reopening the strait is a central point of the current negotiations. But

even a swift reopening doesn't mean a swift return to "normal." According to S&P Global's analysis, it would take up to six months to return to 80% of precrisis supply. First, the more than 170 tankers now floating in the Persian Gulf have to leave it. Then tankers would have to enter the Gulf to pick up oil stored in the Arab countries that line the Gulf. Then facilities in those countries damaged by missiles and drones would have to come back into operation. Repairing various facilities could take weeks, months or even years. And ship owners and tanker captains would also have to become confident that they can sail without the threat of drones or fast-boat attacks.

The turmoil has made clear how much has been learned about energy security over the past half century, mitigating what could have been a catastrophic energy shock.

Winston Churchill laid down the axiom of energy security on the eve of World War I when, as first lord of the admiralty, he converted the Royal Navy to oil from coal to gain speed and flexibility against the German fleet. "Safety and certainty in oil," he said, "lie in variety and variety alone." In other words, diversification of supply.

Today there is much more variety in world oil and natural gas than during the 1970s. The shale revolution has transformed the U.S. from the world's largest importer of oil to the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas and largest exporter of liquefied natural gas.

Overall, the Western Hemisphere now produces more oil than the Middle East did before the crisis.



A gasoline station in the District of Columbia.

Canada is the world's fourth-largest oil producer. Brazil produces four times as much oil as Venezuela; and in Guyana, where production began only seven years ago, output almost equals Venezuela's. In Argentina's Vaca Muerta region, shale oil production has grown sixfold since 2020. The current disruption will propel more oil and gas investment in the Western Hemisphere and Africa.

Diversification goes beyond oil and gas. Responding to the "tanker war" during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, Saudi Arabia built variety in the form of a pipeline system that now moves 7 million barrels of oil a day west to the Red Sea. Abu Dhabi built a pipeline looping around the Strait of Hormuz and plans to double capacity by 2027. France, which once depended on oil for electric

generation, now relies mainly on nuclear. Japan led the development of the LNG industry to push oil out of its electric generation. The growing scale of wind and solar adds further diversification for electric generation.

The crises of the 1970s gave rise to an international system for managing energy security. The International Energy Agency was established to coordinate national responses to crises and avoid a repetition of the bruising scramble among countries for oil that sent prices soaring. Strategic petroleum reserves were established to replace barrels lost to disruption. The IEA recently coordinated the release of oil from the strategic stocks of its member countries, including the U.S.

Previous crises showed that markets themselves also contribute to

energy security. They adjust faster than governments intervening to manage markets, which can make matters worse.

The U.S. gasoline lines of the 1970s weren't the result of the crises themselves. Rather they were manufactured by government policies: price controls and clumsy, bureaucratic allocation systems that dispatched gasoline to well-supplied regions and yanked it from regions in short supply.

Today's crisis has hit Asia hardest, due to its heavy dependence on oil and gas from the Gulf, and leading to shortfalls in supply. In response, governments have resorted to interventions to repress demand, such as rationing, issuing Covid-era like directives to work from home, and giving some domestic consumers priority over others. The U.S. is in a much better position than most other countries. As an energy exporter, America is benefiting from the revenue. The U.S. energy system is functioning efficiently, helping forestall a global economic crisis that could hit hard at home.

If faced with major physical shortages of fuel, governments may have little choice but to intervene more directly in markets. Any intervention should be done with great care. Allowing markets to balance supply and demand, rather than trying to circumvent them, is a basic lesson of energy security. Let's hope that lesson won't have to be relearned if the strait isn't reopened soon.

Mr. Yergin is vice chairman of S&P Global and author of "The Prize" and "The New Map."

## American Idle: The Work Ethic Goes Out of Style



**UPWARD MOBILITY**  
By Jason L. Riley

Maybe you've seen the old video clip on social media. It's the one in which comedian Chris Rock explains how to tell good from bad neighborhoods based simply on who isn't working in the middle of the day.

"If you're in any neighborhood in America at 12:15 in the afternoon on a Wednesday and you see women with sweatpants on, coming out the gym, pushing babies, riding bikes," Mr. Rock explains, "chances are, you're in a nice neighborhood. There's probably a Whole Foods nearby." But if "you see men in sweatpants smoking cigarettes, hanging with their boys, lifting weights in the yard, riding children's bicycles as their actual transportation, then you are in danger."

Mr. Rock's funny and insightful bit came to mind as I read last month's jobs report, which showed that the share of American men in the labor

force has dipped to record lows. According to the Department of Labor, 1 in 3 men were neither working nor looking for a job in April. Among males 20 and older, the 66% labor-force participation rate is down from 73% in 2006. Mr. Rock was highlighting the correlation between unemployment and crime, but public safety isn't the only concern raised by a large population of idle young males.

The premature absence of millions of able-bodied men from our workforce, combined with the continuing retirement of the Baby Boomers and significant reductions in immigration, bodes ill for the country. A life without gainful employment has become a viable alternative for an increasing number of American males. Covid job disruptions didn't help, but the problem of men in their prime working years (25 to 54) exiting the job market long predates the pandemic.

In his book, "Men Without Work," demographer Nicholas Eberstadt reported that the work rate for men 20

and older fell by more than 13 percentage points between 1965 and 2015. During that half-century, he added, "the fraction of men without jobs of any sort in the broad twenty-to-sixty-four group went from 10 percent of the total to almost 22 percent." And "the percentage of wholly jobless prime-age men shot from 6 percent to nearly 16 percent."

**One in 3 working-age American men aren't so much as looking for a job.**

The long-term rise in male joblessness doesn't stem from an inability to find employment. It results instead from an unwillingness to search for work. And while labor-force participation rates vary by race and ethnicity, factors other than hiring discrimination seem to be playing a larger role in the disparities. "The legacy of prejudice might seem to explain why prime-age male work rates and work-

force participation rates are lower for blacks than whites today. But they cannot explain why work rates and LFPRs for white men today are decidedly lower than they were for black men in 1965," Mr. Eberstadt wrote. "Nor can they explain why labor participation rates of married black men twenty-five-to-fifty-four are higher than for never-married white men in the same age group."

Some blame technological advancements and deindustrialization for the increase in male idleness, but those barriers are hardly insurmountable. Like married men who are trying to support their families, foreign-born males who come to the U.S. in search of work also tend to have higher work rates, notwithstanding globalization and other macroeconomic trends. Neither married men nor immigrants are stealing these jobs. Rather, they are seizing employment opportunities that others spurn.

The more likely culprit is a social safety net full of generous government benefits that allow men who

won't work to subsist. Welfare and disability programs at the state and federal level are well-funded by the political left, are easily gamed by design, and have become a significant source of income for men with no job and no interest in finding one. Because these men often have no problem mooching off the women who take them in, they're able to live on welfare payments sent to others in the same household.

Democrats in Washington often look to Europe as a social-welfare model for the U.S. A recent Journal editorial on Britain's workforce woes ought to give them pause. According to a new report from former Labour Health Secretary Alan Milburn, nearly a million Brits under 25 aren't employed, in school or in job training. "Nearly half of Britain's idle youth now claim to have a work-limiting disability," the Journal noted. And around "seven in 10 youth who claimed a disability benefit are still on it a decade later." Europe's large safety net isn't a model for America. It's a cautionary tale.

## Time to Apply the Lessons of the 2014 Ebola Outbreak

By John F. Kerry  
And Vanessa Kerry

As Ebola spread across West Africa in September 2014, the world was on the brink of catastrophe. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned that 1.4 million Africans could be infected by early 2015 if the outbreak wasn't halted.

Hospitals were overwhelmed. Health workers were dying. Governors in the U.S. worried that infected travelers would bring the disease here. But the solutions needed were in Africa, not at a terminal at Newark International Airport.

As secretary of state, one of us saw firsthand how indispensable the U.S. was in arresting the epidemic. As a physician and global health leader, the other has spent years helping countries strengthen the systems that stop outbreaks. Today, another Ebola outbreak is unfolding in Central Africa. Absent a more competent response than we have seen, the outcome could be tragic.

The World Health Organization declared the current outbreak in Congo "a public health emergency of international concern." More than 1,000 suspected cases have been reported. The

outbreak went undetected for weeks and crossed into Uganda. Contact tracing is lagging as the disease spreads in areas affected by armed conflict, displacement and poverty.

In response to the 2014 epidemic, the U.S. led a historic international public-health mobilization. President Obama treated Ebola as a humanitarian

**In Africa, the disease is back, and the need for American leadership has never been greater.**

ian emergency and a national-security priority. The strategy wasn't simply to keep Ebola out of the U.S. but to stop transmission at the source.

More than 3,500 U.S. personnel were deployed across West Africa. Dozens of ministerial-level entreaties by the State Department helped deliver contributions of medical personnel from the U.K. and allies across Europe. The U.S. put boots on the ground to build treatment centers and labs, train thousands of health workers, and support safe burial teams. Congress approved \$5.4 bil-

lion in emergency funding. Coordinators at the State Department ensured that the Defense Department, Health and Human Services Department, U.S. Agency for International Development, CDC and international partners all worked together. Approximately 28,600 people were infected and more than 11,000 died, but hundreds of thousands of lives were spared because the U.S. and the international community acted decisively.

Outbreaks are stopped locally, one community at a time. People must trust health workers. Families must cooperate with contact tracers. Burials must be safe. Clinics must have trained staff, protective equipment, lab support and functioning supply chains.

Unfortunately, many of these systems have been weakened. The dismantling of USAID; cuts to U.S. foreign assistance, vaccine initiatives, global health funding; and America's withdrawal from the WHO have left major gaps in international disease surveillance and response.

The networks that detect out-

breaks early, move supplies rapidly, and support front-line responders are often invisible. In Uganda last year, an Ebola outbreak was contained within weeks because trained health workers, emergency response teams and treatment infrastructure were already in place. Through Seed Global Health, we worked alongside the Ugandan government and partners to train hundreds of clinicians, equip facilities and strengthen emergency response long before the crisis emerged. The outbreak was declared over 12 weeks after it began.

Preparedness works. Delay doesn't, especially in countries like Congo, where capacity-building was abandoned.

The crisis sweeping Central Africa demands immediate action. The current U.S. response has focused heavily on border measures and screening protocols. But the most effective way to protect Americans is by helping Congo, its neighbors, the WHO, Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and front-line responders

who are positioned to contain transmission before it spreads further.

That means deploying technical expertise, not just money. Supporting laboratories and surveillance systems. Strengthening contact tracing. Expanding treatment centers. Ensuring medical supply chains. Training and protecting health workers. Building community trust.

The administration still has time to change course and mobilize America's scientific expertise, public-health capabilities and diplomatic leadership. The costs of waiting, in dollars and lives, are vastly greater than the costs of acting now.

The lesson from 2014 is simple: When America leads, outbreaks can be contained. When we hesitate, they grow.

Mr. Kerry served as U.S. secretary of state, 2013-17, and a distinguished fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Dr. Kerry is CEO of Seed Global Health and an associate professor of public health at Harvard University.

## Global Warming or Just Getting Old?

By Bjorn Lomborg

The World Health Organization is at it again. A top commission—stacked with a former European Union climate commissioner, a former prime minister of Iceland, other former ministers and environmental campaigners—has recommended that the health body declare climate change a global health emergency. The commission's headline evidence is a Lancet study showing heat deaths in Europe are rapidly rising, reaching 63,000 a year. This study shows that European heat-death risk has risen 82% since 1990.

But the study and the commission report both ignore a crucial factor: Heat mortality risk rises sharply with age, and Europe has aged dramatically. Since 1990, the share of Europeans over 70 has increased by 78%.

Aging alone explains virtually all the observed increase in heat deaths.

Any honest analysis of mortality in a rapidly aging society uses age-standardized death rates, which are comparable over time because they control for demographic change. The Global Burden of Disease, the world's leading mortality database, finds that Europe's standardized heat-death risk has changed only marginally since 1990. At current population, the increase amounts to fewer than 850 additional heat deaths. The WHO commission's unstandardized figures exaggerate the problem more than 50-fold.

This isn't a technical quibble. It is the difference between a genuine health crisis and a demographic inevitability being rebranded as a climate emergency.

The deeper dishonesty lies in an-

other omission. As temperatures rise, heat deaths increase but cold deaths fall. Cold deaths far outnumber heat deaths on every continent. Age-standardized data shows that cold death rates in Europe have declined by nearly 50% since 1990. At today's population levels, that translates to roughly 210,000 fewer cold deaths each year.

The WHO report not only exaggerates heat deaths; it conceals the fact that cold deaths have declined by approximately 250 times as much as heat deaths have risen. This is the suppression of inconvenient data to manufacture a crisis.

Mr. Lomborg is President of the Copenhagen Consensus, Visiting Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, and author of "False Alarm" and "Best Things First."

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# The FT View



## FINANCIAL TIMES

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## Cuba's unavoidable reckoning

*US pressure is of dubious morality, but Havana has little choice but to do a deal*

After several months of negotiations with the US that seem to have gone nowhere, Cuba faces a crunch point. The country's economy is suffering the sort of collapse usually seen only during wartime, partly due to pressure from the US and partly due to its own mismanagement. Many households have only a few hours of power a day and some other basic services are crumbling. At least 10 per cent of the population has left since Covid, which accelerated the slump; more could depart as the summer heat aggravates the misery.

Isolated and friendless, Cuba has little choice but to strike an agreement with the US that would see it begin to liberalise its economy and introduce modest political reforms. The alternative is a worsening humanitarian crisis.

While the talks have been ongoing, Havana appears to have been playing for time, perhaps hoping that a major setback for the Trump administration in the midterm elections will lead Washington to focus more at home.

It is perhaps not surprising that Cuba's leadership, inflexible at the best of times, has been reluctant to bend. Inasmuch as the revolution still retains some legitimacy, it is through its reputation for defying American bullying.

That bullying has become even more intense. Following its military intervention in Venezuela, which used to send Havana subsidised oil, the US has been operating a partial blockade of energy imports into Cuba. Washington has also begun to raise the prospect of taking military action, with the indictment on murder charges of former president Raúl Castro last month providing a potential legal pretext.

It is barely discussed in American public life, but this is a deeply cruel way to exert diplomatic pressure — the

modern-day equivalent of a siege. Even the best-run economy in the world would run into extreme economic difficulties if oil imports were completely shut off.

The problem for the Cuban leadership is that the country is anything but well run. Even amid US sanctions, a large part of Cuba's economic problems is homegrown. Enterprise is constantly stifled by the most lethargic and sprawling of bureaucracies. Gaesa, a company controlled by the military, dominates the strategic heights of the economy, squeezing out any challengers.

The crisis in the country's energy system is partly the consequence of a state-led decision to prioritise building new hotels rather than investing in additional power plants.

Whatever the dubious morality of Washington's methods, the agenda it is pushing for Cuba's economy is actually in Havana's interests. To have any chance of reviving living standards, Cuba needs at the very least to allow the

Even the best-run economy in the world would run into extreme economic difficulties if oil imports were completely shut off

private sector to play a much larger role in the economy — which would mean reducing the power of both the state bureaucracy and Gaesa. It will also need to permit more foreign investment, including from the diaspora in the US.

The prospect of US intervention is very real — despite the setbacks suffered in Iran and the high risk that it could lead Washington into a new quagmire.

Cuba's leaders fear that opening the economy will unleash broader forces that could sweep them from power. They have been able to avoid taking difficult decisions through the benevolence of outside powers — first the Soviet Union, and latterly Venezuela. But such assistance has vanished. Even the Chinese have long urged them to liberalise the economy.

In the minds of the Cuban leadership, to cede to Washington's pressure would be a humiliation — and a betrayal of what they have always stood for. But they are running out of options.

## Opinion Science

### Can the rush for vaccines slow the Ebola outbreak?

Andy Carter



The happiest ending, if that is the right phrase, for any disease outbreak is that it naturally burns itself out or is snuffed out by countermeasures, such as vaccines and drugs. For a new Ebola outbreak currently spreading inside and beyond the Democratic Republic of Congo, neither finale looks imminent.

Last week, the World Health Organization said there were more than 1,000 suspected cases of Bundibugyo virus disease, caused by a rare virus for which there is no vaccine or targeted treatment. Most of the 1,000-plus suspected cases are in DR Congo, with some in neighbouring Uganda, including the capital Kampala. The true toll, though, is thought to be higher. The virus is circulating in a border area characterised by conflict, poverty and displacement, making

### Dropping the ball on infectious diseases is a losing strategy for global security

testing and contact tracing difficult. The WHO declared it a public health emergency of international concern on May 17, though not a pandemic, with it posing the highest risk to those in the region.

Now scientists are marshalling knowledge culled from previous epidemics, including Covid, to tackle this unfamiliar foe. The non-profit Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (Cepi) announced on Monday that it would fast-track three experimental Bundibugyo vaccines into clinical testing and called for more vaccine candidates. The WHO will test potential treatments using the same no-frills protocol that showed remdesivir, an antiviral medication, could speed up recovery from Covid.

The outbreak also offers frustratingly familiar lessons in our poly-plague world: that serious health threats can escalate from under-the-radar pathogens, and preparedness matters; that aid cuts weaken the local networks that can spot outbreaks early; and that, with the US embroiled in a dispute over plans to quarantine its own returning citizens in Kenya, dropping the ball on infectious diseases is a losing strategy for global security and international relations.

Bundibugyo, named after a town in

Uganda, is one of six species of Orthobolavirus, four of which cause illness in humans. Outbreaks, which start with zoonotic spillovers, are most often linked to its sibling, Zaire, which drove the record 2014-16 epidemic in west Africa that killed more than 11,000, and the 2018 outbreak in DR Congo that killed nearly 2,300. There is an Ebola vaccine, Ervebo, that targets Zaire but, the WHO cautions, there is "limited and inconclusive" evidence that it can cross-protect against other Orthobolaviruses.

Meanwhile, scientists are sceptical that the Bundibugyo outbreak will fizzle out on its own. At a briefing last week, Christophe Fraser, from the Pandemic Sciences Institute at Oxford University, said epidemiological analysis suggested it had been spreading for about three months and was already outpacing the 2018 DR Congo outbreak. One bright spot: data from Uganda suggests a case fatality rate of 14 per cent, lower than for Zaire, which without medical care typically kills half or more of those infected; one nurse sickened by Bundibugyo is reported to have fully recovered.

Cepi head Richard Hatchett told the briefing it was "hard to fathom" how this outbreak would end without vaccines and treatments, given the affected area contains 15m people and armed groups suspicious of outsiders. Clinics have been targeted by arsonists and burials disrupted by grieving relatives trying to reclaim the bodies of loved ones. Local customs, such as washing bodies before burial, are known to spread the disease.

One of the fast-tracked experimental vaccines, developed by the International Aids Vaccine Initiative, uses the same technology as Ervebo; Cepi is giving IAVI around \$5m to produce a "master virus seed" stock, the starting material for a vaccine. About \$50m is earmarked for early testing of Moderna's mRNA Bundibugyo vaccine candidate. Nearly \$9m will go to the team behind the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid jab, with the Serum Institute of India again partnering to make doses of ChAdOx1 Bundibugyo — designed to boost antibodies and T-cells — hopefully ready for human testing in two to three months.

Oxford University scientists will also play a leading role in the therapeutics trial, testing remdesivir and a monoclonal antibody known as MBP134. Close contacts of confirmed cases may be given the antiviral medication obeldesivir, experimentally, to test whether post-exposure prophylaxis can prevent disease developing.

Bundibugyo might be a viral stranger but the sense of foreboding it has stirred, and the desperate race for effective vaccines and treatments, looks grimly familiar.

The writer is a science commentator

## Letters

### McKinsey bets on consulting's future

Your Lex note (May 25) frames outcome-linked fee setting as an AI-era experiment, as if consulting firms are scrambling to adapt. That's not the story from where I sit, advising clients around the world for the past 15 years.

More than 30 per cent of McKinsey's fees are already tied directly to client outcomes, and that share has been growing for years, driven much more by our own rethinking of how to align fees to impact, than by client pressure.

If a client pays for impact rather than activity, the consultant has skin in the

game, and that tends to produce better results. Firms like ours have been moving this way for decades, adding technology, focusing on delivery, and driving change to what was once purely advisory. Our approach to pricing followed that model, not the other way around.

The call centre bot comparison simply doesn't hold up. AI is helping us accelerate analysis and get to the best answer faster. It's not replacing the judgment a human brings when recommending what actions to take

now or what to shelve until the next quarter, or the ability to then partner on implementing that recommendation today. Outcome-based pricing acknowledges that judgment belongs to people, while adding a level of accountability that professional services have traditionally eschewed. That's a bet on consulting's future rather than a sign of its demise.

**Shelley Stewart III**  
Senior Partner and Global Leader,  
Insights, Reputation & Engagement,  
McKinsey & Company, New York, NY, US

### A significant flaw in Blair's critique of net zero

Your coverage of Tony Blair's new essay ("Blair criticises Burnham for leftwing 'delusion'", Report, May 27) missed a significant flaw in his argument. While he rightly emphasised the importance that "actions match the words on growth", he yet again demonstrated a lack of understanding of how the net zero transition away from fossil fuels drives economic growth.

Our current dependence on fossil fuels is at the core of high energy bills. Drilling for more oil and gas in the North Sea will not stop the UK being vulnerable to volatile prices in international markets for insecure imports. Instability undermines growth.

The UK's economic growth and competitiveness will be boosted by stronger investment in the grid and renewables, along with the more efficient and less polluting technologies of tomorrow. Over the medium term, the clean is cheaper and more secure than the dirty. Investing in the new technologies drives the growth story of the future.

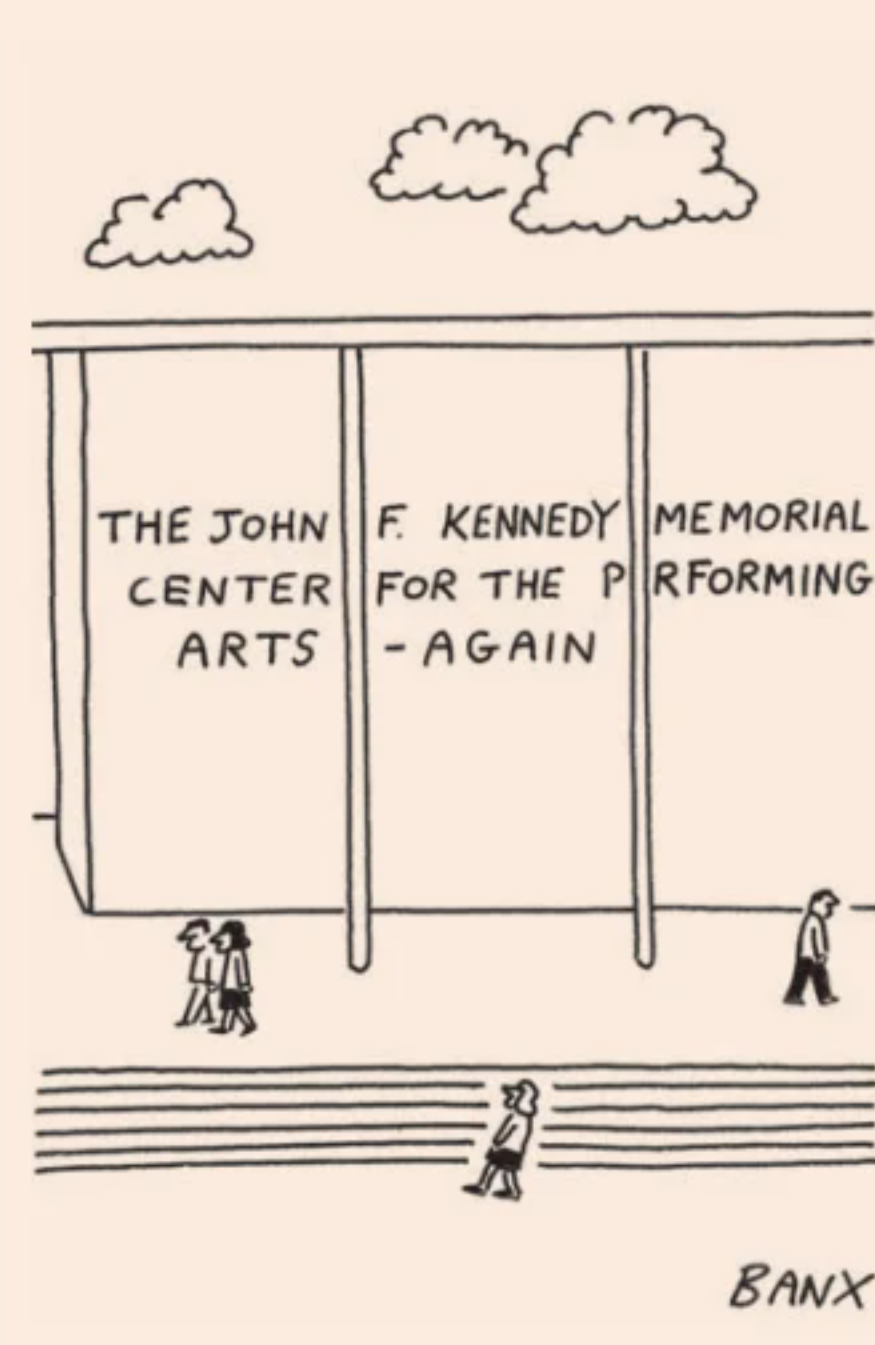
Propping up the polluting and inefficient industries of yesterday, including fossil-fuel production, would not make the UK more competitive. Furthermore, it would divert attention from the task of creating new opportunities as we manage an industry, North Sea oil and gas, with high costs and in inevitable decline.

The UK has been a leader in the transition away from the dirty, destructive models of the past, particularly under the leadership of Blair when he was prime minister. If the UK now backs away, the effect on commitment across the world could be severe. Delay is dangerous and would undermine the future of us all.

**Nicholas Stern**  
IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government, London School of Economics and Political Science, London WC2, UK

### In AI, it's not all about who can automate the fastest

The recent articles on AI in consulting, public services and robotaxis (Report, May 25; AI Shift, May 25; and Opinion, May 25) all point to a deeper issue than productivity. AI is not merely being adopted by existing systems; it is changing the behaviour of those systems.



other road users behave. These are not isolated implementation problems. They are system effects. Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* remains relevant because it reminds us that organisations too often look for individual causes rather than recurring structures.

When facing a recurring problem, we should stop asking only, "Who/what caused this?" and ask, "What system keeps producing this?"

The risk is that AI improves local efficiency while worsening system-level outcomes. The winners will not be those who automate fastest, but those who understand the feedback loops they are creating.

**S Cheng**  
London N10, UK

### The weakness of Australia's preferential voting system

Andrew Catsaras (Letters, June 1) advocates the adoption of Australian-style elections in the UK to guard against "the tyranny of the minority".

But our mix of full preferential voting (every candidate must be ranked) and proportional representation promotes the proliferation of micro-parties representing hyper-specific interests.

There may be more than a hundred parties on a ballot paper.

No mystery who the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party represent but how many know the Fusion Party resulted from the amalgamation of the Science, Pirate, Secular, Vote Planet, and Climate Change Justice parties?

Even without winning seats, fringe parties can influence politics by preference swapping. Elected candidates may hold the balance of power and extract heavy concessions.

Australia cycled through six prime ministers in eight years while the UK is heading for its seventh in a decade. This is where the problem lies; fiddling with the voting system won't help.

**Walter Goe**  
Sydney, NSW, Australia

### Why churches now face quiz nights and cake sales

Like many other FT readers, I was taken aback by Labour MP Jeevun Sandher's "taxing for growth" idea as explained in Chris Smyth's report "Loyalists urge PM to 'tax for growth'" (May 5).

One of the most depressing things about this government is that it thinks it can spend taxpayers' money more efficiently than anyone else but fails to see the negative effect it has on all concerned. It seems all pervasive but one niche area illustrates the problem.

In 2001 Gordon Brown introduced VAT relief on repairs to listed places of worship. This was a lifeline to many small communities who did not want their historic church to fall into disrepair under their watch. This scheme has now been abolished and replaced with a £48m grant that the government can "target". The government can therefore direct its largesse where it wants to, but small communities trying to muster the energy to raise funds to repair their church have an extra 20 per cent to find.

The government's argument is that eight out of 10 communities that have carried out repairs would have done so whatever happens. But it doesn't seem fair to expect those who are making the effort to do the right thing to have to pay an extra 20 per cent, which will require countless quiz nights and cake sales.

It is depressing that the default option nowadays seems to be to sit and wait for the government to provide, rather than being encouraged to help ourselves.

**Alison Garne**  
Fairford, Gloucestershire, UK

### Try this thought experiment on ChatGPT

Imagine we had given a single company the keys to every library in the world and allowed it to charge admission. That this arrangement would have generated enormous wealth for the company is obvious. But would it have maximised innovation, discovery and prosperity overall? Probably not, which is why we never did it ("The UK must embrace its libraries in the age of AI", Opinion, May 19).

Yet we may now be doing something close to it. Systems like ChatGPT and Claude are, in essence, conversational interfaces to humanity's accumulated written knowledge — and their value lies not in what they have built but in what they will control.

If free access to knowledge maximises prosperity, the infrastructure for access should be publicly governed — accessible to all, owned by none.

**Antonio Ciccone**  
Professor of Economics, University of Mannheim, Germany

### Fall in value of retirement flats tells its own story

The plunge in values of many retirement community apartments is a symptom of a flawed development financing plan ("Next stop: buy or rent?", House & Home, FT Weekend, February 21).

In the UK, developers of such communities take all their profits from the full completion of all sales. From this they also have to finance the cost of all the amenity buildings that provide all the various services such as hospitality and healthcare. These buildings can only be sold once to an investor, if they go that route, or are mortgaged.

Either way the developer will pay a lease or the finance costs. Then he has to provide the basic services paid from a service charge and provide nursing and other care and staff hospitality activities with their attendant staff costs.

All this is marginal or unprofitable and has to come from charges to residents and also will factor in the aforementioned lease and loan costs.

In America, many retirement communities are similarly organised in the provision of services, but apartments are sold to elderly people on a "fee simple determinable title basis" whereby the purchaser pays a non-refundable premium to the developer (grantor) for the right to live in the apartment until they die.

This premium is calculated on an actuarial formula taking into account the underlying value of the apartment and age and health of the resident.

Plainly the younger and healthier the applicant the larger the premium and vice versa.

This way a developer can be expected to get many future capital revenues from one apartment as people die (or have to be moved to an acute care setting) and are replaced.

Service and other charges are lower as developers are able to put in place more sophisticated financing of the amenity buildings from day one and benefit from a wider range of revenues from activities such as golf, which developers in the UK do not have space for and could not afford the additional costs involved.

I know of one American development where a lady moved in on this basis and died the following day. The developer refunded her estate the whole amount under those sad circumstances.

**Philip Howard**  
Director, Public Services Solutions,  
London W1, UK

### Invoking Fowler's defence of the split infinitive

Charlie Metcalfe ("AI's heinous split infinitive", Letters, May 27) disinters an ancient shibboleth to criticise AI for splitting an infinitive.

A century ago, in *Modern English Usage*, HW Fowler said the vast majority of English speakers neither know nor care what a split infinitive is and are "happy folk, to be envied".

To stubbornly resist is a human not an AI failing.

**Beau Nidal**  
Laeken, Brussels, Belgium

OPINION ON FT.COM  
EU's dealmaking machine grinds steadily on Brussels churns out preferential trade agreements, writes Alan Beattie  
www.ft.com/trade-secrets  
Goldman Sachs: it isn't coming home Major footballing nations generally get a World Cup boost, with the notable exception of England, writes Louis Ashworth  
www.ft.com/alphaville

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# Opinion

## Why young America is trending socialist

POLITICS

Edward Luce



Among the best-known younger Democrats, two – Zohran Mamdani, New York’s mayor, and New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – call themselves socialists. A third, James Talarico, a Democratic Senate nominee, says he is a Christian progressive. But he is running in Texas, so is treated as a socialist regardless.

More than a third of Americans under 30 view “communism” favourably, according to a Cato poll last year. Almost two-thirds look kindly on socialism. It is easy to dismiss this as youthful misguidance. Gen Z is variously written off as work-shy, entitled, unambitious and ignorant. But there is nothing in their politics nearly as drug-inspired as the late 1960s radicalism of their grandparents. It is not hippie to wish for affordable housing or to fear AI’s impact on your earnings potential. Nor is it Stalinist to want universal health insurance.

That explains why the 41-year-old

likely Senate candidate in Maine, Graham Platero, is staving off scandals that would have finished off candidates in earlier cycles. He once had a skull-and-bones tattoo of a symbol used by Hitler’s Waffen-SS and has been caught sending extramarital sexts. Yet his poll lead is sufficiently large to have forced Maine’s competent and scandal-free governor,

**Coming to grips with the country’s volatility is futile without engaging with the deep scepticism of Gen Z**

Janet Mills, to drop out of the race. Mills is 78. She, unlike Platero, had no plans for single-payer healthcare or, until she flip-flopped, to tax America’s ultra-wealthy. Platero’s seeming immunity from scandal shows that Bernie Sanders-

style left populism is still potent.

The Democratic split over Platero betrays a much deeper philosophical divide. Campaign professionals and mostly older elected Democrats are terrified of squandering their moral capital against Donald Trump because of Platero’s nomination. They also fear that a Platero contest against Susan Collins, the state’s veteran moderate Republican, could imperil the party’s chances of winning the Senate in November.

But Platero is appealing to precisely those groups Democrats most urgently need to win back, especially the young and working class. Those who have done it, such as Mamdani, tend to get written off as irrelevant to middle America. Mamdani’s socialist campaign to run the city that is still the headquarters of global capitalism was powered by the young and the blue collar. Some say he won in spite of his hostility to Israel. It was likelier to have helped. Reflexive

loyalty to Israel is seen as another establishment trait.

That same chasm is also visible on the right. Younger Maga Republicans – beyond so-called podcast populists like Tucker Carlson and Candace Owens – are routinely hostile to Israel. Older Republicans tend to be Israel right or wrong. The same root that feeds flirtation with communism on the left is also fuelling antisemitism on the right. It is no use telling a generation that their views are un-American. The most striking often-pollled finding about Gen Z is their lack of flag-waving patriotism. More than any previous generation at that or any age, Gen Z rejects the idea of America as morally special.

Such alienation is angrier than the “peace and love” of the flower power generation. Luigi Mangione, the man accused of murdering a healthcare executive in late 2024, is still a vigilante folk hero to many young Americans on

the left and right – and not just because of his looks. Gen Z voters are far more likely to approve of violence to settle political disputes than their elders. They are also far less trusting of democracy.

The more thoughtful Democrats are aware that simply opposing Trump is not enough to win young people’s loyalty. Trump’s well-earned unpopularity may be enough for them to regain the House of Representatives, and maybe the Senate, in November. But it will be insufficient in 2028. The party has an ingrained habit of postponing serious thought until after the next election, which, like tomorrow, never comes.

Democrats will not get many more chances to show they can make the system deliver for the majority. Overlooking the sometimes troubling but largely rational complaints of America’s Gen Z would assure their failure.

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When they go low, we go high,” is a Democratic mantra. But it only works if people think liberals have the credibility to trumpet high morals. Not enough of America does. To Gen Z voters, such virtue signalling comes straight from the self-serving “boomer” playbook. The young are no likelier to respect Democratic ethics appeals than they are to take up bridge. Coming to grips with America’s volatile politics is futile without engaging with the deep scepticism of its young.

## A guide for the perplexed on AI

Martin Wolf Economics



Is the technology a boon, bane or bubble? And is humanity capable of ensuring it is more of the first than the second?

How should someone who knows next to nothing about artificial intelligence think about its implications for humanity? While it is cheeky to use the formulation of the Jewish sage Maimonides when tackling the relationship between revelation and philosophy, it is not absurd. After all, even the greatest sage cannot fully understand divinity. So, the fact that I do not understand the implications of AI should not prevent me from struggling to do so. Maybe my struggles will also help others.

So, here goes. The question I wish to consider is: “AI boon, bane or bubble?” Moreover, once we have considered the answers, are there any choices humanity can realistically make to ensure it is far more of the first than the second, or are we doomed to be dragged behind the AI chariot, willy-nilly, wherever it goes?

The answer to the question about whether it is merely a bubble will help to set the ground for answering these as well. So, what might it mean for AI to be a bubble? There are two possibilities.

One is that something important is indeed happening. But markets cannot estimate the returns and are being driven into a speculative frenzy. This, in turn, is fuelling an unsustainable (and to some degree unprofitable) surge in investment. Sooner or later, this bubble will burst, stock prices will collapse, many old and new businesses will go bankrupt and the investment will subside. But we will be left, as we were after,

say, the railway booms of the 19th century and the dotcom bubble of the 1990s, with useful infrastructure: tracks, in the case of the former, and fibre optic cable, in the case of the latter. Such bubbles can transform the world.

The other possibility is that AI is nonsense. The Mississippi and South Sea bubbles of the early 18th century in France and England come to mind: they burst, ruined some, and changed little.

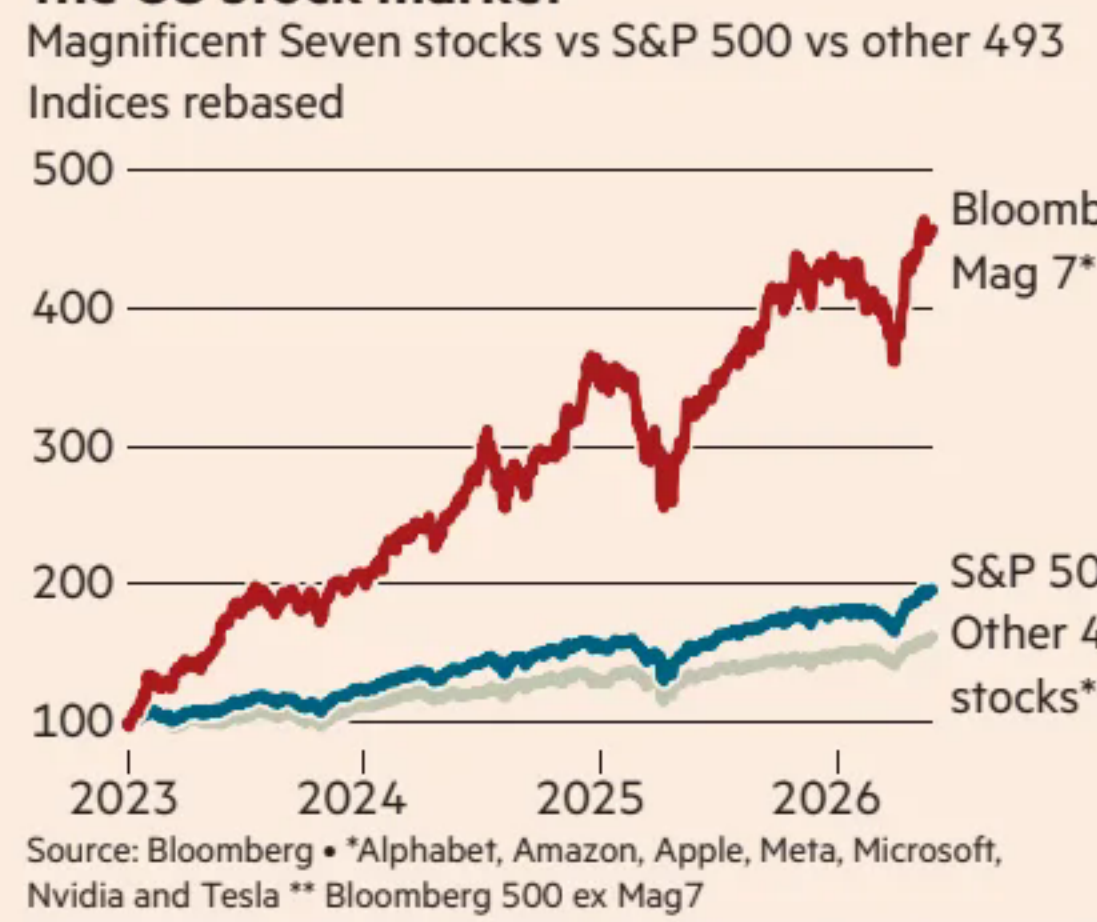
So, is what is happening to AI a bubble at all and if so of which kind? The consensus, which I (tentatively) share, is that AI is real. Whether we are on the threshold of artificial general intelligence, as Demis Hassabis of Google DeepMind argues, I have no idea. But today’s models seem impressive, especially in their “agentic” role.

Moreover, as VC investor Rubén Domínguez Ibar notes in his newsletter The AI Corner, some providers, notably Anthropic, are generating huge rises in revenue, which helps explain the huge valuations expected in initial public offerings. So, the market is indeed bubbly, but it appears based on reality.

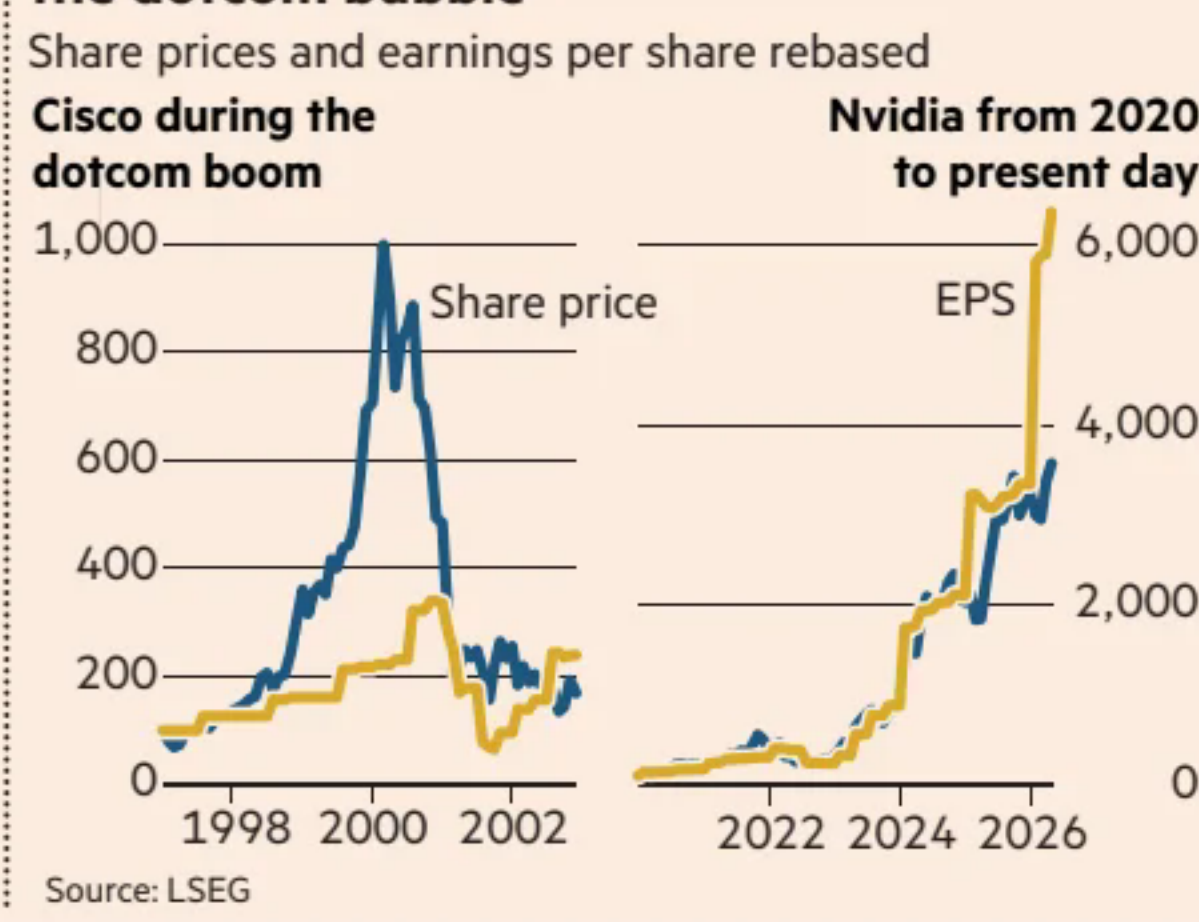
Some have made comparisons between the spectacular surge in the shares of Nvidia with the not dissimilar performance of Cisco in the dotcom bubble. But they note a difference: Nvidia’s earnings have soared, while Cisco’s net income merely doubled in the two years to July 2000. Moreover, analysis from the Peterson Institute for International Economics suggests AI is already generating a huge hidden



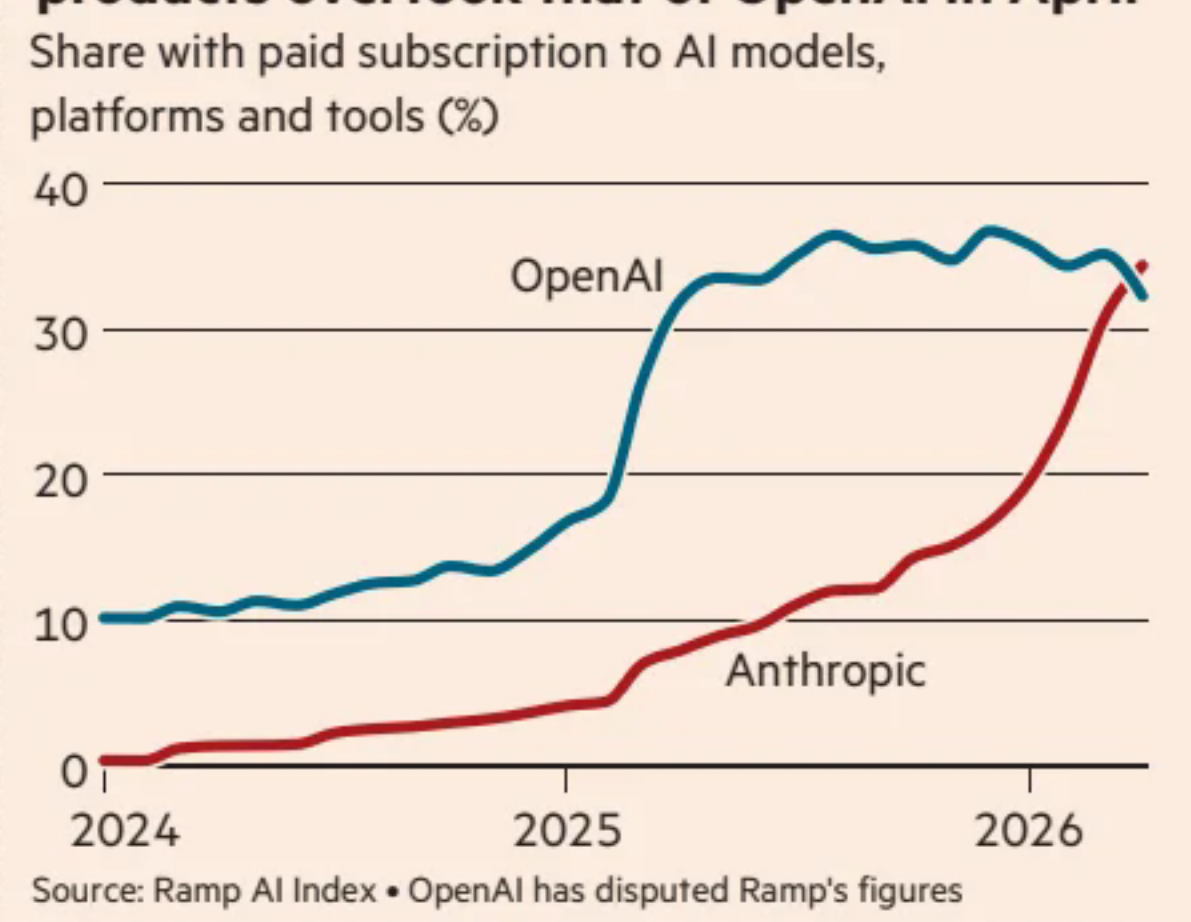
**The Magnificent Seven continue to drive the US stock market**



**This really does not look like the dotcom bubble**



**US business adoption of Anthropic products overtook that of OpenAI in April**



jump in US real GDP. (See charts.)

It is impossible to say the markets are “right” in judging the profitability of the current and prospective AI champions. It is also possible that the earnings we are seeing in Nvidia (or even the revenue in Anthropic) will not be sustained when the investment surge and AI-hype subside. But AI is not just a bubble, it has reality.

This then brings us to “the boon or bane” question. I had a discussion with ChatGPT (what else?) about this. After

**If it develops in the ways that seem likely, it might change almost everything: it is indeed existential**

some to-ing and fro-ing, we listed the top boons and banes as follows.

First, the boons: better healthcare; an acceleration of science; far higher productivity; education at scale; faster progress on climate and clean energy; improved accessibility and inclusion (speech-to-text and automatic translation); improved public services; better transportation and safer work environments; improvements in creativity and cultural expression; and improved access to human knowledge worldwide.

Then, the banes: loss of human control and accountability; lethal new weapons (notably pathogens, but other weaponry too, some in the hands of terrorists); mass unemployment; vast concentrations of power in the hands of monsters; mass surveillance and authoritarian control; even more misin-

formation and manipulation; huge threats to cyber security; entrenchment of bias and discrimination masked as “objectivity”; erosion of human agency and skill; and the environmental costs of vastly resource-intensive systems.

What is one to make of these (entirely plausible) lists? My first conclusion is that AI is not just any “general purpose technology”. If it develops in the ways that seem likely, it might change almost everything: AI is indeed existential. If humanity had any collective sense (which it does not) and had the capacity to stop itself (which it does not), it would, I think, pause the whole thing.

Second is that AI has inevitably unleashed a competition among businesses and governments. My assumption is that anything such a technology can do will then be done. So, we are

going to see competitive races for both the boons and the banes.

My third is that the relatively successful controls on nuclear proliferation and the availability of new drugs cannot be precedents. That is because AI will not be the property solely of states, as nuclear weapons have (so far) been, and it is not a single class of products, like drugs. It is polyvalent.

ChatGPT suggested humanity should stop treating technological capability as the same thing as progress, which should mean flourishing in conditions of “safety, liberty and legitimacy”. Pope Leo agrees: build “for the common good”, he says in his encyclical. But is this possible and if so, how? I will consider that next week.

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Chris Miller

Donald Trump and Xi Jinping both smiled for the cameras at their summit last month but neither side has mistaken the tech truce for peace. Beijing has continued shipping some rare-earth magnets to the US, while Washington will postpone long-delayed restrictions on Chinese chipmakers. Behind the scenes, however, each side is sharpening its knives for a new wave of supply chain conflict.

Right before the summit, Beijing announced a sweeping set of regulations to penalise foreign companies for complying with third-party sanc-

tions. This will be a powerful tool to squeeze multinationals to take China’s side amid future supply chain escalation.

Meanwhile, in Washington, Congress has pushed the White House towards a tougher line. The Republican-controlled House Foreign Affairs Committee has advanced a large package of export control bills. The Match Act would close loopholes that allow US allies more scope to sell chipmaking equipment to China than US companies have. Both the House and Senate have also proposed legislation to limit the ability of American companies to sell AI chips to China.

If both Beijing and Washington foresee the tech war continuing, what’s the logic of a truce? The answer is time.

China believes that it is winning the race for advanced manufacturing – and in key sectors such as batteries and autos, it is. The US Chamber of

Commerce recently released a report finding that China has a “dominant position in global value chains”. Nvidia, which has lobbied hard to sell its chips there, is an exception. Most US companies see China more as a rising competitor than a growing market.

**Behind the scenes, each side is sharpening its knives for a new wave of supply chain conflict**

China’s prowess in advanced manufacturing has even provoked Europe into throwing up trade barriers. Brussels is considering intensified restrictions via its proposed Industrial Accelerator Act. Yet Beijing has powerful tools to counter this. Last year, China’s export restrictions on rare earth mag-

nets and Nexperia, a foundational semiconductor manufacturer, demonstrated its ability to choke European industrial production.

The US is also struggling to de-risk from Chinese supply chains. Washington may be pouring money into critical minerals projects but these will take time to materialise. Meanwhile, for the simpler semiconductors that undergird industrial production, the US is increasingly dependent on Chinese supply. Beijing has good reason to believe that its advanced manufacturing exports will continue to surge – and that Europe, the US and other key markets will fail to mount a concerted response. When it comes to industrial output, time may be on China’s side.

What is Washington’s theory of the truce? Silicon Valley types talk of being “AGI pilled” – a reference to the film *The Matrix* – when referring to the belief that AI will become increasingly capable

and economically transformative. The US government seems to be betting that AI will dramatically enhance US power, too.

Despite claims that China is rapidly diffusing AI across its economy, US companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic have 100 times more revenue than China’s leading AI start-ups. The capabilities of Anthropic’s latest Mythos AI model so spooked the White House that it is now debating AI regulation, despite previously criticising the Biden administration for doing so. The US has just placed a \$9bn AI chip order for its spy agencies. This suggests US intelligence will have more computing power than many of China’s leading AI model companies.

Beijing doesn’t appear worried. When Chinese leaders talk about “great changes unseen in a century”, they’re not talking about AI transforming geopolitics. If Xi was worried about access

to computing power, he would have accepted the Nvidia H200 chips that Trump is so keen to sell.

True, Beijing blocked Meta’s purchase of Manus, a popular Chinese-founded AI application, and is reportedly holding the passports of leading Chinese AI researchers to prevent unauthorised travel.

Yet in terms of spending, China is still pouring disproportionate sums into advanced manufacturing sectors instead of AI data centres. The disruptions of Hormuz, which vindicated China’s decision to stockpile industrial inputs, resonated more strongly in Beijing than the cyber security implications of Mythos.

Instead of being AGI-pilled, Xi and other Chinese leaders are industrial output-pilled. The next year will test which of these approaches is more valuable.

*The writer is author of ‘Chip War’*

## The China-US tech truce is fragile

## OPINION

## The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

## EDITORIALS

## Trump's 'weaponization fund' retreat

## CONGRESS CAN STILL PLUG THE HOLE EXPOSED BY THE PLAN.

FOR ALL THE TALK of a runaway executive, Congress still has the power of the purse. On Tuesday, lawmakers showed that by forcing the administration to abandon its proposed \$1.8 billion "Anti-Weaponization Fund" for doling out money to political allies.

The Justice Department announced the fund last month as part of a settlement of President Donald Trump's \$10 billion lawsuit against his own government over the leak of his tax returns during his first administration. The idea was that instead of paying Trump or his family members who were harmed by the breach, the fund would pay other people the administration considers victims of government abuse — potentially including participants in the riot on Jan. 6, 2021.

GOP members of Congress balked at the idea of such payouts, and they used the forthcoming budget bill as leverage to stop them. The administration needs Congress to pass a \$72 billion bill to

fund border enforcement. Some GOP lawmakers conveyed that they would block the bill if the fund moved forward.

On Tuesday, the administration bowed to that political reality, with acting attorney general Todd Blanche telling a House committee: "We are not moving forward with the fund, period."

That's a welcome concession, but Congress shouldn't rest on its laurels. The Trump administration isn't afraid of trying to lawyer its way out of commitments. Consider how it promised it would pay back tariff payments if they were ruled unlawful but is now fighting to delay some of the refunds.

Once the spending bill passes, Congress loses its leverage, so it might be worth trying to codify the fund's elimi-

nation into the legislation.

After all, the Trump administration was exploiting a weakness in the law that past administrations have exploited as well, if less flagrantly. The Justice Department has at its disposal a Judgment Fund — unlimited since 1977 — that can be used to resolve lawsuits by paying individuals and groups without much accountability. There's nothing stopping an administration from settling meritless lawsuits with friendly groups and spending large sums without Congress's permission.

The best resolution to this fiasco would be for Congress to create new controls on the settlement fund. They could limit the size of payouts, the types of lawsuits that can be settled and who can be paid. They could also require more judicial oversight.

Controlling the Judgment Fund would be an act of good constitutional hygiene, and it ought to be bipartisan. Otherwise, Trump won't be the last president to abuse it.

## A terrible choice for acting director of national intelligence

## THE VACANCIES ACT COULD LET BILL PULTE STAY UNTIL JANUARY, PLENTY OF TIME TO INFLICT REAL DAMAGE.



KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

Bill Pulte speaks to reporters at the White House in January.

lawfare against the president's perceived enemies, from Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook to New York Attorney General Letitia James (D) and Sen. Adam Schiff (D-California).

Being DNI isn't a part-time job. The director is charged with coordinating the country's 18 spy agencies. But Trump said Pulte plans to stay on as director of

the FHFA, as well as chairman of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Trump didn't say whether he plans to nominate Pulte, which would require Senate confirmation. Enough Republicans would likely object that he couldn't make it through. Under the Vacancies Act, Pulte may serve 210 days before being confirmed by the Senate. That would let him stay on until early next year.

That's more than enough time to inflict damage on an intelligence community that is supposed to stay outside the political fray. A good DNI is willing to speak truth to power. Even if Trump has some legitimate frustrations with the intelligence community dating to his 2016 campaign, unleashing Pulte is not going to lead to better and more objective intelligence.

His presence will undermine, or at least cast doubt, on the credibility of the intelligence community's work product.

SOMEHOW PRESIDENT Donald Trump managed to find someone less qualified than Tulsi Gabbard to replace her as interim director of national intelligence. Gabbard is a former congresswoman and combat veteran. Bill Pulte, named Tuesday by Trump, is a partisan sycophant who has none of the "extensive national security expertise" that the law requires of a DNI nominee.

Pulte has used his privileged access to mortgage records as director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency to ingratiate himself with Trump by championing

## Communist China tries to steal the free-market mantle from America

CHINA RECENTLY implemented a "zero-tariff" policy for 53 countries in Africa. As Chinese and African citizens increasingly reap the mutual benefits of trade, America is losing out by heading in the opposite direction.

China imports mostly raw materials and resources from Africa — crude oil, copper, cobalt, agricultural products and unprocessed minerals. Removing import taxes mean that Chinese consumers will benefit from lower prices and Chinese companies will pay less for inputs into their own manufacturing.

Tax-free imports to China won't alone help the continent move up the value chain, but they provide African nations with much-needed hard currency. The young continent also benefits from imports of higher value manufactured goods that improve lives.

There are also geopolitical dividends. China's leaders are presenting their country as a stable trading partner, capitalizing on the confusion and anger unleashed by the Trump administration's global tariff regime.

It's more than a little rich for China to be positioning itself as the defender of free markets. China's state-capitalist economic model, its undervalued currency and an economic policy that favors investment over domestic consumption have given the country a record trade surplus with the rest of the world.

Yet the country's open-access policy generates goodwill and gives Beijing valuable propaganda points in a rivalry for influence across the world's fastest-growing continent. That's an opportunity squandered by President Donald Trump's trade wars and perceived downgrading of the importance of Africa.

The U.S. has its own successful trade preference pact with Africa called



KEVIN FRAYER/GETTY IMAGES

A Chinese woman has a Kenyan flag painted on her cheek as she dances during Africa Day in Beijing on May 23. The event was held to mark the 70th anniversary of China-Africa diplomatic ties.

AGOA, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which granted duty-free access to a range of products in eligible countries. The agreement helped build up the textile industry in Lesotho, for example, and the automotive industry in South Africa.

In 2000, South Africa's automotive exports were \$195 million. Because of American cooperation, the figure reached \$2.38 billion in 2024.

AGOA was allowed to temporarily lapse on Sept. 30. In February, Trump signed a retroactive extension that will expire at the end of 2026. Without the certainty of a longer-term extension, AGOA is now on life support. Meanwhile, his across-the-board global 10 percent tariffs eroded the duty-free benefits of AGOA.

Early data from 2026 shows steep declines. The U.S. imported \$10.61 billion from Africa between January and the end of March. That's a drop of 19.7 percent from a year ago. U.S. imports from South Africa fell from \$7 billion to \$2.67 billion. Small landlocked Lesotho saw its exports to the U.S. drop from \$56.6 million to \$33.6 million, more than 40 percent, as orders dried up and factories closed.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has not visited sub-Saharan Africa since being sworn in last year. His Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, has continued the tradition of making Africa the first annual visit for Beijing's top diplomat.

China's offer may be self-serving, but America's retreat is self-defeating.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



KEN CEDENO/REUTERS

Iranian Americans and supporters of the National Council of Resistance of Iran hold flags in D.C. on May 16.

## No, I do not support the Iranian regime

Danielle Pletka's April 21 op-ed, "These relatives of foreign thugs called America home. No more," attacked me, and I would like to set the record straight.

First, I'm not an Iranian here on a visa, as Pletka implied; I am an American. Second, I'm not kin to an authoritarian. In 1978, my father, Ebrahim Yazdi, supported the revolution and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, precisely because Khomeini promised not to become an autocrat. And when Khomeini broke that promise, my father was one of the first to stand up to him and the extremists who hijacked that revolution.

My father could have fled Iran at any time. Instead, he took responsibility for his error, stayed in Iran and devoted the rest of his life to fighting autocracy. For this, he and members of his Freedom Movement were repeatedly arrested, imprisoned and beaten. To mention Ebrahim Yazdi's support for the revolution while omitting his decades of opposition to the regime is a remarkable distortion.

On NPR in January, I made my negative views of the government of Iran quite clear, leaving no room for Pletka to claim that I am a regime supporter. In that interview, I also expressed doubts that bombing Iran will help average Iranians, which is now clear, and what's worse, the war has strengthened those in power. The majority of Americans also say military action against Iran was a mistake, according to a Washington Post-ABC News-Ipsos poll last month, including the majority of Iranian-Americans, according to a National Iranian American Council-Zogby poll in March.

I suggest that Pletka take a lesson from my father and devote herself to helping repair the harm the Iran war has done to Iranians, Israelis and Americans.

Yousef Yazdi, Baltimore

## Hold D.C. teens accountable

Regarding the May 19 editorial "Burritos with a side of teen violence":

I'm a youth mentor, and I understand the frustration that led U.S. Attorney for D.C. Jeanine Pirro to announce the plan to prosecute parents of juveniles who wreak havoc in D.C., especially because kids have designated, appropriate recreation spaces in the city to socialize. The juveniles in the Chipotle brawl video should know the difference between right and wrong, but they don't seem to care about the consequences of their actions. Additionally, these incidents impact the economy. The Chipotle brawl video is enough to deter customers from patronizing this business and others.

D.C. must address kids' lack of fear of being held accountable by both parents and city officials, and officials need more tools to keep kids in line, such as therapeutic boarding schools.

Greg Raleigh, Washington

## Context behind the increase in policing

The implication in the May 21 Metro article "Gripes against police increase" that an increase in police complaints is inherently negative or unusual deserves closer scrutiny.

The Metropolitan Police Department has roughly 3,100 officers, and the federal government's Safe and Beautiful Task Force reportedly deployed a comparable number of additional personnel in D.C. A near-doubling of visible enforcement presence would reasonably increase the number of civilian-officer interactions and, by extension, the opportunity for complaints.

With that context, the rise in formal

complaints from 470 to 587 (approximately 25 percent) appears proportionate, if not modest, relative to the scale of increased engagement. At the same time, violent crime declined by 29 percent last year compared with 2024, suggesting that the expanded presence may have delivered measurable public safety benefits.

However, complaint volume alone is an incomplete metric. A more meaningful assessment would examine the nature and disposition of those complaints. Without this level of analysis, it is difficult to draw conclusions about trends in officer behavior or accountability.

Expanded use of body-worn cameras and data-driven review processes could further improve transparency and enable continuous improvement by grounding discussions in detailed evidence rather than raw counts.

Steve Henry, Springfield

## A better way to grade

Vincent Phillip Muñoz's May 27 op-ed, "Harvard's solution won't stop runaway A's. This could..." critiqued Harvard's new grading policy, but I believe that he focused on the wrong side of a common target. His proposal for more transparent transcripts makes sense, but it puts stress on achieving perfect grades instead of focusing on educational content.

Brown University has operated without mandatory grades for decades. Students choose among pass/fail classes; there's no race to have a higher grade-point average. By allowing students to orchestrate their own education, Brown's open curriculum pathway aims to increase academic motivation, decrease GPA anxiety and graduate individuals with a highly defined sense of purpose. When students stop competing over a fixed number of A's, they focus on the material they are learning instead of the scoreboard.

Muñoz is correct that faculty have incentives to inflate grades. However, the solution is not to create a more sophisticated ranking system. What are grades actually for? If they exist to measure true learning, pass/fail grading works well as it stands. If they exist to sort students for recruiters, then we have already lost the plot.

Shawn Sidhu, Springfield

## Standardized testing opened doors for me

The May 29 editorial "What 'equity' in college testing has wrought" argued that the elimination of standardized tests in college admissions has come at the cost of academic standards. I understand the opposing argument that one score should not define a student's academic worthiness. But for a student like me, that same logic is exactly why standardized testing mattered.

In high school, I was an underachiever. My teachers often told my parents that I was capable but did not keep up with my classes. As a result, I had an extraordinarily low grade-point average when I applied to colleges. The ACT gave me a chance to show colleges that I had what it took to succeed. Without it, I might not be where I am today, entering my senior year at St. John's University.

Standardized tests are not perfect, but neither are grades, essays or recommendation letters. For some students, they are not a barrier to opportunity; they are the only evidence that opportunity should be given.

Jack Bulik, New York

## Letter submissions

Send letters to [letters@washpost.com](mailto:letters@washpost.com)

## OPINION

RAMESH PONNURU

# An astonishing interstate trade war is coming to the Supreme Court

The country went through a lot in the past quarter-century: the 9/11 terrorist attacks, two major wars, the worst recession since the 1930s, the opioid crisis and the transformation of both political parties from the ones that Bill Clinton and George W. Bush led. Yet, in the most recent presidential election, 43 states voted for a presidential candidate from the same party as they did in 2000.

That's remarkable stability. Only 25 states had voted for the same party in the 1976 and 2000 elections. American politics has hardened into a contest between two fairly solid blocs of states. Presidential elections are increasingly about whether executive actions will impose red-state preferences on blue states or vice versa. The losing states then join forces to challenge the impositions in court.

A growing field of litigation concerns interstate battles over abortion policy. California refuses to extradite a doctor who subverted Louisiana's law protecting unborn children. Red states have sought to prohibit residents from aiding travel for out-of-state abortions.

Some conflicts among the states are inevitable and perhaps even healthy in our system. But rules must restrain those conflicts so that they do not undermine important national goods such as freedom of commerce among the states. Under the Articles of Confederation in the 1780s, New York launched a trade war against Connecticut and New Jersey. Protecting commerce from what Alexander Hamilton called "the interfering and unneighborly regulations of some States, contrary to the true spirit of the Union," was one of the objects of the Constitution. James Madison, though less enthusiastic than Hamilton about a strong central government, wrote similarly.

The Constitution therefore includes several restrictions on what states can do to one another and a commerce clause that hands regulatory power to Congress. For almost all of America's history, the Supreme Court has inferred from that clause that state governments can't regulate interstate economic activity: a doctrine called the "dormant commerce clause." Without it, the same transactions might have to comply with the demands of 50 regulators — or more, since subdivisions of states could join in.

But the justices have, unfortunately, grown less and less willing to enforce those limits on the states. They have read the specific rules narrowly and are moving toward a version of the dormant commerce clause that stops only those policies that explicitly target other states' economies. That leaves plenty of room for state policymakers, and the lawyers advising them, to devise ways to project their power beyond their state borders. The Supreme Court allowed California to require that any pork producers selling in the state follow its pig-protection law. It's a noble cause, but should one state have the effective power to issue regulations for the entire country?

The justices most committed to originalism — the



The U.S. Supreme Court in Washington.

view that laws should be interpreted as the public understood them at the time they were enacted — have been the most skeptical of restrictions on the states. They object that the dormant commerce clause is not in the text of the Constitution. They also note that to enforce it, judges would have to make tricky distinctions to determine which regulations are legitimate and which amount to extraterritorial aggression — and the Constitution does not tell them how to do that.

Federalism scholar Michael Greve, a law professor at George Mason University, notes that there is something puzzling about this line of argument: The court, and these originalist justices, have enforced other elements of the constitutional structure even though they, too, require going beyond the text. All the conservative justices agreed to strike down federal regulations on carbon emissions because Congress had not provided clear authorization for such far-reaching policies. This rule is known as the "major questions doctrine," which is not spelled out in the Constitution, either, and it also requires judgment calls.

The decision on emissions inadvertently raised the stakes of the debate over the boundaries of states' power. The court ruled that Congress hadn't authorized carbon regulation, and Congress was not about to take such action. So supporters of regula-

tion turned to the states. Some states, mostly blue, have passed laws requiring imported energy — from red states with carbon-intensive energy production — to be "cleaner."

Blue jurisdictions have also sued energy companies on the theory that their carbon emissions impose costs on them such as an increased need for firefighting. These lawsuits cannot possibly affect climate change unless they alter behavior outside the blue states: They're an attempt at economic regulation beyond blue borders.

The Supreme Court has taken up one of these lawsuits, brought by the city of Boulder, Colorado. The case is expected to be argued in the fall. Predictably, 26 mostly red states have urged the court to reject Boulder's claims, saying it would cost them jobs and tax revenue: "The States, upon entering the Union, gave up the right to use their laws to wage this sort of interstate conflict. They gave up the right to impose their policy choices on other States and activities entirely outside the home State's jurisdiction."

Those states are right, but they will succeed only if the justices remember that their constitutional duty includes protecting federalism from the states as well as from the federal government. Perhaps Boulder's attempt to set itself up as a global climate regulator is astonishing enough to remind them.

JIM GERAGHTY

# This June tradition divides America. Let's wave a white flag.

Here goes another month of the flag wars. June is Pride Month, when a lot of Americans put out rainbow flags in support of gay rights. Flag Day lands in the middle of the month, and this is the patriotic run-up to America's 250th birthday on July 4.

And June marks the modern American tradition of arguing over who gets to wave what flag and where.

In New Jersey, the mayor of Boonton recently vetoed a proposal that would have allowed the flying of a Pride flag in a city park, after an intense fight on the town council. Next door in Pennsylvania, the Bucks County administration building and nearby Doylestown Borough Hall have official ceremonies for raising the Pride flag at the start of the month.

Some people get irked when they see a flag other than Old Glory and/or a state flag flying above a public building. Upon taking office for a second time, President Donald Trump last year instructed State Department facilities, domestic and abroad, to fly solely the Stars and Stripes. For a while, the administration even removed the Pride flag from the Stonewall National Monument in New York, which . . . I mean, if you're going to fly the Pride flag anywhere on federal property, the Greenwich Village site regarded as the symbol of the gay rights movement feels like the fairest place to do it. In April, the federal government agreed to a court settlement that allows the flag to fly.



MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE/USA TODAY NETWORK VIA REUTERS

Two years ago, the New York Times was quite concerned that Supreme Court Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. and his wife, Martha-Ann, had displayed an "Appeal to Heaven" Revolutionary War-era flag outside their beach house in New Jersey. The Times worried that the "provocative" flag was a sign of support for the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol and had become "a symbol of support for former President Donald J. Trump, for a religious strand of the 'Stop the Steal' campaign and for a push to remake American government in Christian terms."

Much as the "okay" hand gesture quickly became allegedly a not-okay sign of support for white nationalism, there is an ugly American habit these days of reflexively believing that the flags favored by one's political opponents are sinister

*Flag Day on June 14 would be a good occasion to salute the live-and-let-live American tradition and vow to let the flags do the flapping.*

symbols of malign intent.

Ask most people who wave a Pride flag why they do it, and they'll probably say they support gay rights, or they don't want gay Americans to feel like second-class citizens. But I suspect that those who oppose flying a Pride flag on public property perceive some sort of secondary, menacing agenda — undermining traditional values or Christian teaching on sex and marriage, or something along those lines. (It is not helpful when the occasional oddball public school teacher goes on social media and brags that her classroom does not have an American flag but does have a rainbow flag.)

Flag Day on June 14 would be a good occasion to salute the live-and-let-live American tradition and vow to let the flags do the flapping. Otherwise, people may increasingly find themselves tied up in knots, like the Utah Republican lawmaker who last year argued that a school could display a Nazi flag or Confederate flag as part of a history lesson, but that it couldn't fly a rainbow flag. Now, come on. Not even Graham Platner would defend flying a Nazi flag at a school — unless the principal didn't know what it meant.

If the partisan rancor ever subsides in America, everyone could just take people at their word that the flags they fly mean what they say and are not a secret dog whistle for some malevolent message. The Alitos just wanted to celebrate the values of the Founding Fathers, and most who put up a rainbow flag in June just want to say to gay Americans, "Hey, you're welcome here, too" — or are announcing that they do feel welcome.

It's a free country, and people should celebrate that freedom by flying the flag they choose — and not getting up in each other's faces about the flag they've chosen. Alas, America isn't there yet. Maybe by the nation's 300th birthday.

LEANA S. WEN

# The Enhanced Games was a manifestation of wellness culture gone awry

The recent Enhanced Games in Las Vegas, where elite athletes attempted to break world records by pumping their bodies full of performance-enhancing drugs that are banned in competition, has already received plenty of criticism for perverting the spirit of sports. It was also emblematic of a broader cultural shift in the concept of wellness — away from preventing illness through exercise and nutrition and toward using supplements and potentially dangerous peptide injections to become fitter, younger and supposedly "better" versions of ourselves.

For those unfamiliar, the Enhanced Games — colloquially dubbed the "Steroid Olympics" — featured 42 elite athletes who competed in weightlifting, track and swimming. Unlike in traditional competitions where athletes are extensively drug tested, participants were encouraged to use performance enhancers, and most were assisted by medical teams that designed individualized regimens for them.

Among the most popular drugs taken were testosterone (91 percent of athletes) and human growth hormone (79 percent). Also on the list were five anabolic steroids, stimulants such as Adderall and EPO (erythropoietin), the drug notoriously associated with cyclist Lance Armstrong that increases red blood cell production.

Enhanced, the company that sponsored the event and conveniently sells these products online to the public, said it intends to collect data on the athletes and publish it as "research." But we already know a lot about these drugs. EPO can damage the heart and increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes. Anabolic steroids have been linked to liver and kidney damage, dangerous blood clots and sudden cardiac death. Human growth hormone can lead to cancer, diabetes and severe joint problems. Some of these compounds may also affect fertility, so much so that one female competitor chose to freeze her eggs before beginning her doping regimen — a procedure she said the company paid for.

Major sports organizations warned that the spectacle sent a troubling message to impressionable young athletes, in addition to undermining sporting integrity. But influencing the culture is precisely what the event was trying to do: normalize chemically enhanced living not just for elite competitors, but for everyday people. The sporting competition itself was a giant infomercial for the company's online pharmacy. As Max Martin, CEO of the company behind the games, put it at the event, "Now the people at home can also get enhanced and be the best they've ever been."

There are two major flaws in this logic. First, we have no idea whether this is truly "optimization." Looking at the superhuman-size weightlifters, it certainly appears that the muscle growth regimen worked. One competitor said his body changed so



Cody Miller celebrates after winning the 50-meter breaststroke at the Enhanced Games in Las Vegas.

dramatically that their drug cocktails had to be scaled back. It's also probable that certain drugs increased endurance and allowed athletes to train harder and longer. But while these substances may produce short-term results in competition, they also come with very real long-term side effects that most people would want to avoid.

And in any case, the weightlifters failed to break records despite being given multiple attempts. The runners fell short, too. The only athlete to surpass a world record was a swimmer who, in addition to using banned drugs, competed in a specialized polyurethane full-body suit banned from competition since 2010 because it provided an unfair advantage.

It's hard to fault individual athletes for choosing to participate. Virtually all said their primary motivation was financial. Winners received \$250,000, and world record bonuses reached \$1 million. Athletes got paid more just to show up than they might otherwise earn in years. I don't begrudge them for taking the money, though I wish this kind of investment, which included \$20 million to build a temporary venue in Las Vegas, were directed toward promoting healthier fitness activities instead.

And that brings me to the second problem with all of this: Is chemical enhancement really how we want to pursue wellness? A glance at Enhanced's website makes clear that its business is pharmacological self-optimization. Visitors who don't have any medical issues can buy GLP-1 drugs to become a little thinner, testosterone to gain more "vitality" and supplement blends purportedly to defy aging. This is all too common in the booming industry of "biohacking," in which entrepreneurs and longevity clinics peddle products not to treat diseases, but to help healthy people gain a supposed edge.

How far we've come from the wellness culture of the past, which emphasized fresh air, exercise and a healthy diet. Eliminating pesticides and limiting chemicals were once central tenets. That's no longer true, it seems, if there is money to be made persuading people to experiment on themselves in the name of "optimization."

It shouldn't escape anyone's attention that among the investors in Enhanced is Donald Trump Jr. and that the son of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. attended the event. Welcome, ladies and gentleman, to the new era of "medical freedom."

# Opinion

The New York Times

## Everyone's Rallying Around This Terrible Idea

Natasha Sarin

A contributing Opinion writer and a professor at Yale Law School.

**I**N A nation seemingly unable to agree on anything, people appear to be converging on one idea: Taxes are bad. In addition to the calls for broad-based middle-class tax cuts, we're seeing proposed exemptions for teachers, law enforcement officials and boat owners.

Call it the Oprah tax code: Tipped workers, YOU get a tax break! Teachers, YOU get a tax break! Overtime workers, YOU get a tax break! These suggestions aren't coming just from Republicans, the longtime proponents of small government and no-new-tax pledges. Today these ideas are attracting people across the political spectrum, including Democratic lawmakers like the senators Chris Van Hollen and Cory Booker, the latter of whom advocates a system by which "the majority of Americans would not pay federal income taxes."

It's no great mystery why people like the idea of lower taxes. After years of pandemic-era inflation, compounded by tariffs and, more recently, the war in Iran, 55 percent of Americans say their financial situation is getting worse, the highest reported level since Gallup began asking this question 25 years ago. President Trump promised to lower prices on Day 1, but no policies can accomplish anything like that. Tax cuts offer a salve: Keep more money in your wallet, so those high costs seem more manageable. And indeed, this tax season, Americans are getting a refund that is, on average, about \$350 larger than last year.

It all sounds good, but this profusion of new carve-outs would make the already Byzantine tax code only more complex, worsening our fiscal situation without fixing any of the problems that make America feel unaffordable. Tax cuts are a Band-Aid, not a solution.

The thing is, America is already a low-tax country — far lower, as a share of gross domestic product, than almost all other highly developed economies. Sure, there are wasteful inefficiencies that can and should be eliminated. As DOGE's rampage shows, however, you can cut enough to ruin a great many lives, but you can't significantly decrease the government's expenses, because most of them are baked in. So if the tax rate goes much lower, it will cease to be possible to run this large and complex country. To some people, that's the point: to shrink government until it's small enough that someone can "drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub," in the memorable phrase of the anti-tax crusader Grover Norquist.

For those who prefer not to live in a failed state, the other option is to keep taxes steady, or even raise them for some who can easily afford the difference, and in exchange give Americans a government that works. A government that builds highways and schools, defends us against adversaries, lifts children out of poverty and supports those who may be displaced by artificial intelligence.

That takes more revenue, not less, but it makes the taxes you pay worth it, because

**If the tax rate goes much lower, it won't be possible to run the country.**



ILLUSTRATION BY THE NEW YORK TIMES. SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER DAZELEY, VIA GETTY IMAGES

you get so much more in return. And if it's done right, it makes life in America more affordable. Tax dollars can help the 25 percent of American registered voters whose top affordability concern is not being able to afford housing, and the 16 percent who worry most about the cost of health care. Only 2 percent of voters report that their greatest affordability concern is taxes.

Anti-tax fervor is spreading in part because Americans can't comprehend that kind of value proposition. We are not like Europe, where the sick can just walk into a hospital and get treated. Or like Japan, where everyone can travel by efficient high-speed rail. Or like every other developed country, where the government provides paid maternity leave. And we're not like any nation where those at the top pay their fair share.

In America, we pay taxes on salaries and wages. For normal people with normal jobs,

that means paying taxes on everything they earn. But billionaires and centimillionaires live largely on investment income that taxes barely touch. Even the estate tax, meant to collect from the ultrawealthy at least once, at death, has been so gutted that Gary Cohn, the former director of the National Economic Council, is said to have declared "only morons" pay it.

Ordinary Americans are right to resent a tax system that's skewed against them. There are a few limited efforts to correct the imbalance: California is debating a wealth tax, Washington State just signed into law a new tax rate for incomes over \$1 million a year, and New York passed a new tax on luxury second homes in New York City. Just making those at the top pay their fair share won't, however, be enough to get us where we need to be. And the remedy for a system in which some aren't fulfilling their civic duty

isn't to decide that none of us should. Nor is it to create exemptions that are impossible to administer. (In an era when seemingly every credit card swipe asks consumers to add 20 percent more, exactly which industries should qualify for the exemption on tipping? How do we verify how much of a person's income was from tips?) Mr. Trump was right in his first term to advocate a simpler tax code. More narrow exemptions move us further from that worthy goal.

A century ago, the Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. said that "taxes are what we pay for civilized society." The reverse is true, too. Without taxes, society falls apart. Policymakers would do well to offer a vision of government that all constituents think is worth paying into, rather than racing to the bottom with tax cuts for all, which may feel expedient but will ultimately undermine our capacity to build the society we deserve.

COLUMNIST | THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

## All Hail Our Commander in Thief

**WITH EACH PASSING** month of his presidency, Donald Trump behaves more like America's commander in thief than its commander in chief.

How so? Let me count the ways. We are a nation at war today, with tens of thousands of troops deployed near Iran. Generally, when our nation has been at war, the commander in chief's top domestic priority is to keep the country united. Because there is nothing more demoralizing for U.S. troops fighting abroad than to look back and see our country ripping itself apart at home. And there is nothing that encourages an enemy to hold out for better terms for ending a war with America than seeing America at war with itself.

And how has Trump risen to that commander-in-chief unifying duty? He has not lifted a finger to bring Democrats behind the war. Instead, he's prioritized acting like a commander in thief. At the same moment Trump is asking our men and women in uniform to make the ultimate sacrifice, he has engaged in a brazen, in-your-face attempted heist of the U.S. Treasury to benefit himself, his family and his political allies, which could include those who attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. It's so outrageous that even some of his most reliable Republican Party sycophants couldn't accept it.

Trump conspired with his own Justice Department, headed by his former personal lawyer, to use taxpayer money to create a \$1.776 billion political slush fund, supposedly to compensate those Trump supporters who "suffered weaponization and lawfare" at the hands of his predecessor. In fact, as this paper's editorial board noted, it would "reward loyalists willing to defy the law and commit violence on behalf of the president."

Fortunately, a federal judge put a temporary hold on the scheme that no one described better than the Republican former Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell: "So the nation's top law enforcement official is asking for a slush fund to pay people who assault cops? Utterly stupid, morally wrong — take your pick." In the face of all that opposition, Trump has signaled a willingness to back off his terrible plan, but I will believe it only when I see this stunningly corrupt, self-dealing maneuver both dead and buried.

If Trump had an ounce of integrity, instead of scheming to set aside \$1.776 billion to potentially pay off these phony defenders of freedom's frontier — loyalists who ransacked the halls of Congress — he would direct Congress to spend that exact amount to support today's real defenders of freedom's frontier: the Ukrainian Army. It is both resisting Vladimir Putin's attempt to crush Ukraine's democracy and sapping Russia's ability to threaten the other free countries of Europe. God bless Ukraine's fighters.

Alas, though, Trump apparently wants money only for people who tried to overthrow our Constitution at home, not for those who want to emulate our constitutional democracy abroad.

In addition, the Trump-directed Justice Department quietly inserted, as a supplement to that slush fund deal, a one-page document signed by the acting attorney general, Todd Blanche, stating that the government would be "FOREVER BARRED and PRECLUDED from prosecuting or pursuing" pending tax claims against Trump, his family members or his businesses. It is still unclear what will happen to that measure.

President Trump has another moniker suggesting his ethical challenges: "trader in chief," as The Associated Press recently proposed. Why? Because "recent presidents have stayed away from trading stocks in companies whose fortunes they could lift or scuttle with the stroke of a pen, but Donald Trump smashed that precedent in the first quarter of this year with more than 3,600 buy and sell orders." The A.P. wrote, "many of them involving companies whose profits have been directly impacted by his decisions as head of the government."

That was an average of 50 trades a day in stocks that included U.S. military suppliers affected by the Iran war. "If he were defense secretary, he would be committing a crime," Richard Painter, the chief White House ethics adviser in the George W. Bush administration, told The A.P. "Technically he can do this, but it is a fundamental breach of trust."

Not only has Trump choked off virtually all U.S. financial aid to Ukraine, but he is also reducing U.S. troops on the ground in NATO

countries right when Putin, sensing he is losing the war, is increasingly threatening them.

Just as Americans are starting to realize that Trump is preying on our system — trying to manipulate the justice system to generate cash available to his Jan. 6 pirates and immunity from ongoing inquiries into taxes for himself and his family — our allies are concluding that Trump's America is beginning to prey on them.

Indeed, something is happening with America's traditional allies that I never thought I would see in this lifetime or the next. In the post-World War II era, we and our allies together embraced the doctrine of "deterrence" against the Soviet Union, and later Russia, to prevent any attempt by the Kremlin to forcibly expand its influence into the free world or put neighbors under its thumb.

Not any longer.

Our allies have watched Trump threaten to make Canada the 51st state and to seize Greenland from Denmark. They have watched him start a war with Iran without consulting NATO and then demand that NATO help rescue us from what has turned into a mess. They have watched him slash U.S. financial assistance to Ukraine, put the Russian aggressor on the same moral footing as that country and then top it all off with reckless, ill-conceived tariffs on all our allies.

As a result of all that, something unprecedented is happening: "Deterring Trump's America is now becoming a strategic priority of our allies as much as deterring Russia was," Nader Mousavizadeh, the chief executive of Macro Advisory Partners, a geopolitical consulting firm, and a former senior adviser to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, told me.

And how could it not? When you look at how Trump has hammered Canada with tariffs, it is hard not to conclude that the worst position for a country to be in during the second Trump administration "is to be America's closest ally and have integrated your economy, energy systems and military with that of the United States," Mousavizadeh said. Everyone can now see, he added, that Trump will "weaponize any country's dependence on America and use it to extract whatever he can

**Oppose America, and Trump will tariff you; depend on America, and he'll extort you.**

in the narrowest and most tactical and transactional definition of American power."

No wonder that after Trump stepped up his rhetoric about taking over Greenland, European NATO members — Germany, Sweden, France, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland and Britain — all announced plans to send small military contingents to Greenland to bolster the Danes.

Daniel Fried, a former U.S. ambassador to Poland, noted in an essay for the Atlantic Council that though these NATO allies tried to frame their move as necessary to bolster Arctic security, they also "have used the word 'deterrence.' For Europeans to speak in such terms about the United States, even implicitly, is a low point, but it is needed."

Let's not forget that early on Trump forced Ukraine to give the United States access to critical minerals in return for U.S. help against a Russian Army trying to overrun it. This is the real "Trump Doctrine": Oppose America, and I will tariff you; depend on America, and I will extort you.

The only rational response for our allies is to try to "deter and diversify," Mousavizadeh concluded. And if Trump keeps this up for his full four years, he added, "no NATO leader can ever again responsibly agree to the degree of dependence on U.S. technology, U.S. defense systems or financial systems" that NATO countries long took for granted.

I have been in Portugal this week and I have been shocked by the degree to which European business executives speak of having lost faith in American institutions and in America as the guarantor of global legal norms — something they have always taken for granted. It is disorienting for them; they're like hikers who have lost their compass.

In short, having a president who behaves like a commander in thief — not a commander in chief — is costing us dearly at home and abroad. This perversion of the American presidency is undermining the very alliance structure that won two world wars and the Cold War and generated one of history's longest ages of peace and prosperity. Every day we tolerate such behavior we endanger our children's future.

# A.I. Belongs to the People, Not to Billionaires

**Bernie Sanders**

An independent senator representing Vermont.

ARTIFICIAL intelligence will almost certainly be the most transformational technology in the history of the world. It will profoundly affect the life of every man, woman and child in our country. It will bring — and is already bringing — unimaginable changes to our economy, our democracy, our emotional well-being, our environment and how we educate and raise our children. Further, there is a very real fear that as A.I. becomes smarter than humans it could eventually function independently, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

The question, then, is not whether A.I. will change the world. It will. The question is: Who will own and control that future? Who will benefit from it, and who will be hurt by it? Will A.I. be used to make life better for working families? Will it enrich our quality of life? Will it help us eliminate poverty, extend life expectancies and solve the climate crisis? Or will the future of humanity be determined by a handful of billionaires who have promoted and developed A.I., with virtually no democratic input, who stand to become even richer and more powerful than they are today?

That is the choice before us.

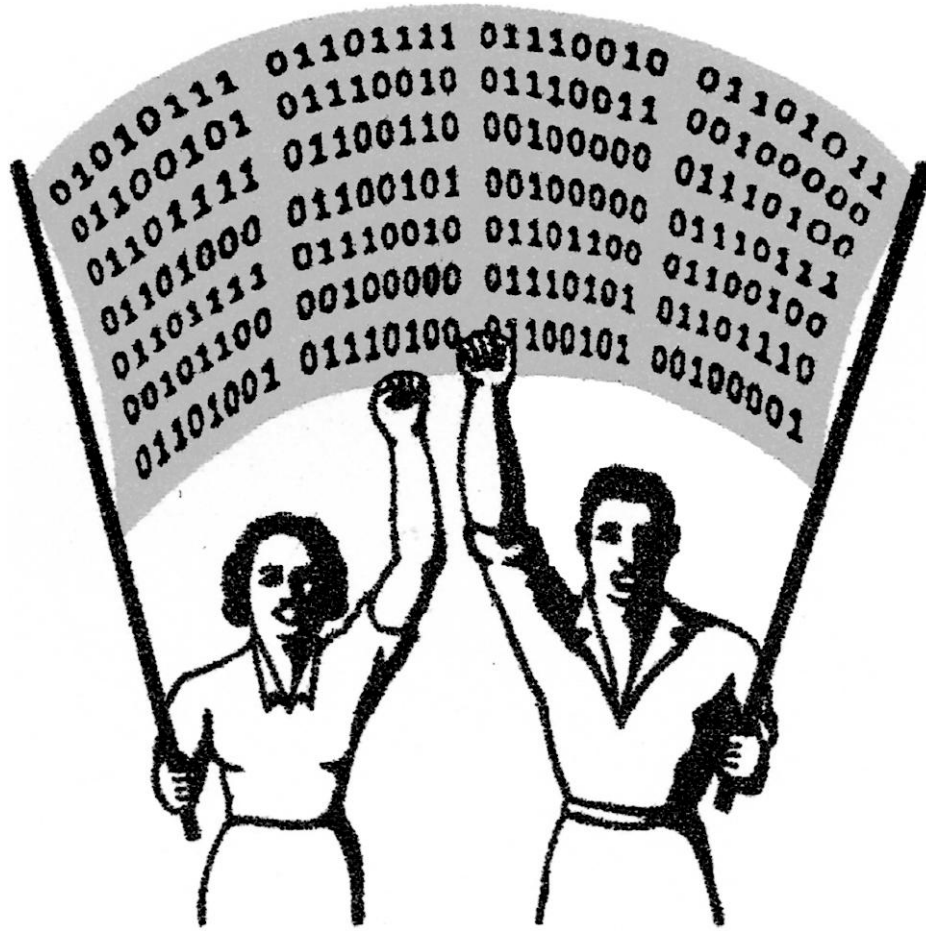
Let us be clear. Artificial intelligence was not created out of thin air. The data and language used by generative A.I. tools didn't just pop into Sam Altman's head or Elon Musk's imagination. A.I. is built on our collective intelligence: our books, songs, artwork, journalism, computer code, scientific research, videos, conversations, images and ideas spanning generations. That is not just the opinion of Bernie Sanders. According to Mr. Altman, the head of OpenAI, A.I. models were trained on our "collective experience, knowledge" and "learnings of humanity."

For the most part, tech oligarchs have fed this knowledge into their A.I. models without permission, without acknowledgment, without compensation. In other words, the creative work of millions of people — writers, artists, musicians, journalists, teachers, scientists and ordinary citizens — has essentially been stolen by some of the wealthiest people in the world. It's time for us to reclaim it.

Since A.I. is built on the collective knowledge of humanity, the wealth it generates must benefit humanity. Not just Mr. Musk, Mr. Altman, Dario Amodei and other moguls whose companies are positioned to dominate the industry. Not just venture capitalists in Silicon Valley or money managers on Wall Street who undoubtedly see A.I. as the next great wealth-extracting machine.

That is why I will soon be introducing the American A.I. Sovereign Wealth Fund Act. This legislation would give the public a direct ownership stake in the largest A.I. companies in our country. How? It would create a sovereign wealth fund through a one-time 50 percent tax — not on the profits of OpenAI, Anthropic, xAI and other companies, but paid with something far more valuable than that: the stock.

If passed, this legislation would do two crucial things. First, it would give the public a direct role in determining the future of this technology. No longer would the future of A.I. and the transformation of human life that it will bring be dictated by a handful of Big Tech oligarchs. The federal government would have the power, through its voting shares and



ERIK CARTER

an equal representation on each company's board, to block decisions that hurt our citizens and to push for policies that help them.

Second, this legislation would guarantee that the trillions of dollars potentially generated by A.I. are used to improve the lives of all of us — not simply to make the richest people in the world even richer. If the big A.I. companies continue to grow as rapidly as many analysts expect, then the value of the sovereign wealth fund will grow as well — and the benefits to the American people will grow along with it.

This is not an original idea. It has been proposed by scholars. It has been endorsed by some of the leading A.I. companies in Amer-

## When a public resource generates wealth, the public should share in it.

ica. OpenAI, for example, recently proposed creating a "public wealth fund that provides every citizen — including those not invested in financial markets — with a stake in A.I.-driven economic growth." Anthropic, led by Mr. Amodei, similarly proposed the creation of "national sovereign wealth funds with stakes in A.I." Mr. Musk, who runs xAI, wrote, "Universal HIGH INCOME via checks issued by the Federal government is the best way to deal with unemployment caused by AI."

Dozens of sovereign wealth funds exist all over the world to ensure that ordinary people benefit from national wealth. Norway's sovereign wealth fund, one of the largest in the world, was funded from the country's oil wealth and is now worth more than \$2 trillion. Instead of a few oil executives pocketing all the benefits of this national resource, Norway

made the decision that this wealth should be used to improve life for all of its people.

This concept has already been put into practice right here at home. Fifty years ago, Alaska created a sovereign wealth fund from the state's oil revenues. For decades, it has paid annual dividends directly to Alaskans. Moreover, public pension funds in states across the country already hold hundreds of billions of dollars in the stock of companies throughout America. Even President Trump, in an executive order, has proposed establishing an American sovereign wealth fund.

To start, the billions, if not trillions, of dollars generated by this fund would provide direct payments to the American people. And as the fund generates more and more wealth, the proceeds would be used to ensure that every man, woman and child in our country has a decent and dignified standard of living, including health care, education and housing.

Needless to say, I recognize that for the government to have a major stake in a company, particularly one for which A.I. is only part of its business, is complicated. More details — including the specific spending priorities and the mechanics of implementation — will be included in the legislation I unveil in the coming weeks.

But the principle is simple: When a public resource generates wealth, the public should share in that wealth. A.I. is being built on a public resource far more valuable than oil: the accumulated knowledge, creativity and labor of mankind.

The future of A.I. and the fate of humanity must not be decided behind closed doors in Silicon Valley. It must not be dictated by billionaires seeking to maximize their power and profit. It must be decided by workers, parents, teachers, artists, scientists, communities and the American people. It's our future. We must decide it.

## LETTERS

### Benefits of Real Work in a College Setting

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "A Cattle Ranch Is Doing What the Ivy League Can't," by Michal Leibowitz (Opinion guest essay, May 24):

This essay identifies an experience no longer available at many American colleges: an opportunity for students to become invested in the mission of the school where they have chosen to study. As an alumnus of Deep Springs College in California, the subject of the essay, I can confirm both how transformative and how rare that feeling is.

It is also what led me to help build Outer Coast, a new two-year liberal arts institution in Sitka, Alaska, that graduated its inaugural class on May 8. Like Deep Springs and Berea College in Kentucky, Outer Coast asks students to do real work: harvesting food for elders, shoveling snow through the winter, restoring a local boathouse and other tasks.

This not only creates real stakes for the student body but also fosters interdependence and a common good between the institution and the town it calls home — a relationship that benefits students and the broader community.

As the essay suggests, aspects of these educational models could be incorporated into the Ivy League and other universities. They can also be started from scratch, today, in the places that need them most.

BRYDEN SWEENEY-TAYLOR  
SITKA, ALASKA

TO THE EDITOR:

Michal Leibowitz's essay about Deep Springs College highlights universal lessons about what constitutes excellence in education. These are lessons that Outward Bound has brought to classrooms across New York City in partnerships with more than 100 schools. We foster learning within a community where students look out for and care for one another so they feel a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, and education becomes a collective endeavor.

In the words of the Outward Bound co-founder Kurt Hahn, "We are crew, not passengers."

It's also critical that students have agency. When trusted to lead and shape their own learning, they develop confidence and critical thinking, and engage more deeply.

Finally, the essay underscores the value of hard, chal-

lenging work. Growth comes not from ease, but from grappling with difficulty, experiencing both success and failure and building resilience.

While institutions like Deep Springs may be rare, these principles should not be. They can — and should — be part of every student's education. We know from direct experience that there are educators in the New York public schools working hard to make that so.

LAURIE ADAMS, NEW YORK  
The writer is the chief executive of NYC Outward Bound Schools.

TO THE EDITOR:

Michal Leibowitz writes, "We are beginning to see that a nation of individuals unconstrained by virtue or a sense of communal responsibility has few ways out of collapsing social trust — and the political and economic problems that creates."

Partly "owning" the college you're attending, as students at Deep Springs College do, is one way to help correct this. But schools that can't quite do this can at least require that students learn that education is more than job training.

When I studied for a degree in chemistry from Le Moyne College, a Jesuit school in Syracuse, N.Y., I was required to take one year of American history and eight semesters of philosophy — not to help me find my place in a chemistry career, but to help me find my place in society.

THOMAS DONVITO  
MADISON, N.J.

TO THE EDITOR:

In the 1960s my brother and I were part of a teenage camper worker program at Camp Poyntelle-Lewis in Pennsylvania. We waited on younger campers in the dining room, did construction work on the new camp, Lewis, and cooked workers their breakfast daily on a charcoal-fired griddle.

Lessons learned there have stayed with me for a lifetime.

JULES TRAUGOT  
NEW PALTZ, N.Y.

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COLUMNIST | BRET STEPHENS

## Dear President Ozymandias

TO: OUR GREATEST PRESIDENT  
FROM: YOUR GREATEST FANS

We are writing to let you know, sir, that we are as outraged as you are that some liberal judge has ordered that your name be stripped from the Donald J. Trump and the John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts. Not only is the decision wrong, it's also backward. You've survived three assassination attempts and yet the building will keep *his* name?

On a related subject, sir, we hope those knuckleheads in Congress won't let some old law stand in the way of putting your face on a \$250 bill. After all, nothing advertises the strength of a country's economy like high-denomination bank notes. And since restaurant meals now often run to about \$250 (minus drinks and dessert) for a party of four, making a bank note with your mug shot on it will be triply convenient: faster payment; a reminder of how affordable things have become under your presidency; and proof that, in the land of the free, you can get away with just about anything.

We're also big supporters of your plan for your triumphal arch for Washington soaring a proud 250 feet, nearly as tall as the Capitol itself. Hopefully it will include large gold-plated statues of the greatest American leaders, such as Abraham Lincoln and yourself. People are calling it the "Arc de Trump," like the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. That one was commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte, just before such strokes of military genius as the Peninsular War, the invasion of Russia and the Hundred Days campaign of 1815.

Do you know they named a bridge and a train station in London in honor of the battle that ended that last excursion?

At any rate, leaders who build gargantuan triumphal arches always go on to greater military glory. Maybe yours will be for the liberation of Hormuz, though that may have to await the deployment of the new "Trump class" battleships after the first one commissions sometime around 2036.

We fear, however, that you may be missing significant opportunities to enhance your and your family's visibility.

We were tempted to suggest, for example, that you consider renaming the Statue of Liberty the "Melania Knauss Trump Statue of Liberty," in honor of the first immigrant — a legal immigrant, of course — to become



ELI HILLER/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, VIA GETTY IMAGES

first lady. But Lady Liberty isn't exactly a "10," except maybe in her dress size, and the poem about "the wretched refuse of your teeming shore" is not on-brand when it comes to the Trump name.

For now, we have shelved the idea. But have you considered building a svelter "Statue of Melania," 250 feet tall (not including the base), on nearby Governors Island? The inscription could read: "Give me your Central European catalog models and anyone willing to write a \$25 million check."

Future generations will find it inspirational.

We also believe you were too modest when you chose to rename the Gulf of Mexico after America rather than after yourself,

as you had thought to do at first. But why settle for a mere gulf? The Atlantic Ocean is named for Atlas, a figure from Greek mythology, which makes little sense since Greece is nowhere near the Atlantic. And the Pacific Ocean, which is much larger than the Atlantic, was named after a brand of Mexican beer, Pacifico, which makes no sense at all.

You know what does make sense? Trump Oceans. Plural. It simplifies geography while amplifying your name.

And we cannot stop there.

You mustn't be shy about putting your name to the new White House ballroom. And though we understand that adding your face to Mount Rushmore (for which there's

## Look on Trump's works and despair.

already a bill in Congress) may, alas, be a geological impossibility, why not, while it's being repaired and redone, add the name TRUMP in huge gold-tiled letters to the floor of the Reflecting Pool in the National Mall? Ideally, these should be lit up at night in a way that can be visible from 30,000 feet, if not from space.

Speaking of space, aren't we going back to the moon under your presidency? That's got to mean naming rights in addition to bragging rights. At a minimum, our first lunar base must be named for you. (The second one can be named for Elon, or maybe Jeff, whoever is first, provided you're still on good terms with either of them.) But why do we even call our planet's moon "the Moon," as if a generic noun should be a proper noun, too? That needs to change.

Get ready for it: Trump Moon.

Mr. President, there are so many ways to honor your priceless achievements and legacy, but we've already taken too much of your time. And time being the most valuable thing of all, it reminds us, finally, of a poem:

*I met a traveler from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs  
of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the  
sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies,  
whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold  
command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those  
passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these  
lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them and the  
heart that fed:  
And on the pedestal these words  
appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of  
kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and  
despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the  
decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and  
bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far  
away.*

Yours sincerely,  
Percy, Bysshe and Shelley