

Beyond the slogan

PM’s renewed push for Swadeshi is inspiring, but going local, simply for the sake of it, could backfire

AGAINST A BACKDROP of waning globalisation and multilateralism, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made a renewed push for Swadeshi, exhorting Indians to buy and sell only locally made goods. The appeal comes in the backdrop of a huge turbulence in the global economy and the US slapping a harsh 25% tariff as well as an added penalty. US President Donald Trump may believe the Indian economy is “dead”, but the huge local demand is a big plus and makes us the fastest-growing market for a range of goods and services. Modi’s public advice is also in line with his 2020 emphasis on self-reliance under the banner of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The PM was articulating a noble thought, but the government should remember that efforts to promote local manufacturing are not inconsistent with an insistence on industries facing competition that incentivises them to raise their game. To be sure, restricted access to the US markets will impact local manufacturing, as Moody’s has pointed out. Given manufacturing has stagnated at about 17-18% of the economy for several years, the country now needs a clear strategy to boost its share. There is also a need to weigh the pros and cons of producing locally. Not every product can be manufactured at a competitive price, which is why a whole host of goods, primarily intermediates, are currently being imported. There is much to be said about being self-reliant and it is important to consider the risks of being over-dependent on nations like China.

However, India needs to ensure that it doesn’t end up manufacturing goods that are expensive because these would simply not find enough demand at the scale needed to make the manufacturing company profitable. The advantage of relatively cheap labour is often negated by poor infrastructure, red tape, rigid labour laws, and high interest rates. That makes manufacturers uncompetitive, prompting them to ask for sops and subsidies. Rather than trying to reinvent the wheel, it would be pragmatic to make competitively-priced products that can be sold locally and also exported. To do this, the government needs to review the import duties which currently average a high 17%. The US may want to shut out Indian goods by taxing them but India can surely explore the China Plus One strategy for other markets if it is competitive enough. What it loses out as import duties can be more than compensated by bigger export volumes.

The bulk of consumer products consumed in India—from staples to apparel—is made locally with a few items being imported. With consumer electronics products now being manufactured here under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, imports of these goods too will likely slow. Aggregate demand for consumer products has been somewhat muted for a variety of reasons including elevated inflation and a slow rise in household incomes, but should pick up on the back of tax cuts and festive season purchases. But India needs to attract more foreign direct investment to boost local manufacturing. Under the PLI investments worth ₹1.76 lakh crore had come in until March 2025. However, payouts since the launch of the ₹1.97-lakh crore scheme have been about ₹21,534 crore. Also small-scale manufacturing units deserve some sops; as the PM said, their interests need to be taken care of. Indeed, there is much merit in the PM’s call to support local businesses, but this should be based on commercial considerations, not sentiment.

India's win at the Oval is test cricket at its finest

INDIA'S IMPROBABLE WIN at the Oval—which levelled the series at 2-2—should set all doubts to rest regarding the edge-of-the-seat entertainment potential of the longest format of the game. This match represented test cricket at its finest as both teams fought hard as the game went into the fifth day. England needed only 35 runs to triumph in this five-match series with four wickets in hand. But that was a bridge too far with the devastating spell of swing bowling by Mohammad Siraj and Prasidh Krishna. Siraj’s 5 for 104 runs won the match for India when his perfect yorker castled Gus Atkinson. Krishna took four wickets for 126 runs. Cricket is a game played with the thinnest margins as India was victorious with a six-run victory over England.

India’s performance against England should be a shot in the arm for the country’s cricketing establishment as they fielded a much younger side led by Shubman Gill. Expectations were typically low as the old stalwarts Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli had retired. Gill’s prior experience in captaincy was in the Indian Premier League series when he led the Gujarat Titans. But he grew into his role throughout the five-match test series in England. He led from the front with his classical batting and amassed 754 runs with four centuries at an average of 75.40 runs. This sort of performance evokes memories of Sunil Gavaskar’s exploits against the West Indies in 1970-71. The fact that he achieved all of this with the pressures of captaincy is truly remarkable.

Gill’s exploits with the bat was part of the 21 centuries struck in the series, a performance that emulated the five-match series between Australia and West Indies way back in 1955. But it is not just Gill but others like Yashasvi Jaiswal, vice-captain Rishabh Pant, and KL Rahul also struck centuries. In the first test at Leeds, there were in fact five centuries struck by Indian batsmen, including those by Pant in both innings. Despite this problem of potential plenty, India lost that match by five wickets. England secured the advantage as they skittled out India’s middle and lower batting order. With seven wickets being lost for 41 runs in the first innings and six wickets folding up for 31 runs in the second innings, that match was lost.

India under Gill responded thereafter with its middle and lower order stepping up when the top batsmen floundered. It says a lot when a draw in the fourth test in Manchester felt like a victory. That was no mean achievement as India responded to the England captain’s heroic exploits in that game with Gill scoring 103 and centuries by Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar in the second innings forcing a draw. Jadeja hit five 50s in the whole series. Another big find for India was the all-round capability of Sundar who ensured that the middle and lower order held up. For such reasons, Gill clearly showed his mettle as captain and ensured that the performance at Leeds was not repeated in the subsequent test matches.

More than India’s batsmen, it is our bowlers who ensured a series-levelling win. India no doubt had the services of strike bowler Jasprit Bumrah but he did not play at the Oval. Hailed by the *Guardian’s* cricket writer for his exploits in 2021 as “cricket’s master of disguise who takes on at least half a dozen guises: talisman, calm head, tail-end swing guru, new ball craftsman, reverse swing guru, yorker-summoning necromancer”, he tormented England’s batsmen in this series as well with 14 wickets at an economy rate of 3.04 runs. Siraj’s feats, however, define India’s performance with the ball as he emerged as the highest wicket taker in these five matches. Siraj bowled India to victory at the Oval but his best performance was six wickets for 70 runs in the second test at Birmingham which India won by 336 runs.

Views are personal

IN THE MIX OF TARIFFS & TRADE-OFF THAT FOLLOWED, IMPOSSIBLE TO FIGURE OUT WHICH COUNTRY IS BETTER OFF

A geoeconomic tool

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been routed in a way that aims to avoid reciprocal tariffs for the specific country.

Reciprocal tariffs on various countries were introduced for correcting the large trade deficits that the US has with trade partners. The deficits were considered “extraordinary” threats to the national security and economy of the US, amounting to a national emergency and imposition of fresh *ad valorem* tariffs. While the lowest baseline tariff was 10%, many countries faced much higher rates. These included those that the US felt were maintaining significantly high tariff and non-tariff barriers for its exports and investments. The tariffs, after being announced on April 2, were paused till August 1, for allowing countries to act on trade barriers and cut trade deals with the US.

Section 232 tariffs are not country-specific, but product-specific. They also go back to Trump 1.0 and are levied on items whose imports are considered injurious to US national security. Currently, these tariffs on steel and aluminium exports to the US are as high as 50%, while those on imported cars and auto parts are at 25%. More Section 232 tariffs are likely to come

into effect on imports of copper, trucks, commercial aircraft, jet engines, lumber, timber, pharmaceuticals, and processed critical minerals once investigations on “injuries” caused by these imports are determined.

In its negotiations, the US has been trading off market access through country-wise reciprocal tariffs against access from Section 232 sectoral tariffs and vice-versa. These trade-offs are leading to various “prices” for different trade partners, through a combination of demand for deep domestic market access commitments; purchase commitments for US exports; and also investment commitments in the US.

Indonesia, for example, now has reciprocal tariffs of 19%. However, in its deal with the US, it has not been exempted from Section 232 tariffs. Bangladesh’s current lower reciprocal tariffs of 20% have come in return for large commitments to purchase American wheat, soya bean, cotton, and Boeing aircraft without exemptions from Section 232 tariffs.

Japan, which now has a reciprocal tariff of 15%, reduced from 24% earlier, has

committed to investing \$550 billion in the US. The UK, which is in the lowest reciprocal tariff category of 10%, has been spared automobile tariffs of Section 232, up to a ceiling of 100,000 vehicles annually. But auto part exports from the UK will still attract tariffs of 10%. Vietnam, while now being charged a lower reciprocal tariff of 20%, has been cramped for economic room through transshipment tariffs of 40%, which would significantly impact its prospects as a re-export hub.

The short point is that tariffs are being used by the US as a geoeconomic tool for making other countries agree to economic policies that suit its national security and economic interests. This has been made clear by the Trump administration right from the beginning through both reciprocal tariffs as well as Section 232 tariffs. And in the mix and trade-off that has followed, it is impossible to figure out which country is “better off” than others.

Moving forward, the US will continue to employ tariffs—reciprocal, Section 232, and transshipment—as geoeconomic tools for serving security objectives. If it senses that some countries are not implementing their commitments sincerely, it is likely to employ a combination of new Section 232 tariffs, along with demand for more purchase commitments, and ostensibly more non-tariff market access demands.

In the current scenario, it is not possible to figure which country has got a “better deal”. The cost of the prices that each US trade partner is paying for a deal is more, or less, depending on its specific circumstances. India, therefore, shouldn’t be too worried at this stage.

Views are personal

Shifting gears in India’s energy transition



SUMANT SINHA

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With a few more bold policy shifts, especially on enabling supply and demand flexibility, and digital innovation paving the way, we are in for an exciting journey

INDIA CROSSED A milestone in June—50% of its electricity generation capacity now comes from non-carbon-emitting sources, a testament to the Prime Minister’s clean growth vision. This marks a celebratory moment in India’s energy transition journey. But the transition is a long road trip requiring frequent gear shifts to adapt to changing terrain. India must now navigate rising demand, supply volatility, and evolving market dynamics to replace its fossil-fuel-based system with a clean, flexible, and inclusive energy ecosystem.

Electricity demand has surged over 20% in the last three years, and nearly doubled in the past 12 years. Peak demand now occurs in May and September, driven by heatwaves and post-monsoon industrial activity. Daily peaks have shifted too, around 3 pm and 9.30 pm, compared to 11 am and 7 pm in 2010. With residential and commercial sectors making up 45% demand, electricity use fluctuates sharply due to weather-sensitive appliances like air conditioners (ACs) and geysers. Northern states have increased their consumption share, while western ones have declined. In sum, India is experiencing a significant rise and volatility in electricity demand, along with changes in when and where.

On the supply side, clean energy sources like solar and wind are inherently variable and time-bound. They meet 25% of afternoon demand and only 10-12% of evening demand, while on the rise. Solutions like round-the-clock renewable energy, delivered through a combination of solar, wind, hydro, and storage, are gaining ground, but more capacity is needed to meet a larger share of electricity demand.

Aligning volatile demand with variable supply across all hours and seasons at the

national level is a growing challenge. While legacy coal systems provide backup, India urgently needs clean alternatives that can ramp up or down within minutes to handle sudden surpluses or shortfalls. Equally important is the ability to manage demand flexibly, reducing or shifting consumption when needed—such as during sudden drops in supply due to unexpected weather or spikes in air conditioning use.

The largest buyers of electricity, electricity distribution companies (discoms), also increasingly require flexibility to benefit from falling prices and meet shifting consumer needs. They are growing reluctant to sign the 25-year power purchase contracts.

Spot markets, which handle around 10% of India’s electricity, offer agility but are highly volatile. Prices can drop to near zero during solar hours and spike to ₹10/unit in the evening. Regulatory constraints that cap consumer tariffs discourage discoms from engaging in these risk-prone markets, despite their potential for dynamic and significantly higher procurement.

This need for flexibility is driving the entry of India’s electricity markets into a quick-commerce era, where minute-level responsiveness is becoming the premium. The traditional model—that of long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs)—is under strain, but has its benefits and is likely to retain a sizeable share of the market.

The transition has so far relied on mandates for discoms and select large industries, but this is no longer sustainable,

especially as discoms hesitate. India’s emission profile is also shifting. Industry now accounts for 38% of energy use and 40% of emissions, while households contribute to 35% of electricity demand growth. The rising use of ACs alone could add 120-140 gigawatt to peak demand by 2030—more than the UK’s total demand.

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Greenhouse gas emission targets

These benchmarks of placing a cap on emissions per unit of output (similar to China and Korea) apply to 282 plants across four high-emitting sectors accounting for 15-20% of India’s electricity use—aluminium, cement, chlor-alkali, and pulp and paper. The targets are annual and mandatory, enabling carbon pricing to influence business decisions and internal rate of return calculations. Given that these targets are moderately more ambitious than existing ones on large industries like the perform, achieve, and trade scheme and renewable consumption obligations, and that are likely to be expanded to other sectors, this could boost demand for clean energy and energy efficiency.

Virtual PPAs (VPPAs)

VPPAs offer price certainty without

long-term lock-ins, attributes that discoms and industries seek. In this financial contract, a buyer and renewable generator agree on a strike price. The generator sells power in the spot market, and payments are exchanged based on price differences. Buyers receive renewable energy certificates at predictable costs, while generators gain stable revenue streams—unlocking capital for clean energy projects.

India Energy Stack

Inspired by the success of India Stack (which powers Aadhaar, United Payments Interface, and Digilocker), the India Energy Stack aims to digitally connect generators, discoms, regulators, consumers, and innovators. It will enable real-time data-sharing and visibility of distributed assets like rooftop solar and batteries. If we place the onus of climate action on a larger populace, the India Energy Stack could give them a tool—to sell clean energy directly to other households instead of via utilities and benefit from participating in demand-side flexibility initiatives. This could transform consumers into active participants, choosing when and how to use or trade electricity.

India now stands on the cusp of a new phase in its energy transition—from static to dynamic demand and supply, from rigid contracts to agile markets, and from centralised control to digital and distributed participation. We have made a good start to be ready for what’s coming. With a few more bold policy shifts, especially on enabling supply, and demand flexibility and digital innovation paving the way, we are surely in for an exciting journey—full of challenges, creativity, and many more transformative milestones.

countries was not achieved. Granting access to India’s agriculture and dairy sector is the main hurdle. However, dependency on the US can be reduced gradually if India pursues and captures alternative markets. The transition will take considerable time. Meanwhile, the manufacturing sector can expect some turbulence. —RV Baskaran, Pune

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Tariff Shockwaves

In a world still recalibrating after pandemic disruptions and geopolitical realignments, the sudden surge in US tariffs under President Donald Trump’s latest executive order has rattled global businesses. While the administration frames the move as a necessary recalibration of out-dated trade pacts, the broader impact reveals a mix of strategic coercion and economic brinkmanship that risks destabilising supply chains and fanning inflation both within and beyond American borders. The tariff hikes span more than 90 countries, from major players like India and Brazil to smaller economies such as Laos and Switzerland. The rationale: reward nations that swiftly renegotiate trade deals, penalise those that don’t. But this conditional framework has done little to mask the underlying asymmetry in bargaining power. Many nations have secured only partial reprieves under pressure, while others – despite strong economic ties with the US – have found themselves blindsided by sharp increases. Switzerland, for instance, saw a previously discussed 10 per cent cap explode into a 39 per cent reality, catching exporters of precision goods and pharmaceuticals off guard. Brazil, meanwhile, was slapped with a 50 per cent tariff after political friction over its treatment of opposition leaders and perceived hostility towards US tech firms. In many boardrooms, the suddenness of the tariff spikes has bred not just concern but distrust. Companies fear that strategic planning is becoming impossible in a trade environment increasingly shaped by unpredictability, unilateralism, and the volatile tenor of political messaging. This tariff diplomacy blurs the line between economic policy and geopolitical posturing. India’s case is especially telling. Alongside a 25 per cent tariff, the threat of additional penalties over its on-going trade with Russia reflects a growing tendency to fuse foreign policy leverage with trade enforcement. The message is clear: align with US interests, or face punitive consequences. For American consumers, this strategy comes at a cost. Higher tariffs almost inevitably translate into higher prices at home. Whether it is Darjeeling tea, Mexican tomatoes, or Thai microelectronics, these imported goods form part of daily consumption and industrial production alike. As businesses either absorb costs or pass them on, the inflationary pressure could undercut the very economic stability the policy claims to protect. What is most concerning is the uncertainty. Businesses across the board – from fruit distributors in Arizona to electronics manufacturers in Southeast Asia – are now forced to operate under the looming threat of sudden policy reversals. Even temporary reprieves, such as Mexico’s 90-day exemption, feel less like stability and more like a countdown to potential disruption. Mr Trump’s tariff regime may succeed in compelling some governments to the negotiating table. But the long-term damage to trust, predictability, and multilateral cooperation could outweigh any immediate tactical gains. In reshaping the global trade architecture through unilateral force, the US risks isolating itself from the very partnerships it once championed – and dragging the global economy into a phase of transactional turbulence.

Unearthing Identity

The discovery of the ancient settlement at Keeladi in Tamil Nadu is much more than an archaeological milestone – it is a profound challenge to long-standing narratives about Indian civilisation. As trench after trench yields evidence of a literate, urban society dating back over 2,500 years, the soil of Keeladi appears to be unearthing not just artefacts, but forgotten truths. For over a century, mainstream historical discourse has portrayed Indian civilisation as a northern phenomenon, emerging first through the Indus Valley Civilisation and later through the Vedic culture of the Gangetic plains. This view, while based on significant finds, has long relegated southern India to a supporting role – a region waiting to be “civilised” by Aryan influence from the north. Keeladi destabilises that account by revealing a complex, well-organised settlement in the deep south from the same period. The presence of sophisticated brick structures, planned water systems, and most notably Tamil Brahmi script graffiti dating back to the 6th century BCE, opens up the possibility that the south’s civilisational arc was not derivative but parallel. If the Tamil Brahmi script did not emerge from the Ashokan Brahmi, but developed independently – perhaps with shared roots in the Indus Valley script – it compels a wholesale revision of how we understand the evolution of literacy, language, and statecraft in ancient India. But with history comes politics. The debate surrounding Keeladi’s significance has quickly become entangled in the enduring north-south divide of Indian identity. State governments see in Keeladi a wellspring of regional pride and cultural legitimacy, while central institutions appear hesitant, invoking procedural objections and calls for more scientific rigour. This tug-of-war is not merely about archaeology – it is about ownership of the national narrative. Such defensiveness reveals how central historical memory is to political legitimacy. By claiming that civilisation originated in one part of the country and spread outward, certain groups have sought to establish cultural dominance. But Keeladi reminds us that civilisation, like language and culture, does not flow in one direction. It branches, adapts, and emerges in multiple places simultaneously. This is not to say that we should jump to conclusions. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. But to suppress or delay emerging data because it unsettles an established order is to do violence to both science and society. Children visiting the Keeladi museum are encountering a history far more diverse than textbooks suggest. For many, it’s a first tangible link to a past that includes them – not as footnotes, but as central actors in India’s civilisational journey. Keeladi’s greatest gift may not be the artefacts it reveals, but the questions it forces us to ask – about who we are, where we came from, and who gets to decide which pasts matter. History, like identity, is layered. And the deeper we dig, the more complex – and connected – it becomes.

Swadeshi voices

‘Among all the factors which you think are calculated to improve the condition of the people and bring back prosperity to the people, the Swadeshi Movement is one of the highest importance. Patriotism needs it, humanity dictates it, and every possible consideration that you can have, will enforce the carrying out of the Swadeshi Movement in the most earnest spirit, not only now but for a long time to come’

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on his recent visit to Varanasi, called on citizens to adopt the spirit of ‘Swadeshi’ and support locally-made products. He stressed that true service to the nation lies in promoting indigenous goods, especially amid “global economic uncertainties”. The Prime Minister’s comments, made soon after the US announced harsh tariffs on exports from India and 70 other countries, assumes significance. It provides a bridge to the past, an occasion to learn lessons from the Swadeshi movement which began in 1905 in Bengal and then spread across the sub-continent. Swadeshi voices of legendary leaders and thinkers are worth pondering today.

At the 22nd session of the Indian National Congress, held in Calcutta from 26-29 December 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji delivered the presidential address highlighting “Swadeshi is not a thing of to-day. It has existed in Bombay as far as I know for many years past. I am a free-trader and I am a Member in the Executive Committee of the Cobden Club for 20 years, and yet I say that Swadeshi is a necessary necessity for India in its unnatural economic muddle. As long as the economic condition remains unnatural and impoverishing, by the necessity of supplying every year some Rs. 20,00,00,000 for the salary, pensions etc. of the children of a foreign country at the expense and impoverishment of the children of India, to talk of applying economic laws to the condition of India is adding insult to injury. I ask any Englishman whether Englishmen would submit to this unnatural economic muddle of India for a single day in England, leave alone 150 years? No, never. No, Ladies and Gentlemen, England will never submit to it.”

Dr Rash Behari Ghose, who succeeded Dadabhai as Congress president in 1907, said in a lengthy welcome address, “Swadeshi movement seems also to have given great offence to a certain section of the Anglo-Indian community. It seems that if you call the movement a boycott of foreign goods, you are a traitor to England. But competition with Manchester is not yet treason in the Indian Statute Book. The Swadeshi movement is only a prelude to our determination to enter into the great brotherhood of the trading nations of the West...come with me to the exhibition on the other side of the street, a visit to it, I am sure, will fill the heart of every one of you with hope and gladness; for in Swadeshim you see the cradle of a new India. To speak of such a movement as disloyal is a lie and calumny. We love England with all her faults, but we love India more.”

At the Industrial Conference, as part of 1906 Congress session, the Maharaja of Baroda Sayajirao Gaekwar III spoke on “the triumph of machinery as the triumph of our age...The rise of power-looms, for instance, has been stealing a march over the handloom workers, and the numbers employed in cotton weaving in India have declined by 23 per cent, even with-



in the last decade...this textile industry itself which shows how, with intelligent adaptation to the improved methods our Indian industries can compete with the manufactures of Europe. The Bombay mills give daily employment to about 1,70,000 factory operatives, while so many as 30,000 more are maintained by ginning presses. Some forty years ago we had only 13 cotton mills in all India. The number rose to 47 in 1876, to 95 in 1886, to 155 in 1895, and to 203 in 1904; and to-day the number of our cotton mills is still larger. We had less than 4,000 power-looms forty years ago: the number was over 47,000 in 1904: We had less than 3,00,000 spindles 40 years ago: the number exceeded five million in 1904. These are insignificant figures compared with the huge cotton industry of Lancashire; but they show that we have made steady progress...New mills have been started in Ahmedabad and Bombay within the last two years, largely as a result of the present Swadeshi movement.”

Sir Vitaldas Damodar Thackersey, prominent businessman of Bombay, delivering the presidential address to the Industrial Conference, said “Whatever Bengal might have done or failed to do, she has undoubtedly given an impetus to the Swadeshi idea. All over the country today, among young and old, rich and poor, men and women, high caste and low caste, the word Swadeshi has become a household word, and the spirit of it too, we may hope, is well understood. We have got the Swadeshi idea firmly implanted in the national mind. We have now to consider what our programme should be for the near future. We cannot do everything at once. Industries are not created in a day...let us focus on the agricultural industry. It behoves private landlords like the Zamindars of Bengal, who correspond to the landed aristocracy of England, to devote their time and resources towards developing their industry. If the Swadeshi spirit inspires

these great landed magnates to introduce science and system into agriculture so as to make it yield the highest profit of which it is capable, then believe me you will be in sight of large manufactures, financed, controlled, and worked by our own countrymen.”

Through February 1907 Gopalkrishna Gokhale delivered addresses in Lucknow where he spoke about the economic condition of India and Swadeshi movement. “One of the most gratifying signs of the present times is the rapid growth of the Swadeshi sentiment all over the country during the last two years. Swadeshim at its highest is not merely an industrial movement, but that it affects the whole life of the nation, that Swadeshim at its highest is a deep, passionate, fervent, all-embracing love of the motherland, and that this love seeks to show itself, not in one sphere of activity only, but in all: it invades



true salvation of India...the true industrial regeneration of the country.”

Mrs Annie Besant, writing in the Central Hindu College magazine, said, “The point is the building up of the entire Indian nation, by the encouragement of national feeling, by maintaining the traditional dress, way of living and so on, by promoting Indian arts and manufactures, by giving preference to Indian products over foreign. Now this is a point which really goes to the very root of Indian revival. Do not undervalue the importance of sentiment, and do not try to do away with everything which differentiates India from other lands; rather strive to maintain the immemorial customs and follow the immemori-

al traditions... it is the bounden duty of every patriotic Indian to encourage Indian art, Indian manufactures and Indian labour; and not to go across the seas to bring here endless manufactured articles, but to give work to his own people. Let all encourage Indian manufactures and arts, and all Indian-made goods in India. Indian art has gained a name all over the world because of its beauty and artistic finish, and why should men who have such art on their own soil, why should they go and buy the shoddy productions of Birmingham and Manchester?”

In the Indian Review, Sister Nivedita of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda order, commented, “in the Swadeshi movement the Indian people. have found an opportunity to make themselves respected by the whole world. For the world respects that which shows that it is to be feared, and the one thing that is feared by all is strong, intelligent, and united action: We conquer a single elephant with ease. But where is the man who would attack a herd? The note of manliness and self-help is sounded throughout the Swadeshi movement. There is here no begging for help, no cringing for concessions. What India can do for herself, that she will do...And there is no reason why the movement should fail in India.”

When Surat was hosting a Swadeshi conference in December 1907, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, said, “it is hardly necessary to make any appeal to you in the cause of Swadeshi. I consider it as a dispensation of Providence that the minds of our people have for some time past been more and more directed towards the Swadeshi Movement. Among all the factors which you think are calculated to improve the condition of the people and bring back prosperity to the people, the Swadeshi Movement is one of the highest importance. Patriotism needs it, humanity dictates it, and every possible consideration that you can have, will enforce the carrying out of the Swadeshi Movement in the most earnest spirit, not only now but for a long time to come.”

Through the thoughts, inspiring ideas and writings of these iconic personalities, voices of Swadeshi movement can still be heard, loud and clear.

Deve Gowda, within a year of explosive allegations of sexual abuse is a rare but powerful example of justice served swiftly and decisively.

His horrific crimes – rape, sexual assault, and the deliberate recording of such acts – were laid bare ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls through pen drives containing graphic videos, photos, and screenshots.

Shockingly, victims were easily identifiable, exposing them to public trauma. Police estimates suggest nearly 100 women – ranging from housemaids and government employees to political workers – had been violated.

Initially, Prajwal reacted as most powerful offenders do – crying “political conspiracy,” intimidating the media, securing gag orders, and fleeing to Ger-

Global Housing Crisis

A spectre looms over world cities from Dublin to Delhi, London to Lagos. It is not the promise of glass towers or innovation hubs, but the absence of homes. While policy pledges proliferate, billions remain locked out of shelter. In 2025, analysts determined that as many as 6.5 million new housing units are required across developed economies alone to meet demand and affordability, not to mention the eight to ten million unit gap existing in poorer communities. This shortfall is not statistical noise; it is the slow erosion of human dignity.

Poverty is not the only force behind the crisis. In high-income countries, surging property values outstrip wage growth. London’s average house price is now nearly 9.6 times the median salary; in Toronto and Seoul, more than tenfold. In lower-income nations, rapid urban migration swells informal settlements.

Nairobi’s slum population now exceeds three million; Rio and Mumbai struggle under the weight of millions living in shelters of tin and cardboard. Globally, 1.6 billion people live with inadequate structure or overcrowded beds. These are not anomalies; they are symptoms of planning failure and economic imbalance. Behind this crisis lies a catalogue of system breakdowns. In



many cities, zoning laws or slow permitting processes freeze potential supply. Japan’s urban densification restrictions, Germany’s conservation codes, and U.S. local review hoops replicate delays that prevent new units from emerging.

A single zoning dispute in Mumbai can stall an entire high-rise for years. In Europe alone, judicial planning reviews grew by at least 15 per cent in the last three years, ensnaring thousands of units in legal paralysis. What we badly need in bricks, we deny through bureaucracy.

The human toll is urgent. In New York, over 650,000 people slept in shelters in 2024. In Cape Town, shack dwellers account for one in five residents.

In Barcelona and Vancouver, young workers and retirees alike share couches or wait years for affordable units. Excessive rent consumes over 35 per cent of many renters’ incomes.

In slums, fragile health outcomes, fire hazards, and unstable tenure erode hope into habit. A home is not just shelter; it is the threshold between opportunity and oblivion.

Yet the crisis could be tamed. In Ireland, pilot modular construction programmes reduced build time by over 30 per cent. In Brazil, upzonings near metro lines unlocked vast new housing stocks.

India’s mass transit-oriented developments yielded 200,000 homes with minimal idle land. A WHO-aligned health standard for housing now makes ventilation, insulation, and sanitation prerequisites. These are bullets not of charity but of design, process, and determination.

To close the gap, cities must designate housing as critical national infrastructure. In New York, pressing certificates and approvals within months (not years) becomes law. Judicial appeals must be limited to substantive violations, not delays of convenience.

many, presumably believing his political clout, and the unholy nexus of police, judiciary, and politicians, would shield him. His parents even reportedly abducted one of the victims in an attempt to suppress testimony.

But sustained public outrage, media coverage, and the courage of multiple victims ensured the system could not ignore the case.

With a professional police probe, untainted evidence, and a determined prosecution, the court delivered a swift conviction.

This verdict proves that, with political will and institutional integrity, justice is still possible – even for the voiceless.

Yours, etc.,
N Sadhasiva Reddy,
Bengaluru, 2 August.



Pakistan’s involvement in Pahalgam now proven

HARSHA KAKAR

The report of the Monitoring Team of the UNSC 1267 Sanctions Committee released last week, says, “On 22nd April, terrorists attacked a tourist spot in Pahalgam, J and K. Twenty-six civilians were killed. The attack was claimed that same day by The Resistance Front (TRF), who in parallel published a photograph of the attack site. The claim was repeated the following day.” It adds that on 26 April, TRF retracted their statement.

The report also quoted Indian and Pakistan views when it mentioned, “One member state (India) said the attack could not have happened without LeT support, and that there was a relationship between the LeT and TRF. One member state (Pakistan) rejected these views and said LeT was defunct.” The report closed by mentioning, “the attack was carried out by TRF, which is synonymous with LeT.”

The UN accepted the Indian viewpoint that the LeT and TRF are the same organisation. For the first time the TRF has emerged in a UN document. Decisions taken by the Sanctions Committee are normally unanimously adopted by the UNSC. Pakistan, a current non-permanent member of the UNSC may find it difficult to prevent sanction of the TRF.

On 17 July, the US designated the TRF as a ‘Foreign Terrorist Organization’ and ‘Specially Designated Global Terrorist.’ Pakistan initially objected to the US decision aware that its claims of the LeT being defunct would have few takers. Subsequently, its foreign minister Ishaq Dar, mentioned, “We have no issue. And we welcome, if they have any evidence, that they are involved.” In reality, Pakistan had no choice as it was already announced.

In the same interview, speaking on the UNSC resolution on Pahalgam, Dar added, “We opposed the mention of TRF in the UNSC statement. I got calls from global capitals, but Pakistan will not accept. TRF was deleted, and Pakistan prevailed.” If Pakistan was not involved, then why was it so desperate to protect the TRF in the UNSC?

India launched Operation Sindoor as a retaliation to Pakistan’s support for the Pahalgam attack. In the short 88-hour operation India forced Pakistan to seek a ceasefire based on heavy losses and abject failure of its strikes. India’s victory was marred by Donald Trump claiming credit for ending the conflict.

Pakistan kept denying its involvement in Pahalgam. It even offered an independent probe, which like the ongoing probe on the attack on Air Force station Pathankot of January 2016, would stretch on without an end. Pakistan’s defence minister, Khwaja Asif, went on to mention that Pahalgam was possibly a false flag operation conducted by Indian security agencies. He added, “We have absolutely nothing to do with it. We reject terrorism in all its forms and everywhere.”

The recent killing of the three terrorists involved in Pahalgam in Operation Mahadev cleared all doubts. The terrorists had been tracked since Pahalgam but were possibly asked to lie low by their Pakistani handlers, after India hit Pakistan with Operation Sindoor. Rawalpindi was aware that another terrorist incident could spell disaster as its destroyed assets had yet to be replaced or repaired. This time it would be unable to hide its losses.

Tracking the terrorists was a tedious task. Over 1,000 individuals were interviewed and amongst them, two who provided shelter, post Pahalgam, were arrested. While the general

area where they were hiding was known, it was not easy to track them as the area is heavily forested and benefits terrorists rather than security agencies.

Ultimately, it was the opening of a Chinese communication device to establish contact with their handlers which gave their specific location away. These devices have been banned in India and are known to be used only by terrorists. A subsequent swift operation led to their deaths. Their bodies were identified by those who had provided them shelter. Their identities were established as Suleman alias Faisal, Tahir Habib alias Afghani, and Jibrán. Suleman was involved in both Pahalgam and the Gagangir terror attack near Sonamarg in October 2024.

For the government, confirming that these were the terrorists involved in the Pahalgam attack and proving the direct involvement of Pakistan was essential. The first part was done by ballistically authenticating that the weapons obtained from the slain terrorists were the same which were used in Pahalgam. Bullet shells from the Pahalgam site matched those test-fired from the weapons at the forensic laboratory in Chandigarh. Six separate scientists were involved in the assessment to ensure that there was no error.

The Home Minister, Amit Shah stated in parliament, “There is no room for doubt. I am holding the ballistic report, six scientists have cross-checked it and confirmed to me over video call that the bullets fired at Pahalgam and the bullets fired from these guns are a 100 per cent match.” Once this was established, the next was to obtain irrefutable proof of Pakistan’s involvement.

This emerged with the recovery of multiple equipment and products of Pakistani origin. These included



ultra-high frequency wireless sets employed to communicate with their handlers across the border and other expendable products, including medicines, manufactured in Pakistan.

Two terrorists were also in possession of their Pakistan voter numbers which enabled agencies to confirm that one was from Lahore and the other from POK. Media reports mention that the family of Tahir Habib, one of the slain terrorists, held his funeral in absentia, at Khai Gala village in POK. The village objected to the presence of Rizwan Hanif, a local LeT commander, further confirming Pakistan’s and LeT’s involvement. Shah stated, “two had Pakistani voter numbers, and even chocolates they carried were made in Pakistan.”

The Pakistan foreign ministry, as expected, refused to accept Indian findings including the individuals

being Pakistani nationals. Their statement mentioned, “The account given by the Indian Home Minister is replete with fabrications, leading to serious questions about its credibility.”

The report of the Monitoring Team of the UNSC 1267 Sanctions Committee, the US designating TRF as a terrorist organization and irrefutable proof obtained from the slain terrorists are indicators of Pakistan’s involvement in Pahalgam and these terrorists being Pakistani nationals. Rawalpindi unwilling to accept them as its nationals is nothing new. In Kargil, they had refused to accept the remains of their soldiers who died fighting, which even today lie buried on Indian soil. These are just terrorists and expendable.

(The writer is a retired Major-General of the Indian Army.)

‘The road is made by walking’

ANDREW SHENG

Asian economies are still anxiously assessing how to compete for trade with the United States after missing the August 1 deadline for the Trump administration’s tariff negotiations.

The Philippines’ tariff rate for exports to the US is reportedly down to 19 per cent. However, one Filipino lawmaker says it is 6 per cent. Indonesia’s rate is down to 19 per cent; Vietnam’s is down to 20 per cent. Hours before the deadline, Malaysian, Thai and Cambodian leaders seemed to be on the cusp of reaching deals with the US. Meanwhile, Laos is bracing for stiff tariffs of up to 40 per cent.

This is Maga economics in a nutshell. Washington has traded in a multilateral approach to hegemony for a “divide and conquer” strategy that makes smaller economies compete against each other for the superpower’s favour. Against the largest importer in the world, small exporters have no cards, as Donald Trump might say.

As governments scramble to negotiate deals, businesses may have to close entire factories or shift to countries with lower tariffs. If current profit margins are too thin, higher tariff rates are likely to put further stress on the cost of doing business.

Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh emerged as big winners from the first phase of the US-China trade war in the late 2010s. But Cambodia’s tariff rate faced as much as 40 per cent, compared with Bangladesh’s 35 per cent rate.. On August 1, Trump basically equalized tariffs by putting Cambodia and Bangladesh at 19 per cent, versus Vietnam at 20 per cent.

This climate of fierce geoeconomic competition is ushering in a wave of uncertainty. The unpredictable nature of who will win or lose from the US’ “divide and conquer” strategy produces more questions than answers. Meanwhile, any attempt to use technology to stay ahead of the game may be in vain even as the US doubles down on artificial intelligence (AI) policy.

Last month, the Trump administration released “America’s AI Action Plan.” According to Trump, “As [the US] global competitors race to exploit these technologies [such as AI], it is a national security imperative for the United States to achieve and maintain unquestioned and unchallenged global technological dominance”.

In a unipolar order, the hegemon dictates the rules. After the second world war, the global economy was comparatively stable. Under Pax Americana, one set of rules governed free trade and capital flows. However, the world system wasn’t without contradiction. Europe and Russia began to wield more influence after recovering from the second world war. The rise of China, India and emerging economies such as Indonesia and Brazil was also on the horizon. The unipolar world order gradually gave way to a multipolar one.

During the Cold War, Mao Zedong divided the world into the “first world” of superpowers, “second world” of advanced economies and the “third world” of non-aligned countries. One might mathematically approach this fragmentation through the N-body equation, more popularly fictionalised by Chinese author Liu Cixin in his science fiction novel, The Three-Body Problem. When physicist

Isaac Newton studied the motion of planets, he was able to predict the trajectory of two bodies mathematically. But the three-body problem has no elegant mathematical solution to predict the outcome of multiple-body gravitational interactions.

Each body’s motion is influenced by the changing gravitational pull of the other two or more bodies, creating complex interactions that current mathematics cannot accurately explain. The system illustrates chaotic behaviour characterised by a lack of information and random variables.

The three-body problem illustrates science’s limitations, as well as the limitations of historically informed paradigms used to understand contemporary times and predict the future. AI stems from this paradigm as it combines existing data, computing power and algorithms in the form of large language models.

The US believes AI could shape the outcome of several economic puzzles. Will AI help Maga return to the unipolar order? Is the bipolar order between the US and China stable? Will a multipolar order comprising three or more powers lead to conflict and more disorder? National security thinkers posit that if they collect real-time data through social media and intelligence-gathering, gain superiority in computing and apply the most advanced learning models, they can beat the opposition. If only life were that simple.

Chinese strategist Sun Tzu understood the importance of gathering intelligence. War is all about operating in uncertainty. Decision-making is difficult in a fast-changing environment plagued by misinformation, disinformation and information gaps.



AI can use algorithms to generate “synthetic data”, but all data exporters know the fatal flaw of “garbage in, garbage out”. Bad data leads to bad decisions. Hence, there is no perfect AI solution.

The clash of civilisations and economies on a global scale is systemic competition between entangled systems that are not independent of one another. China, being an older civilisation compared to the US – understands the need for resilient systems, whether they be supply chains or governing institutions.

Ultimately, these systems are underpinned by people and the planet we live on. After all, decisions are inevitably made by people, even if

they use AI. Climate change only adds new risks, making outcomes even more unpredictable. The world system will be shaped by how each competitor learns from mistakes or missteps and takes action to be more resilient against future shocks.

We have no algorithm to predict how the contest for the 21st century will unfold. As the Spanish poet Antonio Machado profoundly put it, “Traveller, there is no road, the road is made by walking.”

(The writer is Distinguished Fellow of Asia Global Institute, University of Hong Kong; and Chairman of George Tow Institute of Open and Advanced Studies, Wawasan Open University in Penang, Malaysia.)
Special to ANN.

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

ALTHOUGH the French military communique on the subject of the war in Morocco admit nothing, such news as we are receiving coming by way of Tangiers, French Ministers have repeatedly referred to the serious nature of the situation. It was thought the other day when Abdel Krim was reported to be drawing in his forces and entrenching that the time for the French to deliver the final blow had at last arrived. But no news has yet been received of any massed attack, Tangiers reports the loss of another French post, and M. Painleve continues to be pessimistic. What then is really happening in Morocco? The reports about enemy infiltration into regions remote from Abdel Krim’s sphere of operations, no less than the insistence by French Generals on the need of reinforcements from France appear to indicate that the Arab levies on whom so much reliance was placed have proved untrustworthy. When M. Painleve says that a victory for Abdel Krim means the loss of the whole of Morocco he cannot be surprised if an impression is left on the public that the Arab uprising is general and not confined to the Rifis.

NEWS ITEMS

COMMONS TO RISE AT WEEK-END

BILLS POSTPONED TILL AUTUMN

LONDON, AUG. 3.

SPEAKING in the House of Commons to-day, Mr. Baldwin announced that the House would rise on August 7 or 8 until November 16.

The following are among the Bills which have been postponed until the autumn:—

Dangerous Drugs Bill; Government of India Civil Service Bill; and the Merchandise Marks on Imported Agri-cultural Produce Bill.

Mr. J. Maxton (Lab., Bridgeton), asked would the House reassemble if industrial troubles became more serious in the interval.

Mr. Baldwin said that there was always power to summon the House. He had no hesitation in giving an assurance that he would do so, but he could not imagine that such assurance was necessary.—Reuter

ATHENS-SOFIA TENSION

ALLEGED TERRORISM BY BULGARS

ATHENS, AUG. 3.

GRECO-BULGARIAN tension has arisen owing to the murder of a Greek landowner, named Nikolaides, by a Bulgarian, by name Comitadgis Stanamaka. The Greek Foreign Minister has declared that the murder was intended to terrorize the five thousand Greeks in Bulgaria due to emigrate before October 15 under agreement after liquidating their properties, so as to compel them to leave Bulgaria earlier and abandon their properties, which, it is alleged, Bulgarian irregulars are ready to occupy.

Greece has asked Bulgaria to arrest and punish the murderers but as Bulgaria seems to treat the matter lightly, it has been deemed necessary to reinforce the frontier troops in order to protect Greek emigrants.

The Bulgarian Minister at Athens is reported to have declared that the Greek Government is exaggerating the importance of the murder.—Reuter.

ENTICEMENT ATTEMPTS

BOMBAY CHARGES RAISED IN COMMONS

LONDON, AUG. 3.

COL. Harry Day (Lab. Central Southwark), drew attention in the House of Commons to-day to the representations made to the Bombay Government with a view to stopping attempts to entice white girls from Bombay to Portugese India and to the native States for immoral purposes.

Earl Winterton replied that the representations had not been brought to his notice. Lord Birkenhead saw no reason to suppose that the matter would not be dealt with suitably by the authorities in India, but a special inquiry could be made if Col. Day so desired.

WOMEN STUDENTS

RESOLUTION OF ALLAHABAD UNIVERSITY

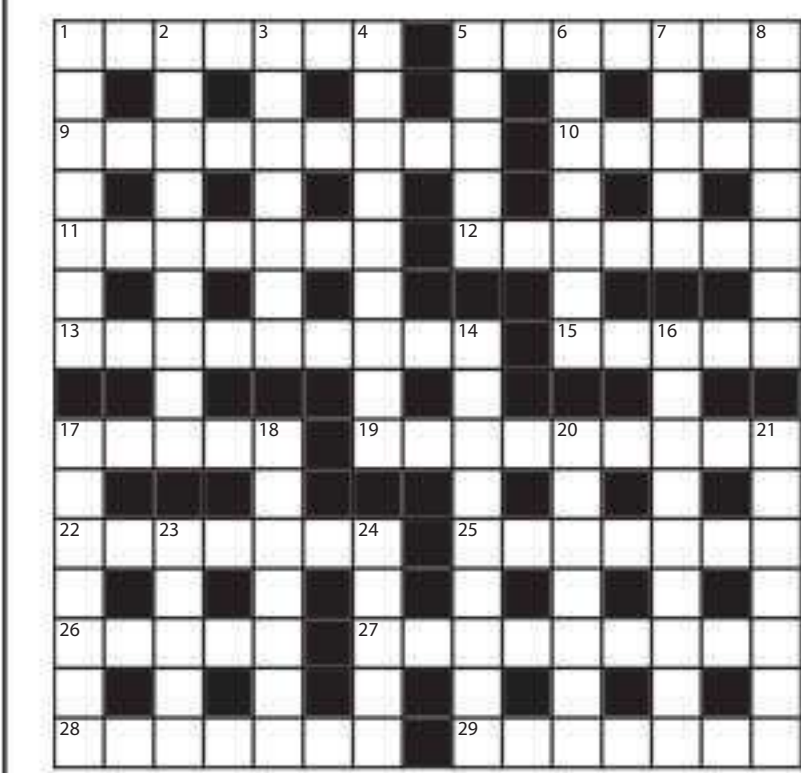
ALLAHABAD, AUG. 4.

THE Executive Council of the Allahabad University has passed a resolution that, except with the permission of the Vice-Chancellor, no female student shall be admitted to any of the B. A. classes along with male students.

The legality of the step is questioned by a local paper. A meeting of the women of Allahabad is announced to take place next Thursday to consider the resolution.

CROSSWORD

NO-293215



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

SHAPES SOBSTORY
A O H A O R E
F L A T F O O T E D A C H E
V P D U I T E
R E C O R D E R L A N D A U
U Y A E T R
D R S I S O A
P I M I T E N T O U G L Y
T O N P N
F O L L O W P A L M T R E E
R I S O A D N
K I L N H O I T Y T O I T Y
A E O N U W E
P L A N G E N T P A N T R Y

ACROSS

- Peculiar rogue promises to pay (7)
- Fixes fight with El Salvador (7)
- Flexible cushion turned over in a piece of furniture (9)
- Benefit involving northern wind (5)
- One of pack in charge holding ace of hearts (7)

DOWN

- Firm chaff initially swallowed by mountain bird (7)
- Daughter with European cat weed (9)
- Creature that a pirate holds (5)
- Way fish harden (5)
- Fancy green dens for bears (9)
- Not so heavy smoker's accessory (7)
- Springy hat worn by English non-smoker (7)

DOWN

- Risked placing new church in country (7)
- Adjust back row (9)

ACROSS

- Unpopular team away from home (7)
- Reserves bed with bit of extra support (9)
- Clean compass (5)
- Break sculpture perhaps and begin again (7)
- Penny and Scotsman love quietly (5)
- Tell tales about revolting trainer (7)
- Dream of dark horse (9)
- Cost including epic rewritten for Cliff (9)

DOWN

- Very legitimate petition (7)
- Reliant upon changing for convenience (7)
- Constant undoing regularly upset kitties (7)
- Makes offensive remarks about sliders (7)
- Greengrocer using apostrophes: 'Vegetable's and topping's for fruit' (5)
- Feeling frisky in outskirts of Rugby (5)

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

States Focus



CM SAINI: NO POOR FAMILY IN HARYANA WILL REMAIN HOMELESS

Asserting that no poor family in Haryana will remain homeless, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Monday handed over ownership certificates under the Mukhyamantri Shehri Awas Yojana and plot allotment letters under the Mukhyamantri Gramin Awas Yojana 2.0 to hundreds of beneficiaries.

At a State-level programme held in Panchkula, Saini while reaffirming the Government's commitment, said that no poor family in Haryana will remain homeless, underscoring the resolve of the Government to ensure inclusive growth. The Chief Minister said that on Monday, 1,144 beneficiaries in Sector-23, Jagadhri received ownership certificates under Mukhyamantri Shehri Awas Yojana.



SC CLEARS WAY FOR 27% OBC QUOTA IN MAHARASHTRA POLLS

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said the Supreme Court's order has paved the way for holding the elections to local bodies with a 27 per cent quota for OBCs. "The Supreme court had already directed on May 6 that the local body polls be held as per the OBC quota of 2017. This direction was confirmed today. Now the entire OBC reservation will be implemented in the upcoming polls to local bodies," Fadnavis told reporters. He further said the 2022 law of ward delimitation has been scrapped. State minister and NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal hailed the Supreme Court order dismissing petitions challenging OBC reservation in local body elections and sought the re-implementation of pre-2022 ward structures.

Shibu Soren passes away at 81

PRANAV PRATYUSH ■ Ranchi

A pall of gloom descended on Jharkhand as Shibu Soren, the stalwart leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and former Chief Minister, passed away at the age of 81 on Monday, at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi after a prolonged illness.

Revered across the state and widely known by the honorifics Guruji and Dishom Guru — "Guru of the Land" — Soren's demise signifies the passing of a political generation ro-ted in grassroots struggle and tribal identity.

The announcement was made by his son and sitting Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who took to social media to share the news with deep sorrow.

"Respected Dishom Guruji has departed from among us. Today, I feel an indescribable emptiness," he wrote—words that echoed through the hearts of Jharkhand's people, many of whom saw Soren as more than a leader, but as a symbol of their fight for dignity and recognition.



PM Narendra Modi paying his respects to former Jharkhand CM Shibu Soren, who passed away at the age of 81 on Monday at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in New Delhi on Monday Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren is also seen

The Rajya Sabha MP was getting treatment at Sir Gangaram Hospital in Delhi since June after he developed some complications in Ranchi.

Soren was also a patient of cronic kidney disease and some other ailments. Senior national leaders, including President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, leader of opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Congress national president Mallikarjun Kharge, Union Minister Sanjay Seth and others visited Sir Gangaram Hospital and paid tribute to Soren.

The leaders paid their last respect to Shibu Soren and consoled his son and Jharkhand Chief Minister

Hemant Soren and his wife Kalpana Murmu Soren, who were present there.

Hailing him as a towering presence in Indian political history, the Prime Minister paid tribute to Shibu Soren's lifelong commitment to tribal empowerment and his pivotal role in the creation of Jharkhand.

"Shri Shibu Soren ji was a

Six dead in Uttarakhand, Himachal as rains wreak havoc

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Three people drowned in Uttarakhand and another three killed in Himachal Pradesh when their vehicle fell into a gorge after skidding off a wet road, as rain continued to wreak havoc in the region.

Thirteen districts in Uttar Pradesh have been flooded, with major rivers like Ganga, Yamuna and Betwa flowing above the danger mark at several places. Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Monday conducted an aerial survey in Sawai Madhopur district to assess the damage caused

by flood-like situation following heavy rainfall.

In Uttarkhand, one person was swept away on Monday by strong currents of the Bhakhra stream near Haldwani. Another two had drowned in a swollen stream near Bhujiyaghat on Haldwani road on Sunday.

Two shops were buried under boulders and debris falling from the hillside in Rudraprayag district in the wake of a landslide overnight, the state emergency operation centre here said.

Heavy overnight rains continued in Dehradun on Monday with the district administration closing



Wall of a house built on a slope collapses after heavy rainfall in Dehradun on Monday

schools and aanganwadi centres for the day.

Major rivers in the state were in spate, including the

Ganga in Haridwar and Kali. In Himachal's Mandi, three people were killed when their vehicle fell into a gorge.

STATE GOVT ANNOUNCES THREE-DAY STATE MOURNING, GOVT OFFICES TO REMAIN CLOSED FOR TWO DAYS

grassroots statesman who dedicated his life to public service with tireless resolve. He championed the cause of tribal communities, the underprivileged and the marginalised. Deeply saddened by his demise. My heartfelt sympathies are with his loved ones and followers. I spoke with Jharkhand Chief Minister Shri Hemant Soren ji to offer my condolences. Om Shanti," Prime Minister Modi posted on X.

Political leaders across the spectrum, both allies and opponents, came together in mourning.

From his early days resisting land exploitation to his leadership as a three-time Chief Minister and former Union Minister, Soren's career was defined by a deep-rooted dedication to his people.

Police identified the deceased as Devrat, Mangal Chand and Ashu.

The incident, in which two more were injured, occurred late Sunday night when the vehicle skidded off the narrow road and ended up in a deep gorge near a Saini drain between Magrugla and Majhwal.

All five were returning home from Shankardehra, where they had been for the apple season.

In Rajasthan, Sharma flew over Chakeri, Jadawata, Ajanoti, Mainpura, Dhanauli and Surwal villages and inspected the damaged Bodal culvert in Khandar, officials said.

Omar Abdullah calls for farmer-centric research to build self-reliant J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Jammu

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Monday lauded the agricultural scientists, faculty and students in driving innovation and called for farmer-centric research to build self-reliant Jammu and Kashmir.

Addressing the 9th convocation ceremony of Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) here, Abdullah applauded the outstanding performance of girl students securing 252 out of 446 degrees, seven of eight gold medals and 32 of 35 merit certificates.

"This is an absolute pleasure to see so many girls receiving gold medals, a shining example of women excelling in agri-education and research," he said.



J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and state CM Omar Abdullah during the 9th Convocation of Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu on Monday

"Earlier, there was a time when out of 10 students, only one used to be a girl but the ratio has changed...it is encouraging and shows that there is no field in which our sisters and daughters are not able to establish a position for themselves," the chief minister said, receiving a thundering applause from the audience.

He said gone are the days when it was thought that agriculture and allied sectors were the exclusive domain of men who have to fight for their rightful place by virtue of hardwork.

Highlighting the importance of agriculture and allied sectors, he said this is an area which has a rich potential and needs a focussed attention from the Government and the academia to build self-reliant Jammu and Kashmir with

farmer-centric research.

"This sector is the most important part of our economy. In terms of visibility, tourism is seen as more important while industry also gets a lot of attention. But if you look at the GDP of Jammu and Kashmir as a state, as a territory, agriculture and allied sectors far exceed anything else that contributes to the economy of the Jammu and Kashmir," Abdullah said.

The chief minister said new technologies, innovations, new ideas and new Government policies like the holistic agriculture program of Jammu and Kashmir or sending money directly into the bank accounts of farmers by the union Government, insurance cover for failed crops provide an opportunity in this sector.

20 peacocks found dead in Karnataka's Tumakuru

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Tumakuru (Karnataka)

Twenty peacocks were found dead under mysterious circumstances in Tumakuru district in Karnataka on Monday and Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre has ordered a probe led by the Deputy Conservator of Forests.

Of the deceased, three were male and 17 female, officials said.

The farmers who discovered the dead peacocks in a field near Medigeshi in Hanumanthapura village of Madhugiri taluk in the district alerted the police, following which they, along with the forest department officials, reached the spot.

The cause of the death is yet to be ascertained, a senior police official said, adding that samples have been collected and sent to Forensic Science Labs experts for further analysis by the forest department.

A case has been registered by the forest department.

Expressing sorrow over the death of peacocks, Minister Khandre has issued a directive to the Chief Wildlife Warden recalling that a month-and-a-half ago, a tiger—our national animal—and its four cubs had died due to poisoning in the Male Mahadeshwara Hills in Chamranagara district.

MUKHTAR ANSARI'S SON UMAR ANSARI ARRESTED

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In a joint operation, the Lucknow and Ghazipur police arrested Umar Ansari, the younger son of mafia don turned politician Mukhtar Ansari, from MLA residence in Darulshafa late on Sunday night. The residence in which Umar Ansari was staying belonged to his elder brother and MLA Abbas Ansari from Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP).

According to ADG Law and Order Amitabh Yash, Umar had filed a petition in the court by forging the signatures of his absconding mother Afshan Ansari, who has a reward of one lakh rupees on her arrest, so that the property confiscated under the Gangster Act could be released. Police will interrogate Umar Ansari in Ghazipur in the case. The process of presenting him in the court will be completed there.

It may be mentioned that a case was registered against Umar Ansari in Ghazipur's Mohammadabad police station area. According to the FIR, Umar filed a petition in the court in the name of his mother Afshan Ansari, demanding the release of the confiscated property. But the signatures in the documents attached with the petition were found to be suspicious. Lawyer Liaquat Ali had claimed in the court that Afshan herself signed the petition and sent it through Umar. When the documents were examined by the Government advocate, it was revealed that the signatures on the petition did not match at all with the signatures recorded in Afshan Ansari's earlier documents.

Not only this, Afshan is currently an accused with a reward of one lakh rupees. Ghazipur and Mau police have announced a reward of 50,000 each on her arrest.

Evicted people should not be given shelter: Assam CM Himanta

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said people should not give shelter to evicted persons, else the "position of our people", which has improved through evictions and other measures, will become "bad again". He asserted that the Government will continue with its anti-encroachment drives to protect the 'jati' (community) if people continue to cooperate with it.

"Our people are conscious now. I don't think they will cooperate a lot," Sarma told reporters on sidelines of programmes in Bodoland territorial Region (BTR) when asked if the evicted people will settle down in other parts of the state.

He said the encroachers should return from where they came from and the Government has no objection to it. Urging the public not to



help the evicted people, he said, "Our people should not give them shelter. Otherwise, our position which has become little good through evictions and other steps, will become bad again."

The Chief Minister said about 29 lakh bighas (more than 9.5 lakh acres) of land is still under encroachment in the State.

"A lot of work is to be done and if people cooperate with us, we will be able to do it and protect our 'jati' (community)," he added. On last week's

eviction drive in Uriamghat area along inter-state border with Nagaland, he said, "There is no Naga aggression there. The Naga people and Government have helped us in the eviction."

Without naming any community, he accused the alleged encroachers of being the root of several issues.

"By turning our forest into betelnut plantations, fishery, they are harassing us. Who is doing 'love jihad'? It is happening on us. Who has done 'land jihad'? It is happening on us. We are the ones who should cry but they are shedding tears," Sarma said.

The Chief Minister had earlier said 1.29 lakh bighas (over 42,500 acres) of land have been cleared of encroachment in the last four years, claiming that these huge tracts were under possession of "illegal Bangladeshis and doubtful citizens".

Illegal religious conversion racket in UP: ED arrests Chhangur Baba's aide

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

A special PMLA court in Lucknow on Monday granted custody of Naveen Rohra, an alleged aide of Chhangur Baba, to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) as part of a money-laundering investigation

linked to an alleged illegal religious conversion racket in Uttar Pradesh, official sources said. Rohra was lodged in jail after the Uttar Pradesh Police Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) arrested him some time back.

The ED had moved a local court seeking his custodial remand for questioning and

the court has granted his custody to the agency, the sources said. The agency had earlier claimed that all the immovable assets "acquired" by Chhangur Baba were in the names of Naveen Rohra and his wife Neetu Rohra to conceal his actual involvement in money laundering.

Nitish announces domicile policy for teachers recruitment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Monday announced a 'domicile policy' in the recruitment of Government teachers.

The CM, however, did not specify what percentage of recruitments was to be reserved for those born and raised in the state.

The announcement came

ahead of the assembly elections in the State, which are due this year.

"The Education Department has been directed to make necessary amendments to the relevant rules to give priority to the residents (domicile) of Bihar in the recruitment of teachers," Kumar said in a social media post.

"Since the formation of the Government in Nov-

ember 2005, we have been continuously working to improve the education system. A large number of teachers have been appointed to strengthen the education system," he said.

This will be implemented from the Teachers Recruitment Exam (TRE)-4, which will be conducted this year, while TRE-5 will be held in 2026, the chief minister said. Instructions have also

been given to conduct Secondary Teachers Eligibility Test (STET) before the organisation of TRE-5, he said.

Recently, amid growing clamour for a 'domicile policy' in Bihar, the Bihar Cabinet ordered that a quota of 35 per cent for women in Government jobs will be restricted to only 'permanent residents' of the state. In 2016, the state

Government introduced 35 per cent reservation for women in Government jobs in the state at all levels.

Notably, the state has been witnessing attempts at public mobilisation on the issue of domicile, ahead of assembly elections.

Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav has promised '100 per cent domicile' if the RJD comes to power.



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EX-MP SUICIDE: SC RESERVES VERDICT ON SON'S PLEA AGAINST QUASHING OF FIR

The Supreme Court on Monday reserved its verdict on a plea against an order quashing the FIR against nine persons, including Praful Khoda Patel, Administrator of the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, for allegedly abetting suicide of former Lok Sabha MP Mohan Delkar in 2021. The Bombay High Court on September 8, 2022 quashed the case against nine persons in the case. The FIR was registered after the death of Delkar, a seven-time MP from Dadra and Nagar Haveli, who was found dead in a Mumbai hotel in 2021. A bench of Chief Justice BR Gavai and Justice K Vinod Chandran on Monday reserved its verdict after hearing senior advocate Meenakshi Arora, appearing for Abhinav Delkar, son of the late MP, and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta for the state government and senior lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani on behalf of some accused. During the hearing, the bench engaged in a detailed discussion on whether the material on record, including the 30-page suicide note left by the deceased MP, could sustain charges under Section 306 of IPC (abetment of suicide).



Setback for UP as SC mulls putting in abeyance nod to Banke Bihari Temple Corridor, Vrindavan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a setback to the Uttar Pradesh Government, the Supreme Court on Monday said it would keep in abeyance its May 15 nod to the ambitious scheme to develop the Shri Banke Bihari Temple Corridor at Vrindavan in Mathura for the benefit of devotees as main stakeholders were not heard.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Joyimalya Bagchi deprecated the approach of the state Government in moving the court in "clandestine manner" and questioned the hurry for enacting an ordinance Uttar Pradesh Shri Bankey Bihari Ji Temple Trust Ordinance, 2025 to take over the management of the ancient temple.

The top court said it would appoint a committee headed by a retired high court or district judge to manage the affairs of the temple in the interest of lakhs of devotees besides including the main stakeholders in the managing committee.

The bench told Additional Solicitor General KM Nataraj, appearing for the Uttar Pradesh Government, "Less said the better. How do you justify the directions passed by the court? The state in the most unfortunate way came to the court in the most clandestine manner without informing the court receiver or stakeholders (members of the family who claimed to be the owner of the temple). Get the directions behind their back and set aside the order



Architectural plan of Banke Bihari Temple Corridor

of the high court. This is the least thing we expect from the state."

The top court at present is not adjudicating the constitutionality of the ordinance and the high court will look into it.

The bench asked Nataraj to seek instructions while deciding to pass an order on August 5 to keep the May 15 order in abeyance and appoint someone as the managing trustee of the temple to look after the daily affairs.

"This is the land of Lord Krishna. He was the first mediator known to the world. Let's find a way out to resolve the dispute pending for years and develop the area in the interest of lakhs of devotees who

visit these iconic religious places. Basic amenities need to be created as nowadays religious tourism is one of the biggest sources of revenue," the bench said.

It assured all the stakeholders, including several warring factions, who claim to be owners of the temple that some responsible person would be given charge to manage the affairs of the temple aside from a mandate to develop the adjoining areas and small temples in nearby localities.

When Nataraj pointed that one person claiming to be from the Goswami community moved the top court for intervention but was not heard by the community, the

bench asked if the court-receiver was in-charge of the temple management, why was the person not heard and a response from other warring factions not sought.

The top court further questioned the Government of wanting to acquire five-acre land for developing a holding area from the temple funds and not use its money.

"What stopped you from acquiring the entire land and properties from your corpus in public interest? What was the tearing hurry in enacting the ordinance, when the matter was sub-judice? Providing basic amenities and developing the area is the duty of the state. There are numerous instances

where the state's participation has helped in developing the religious places like in Golden Temple in Amritsar," the bench said.

Senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for members of the managing committee, said the order was passed without hearing them and as it was a private temple, they were required to be heard.

The bench said the term "private temple" was a misnomer and the state was trying to acquire the land for the benefit of lakhs of devotees who visit the temple every year.

The top court posted the matter for August 5 while asking Nataraj to seek instructions and clarifying that the constitutionality of the ordinance would be decided by the high court for which it would modify the May 15 order.

The managing committee members and other petitioners who sought the recall or modification of the May 15 order were asked to give certain suggestions with respect to the management of the affairs of the historic temple.

The plea, filed through advocate Tanvi Dubey, of the management committee of the Thakur Shree Banke Bihari Ji Maharaj Temple in Mathura, challenges the ordinance, which vested the control of the shrine's administration with the state. On May 15, the top court allowed an impleadment application filed by the state and paved the way for a Uttar Pradesh Government scheme to develop the corridor.

Bridging the legal gap: Rethinking the status of gig and platform workers in India's evolving economy



MINU DWIVEDI

India's booming digital economy owes much of its momentum to the silent yet indispensable efforts of gig and platform workers — drivers, delivery personnel and service providers who form the backbone of quick commerce and app-based services ecosystem. Despite their vital role in shaping consumer convenience and service efficiency, these workers continue to operate in a grey zone as there is currently a legal vacuum on the labour and employment laws applicable to them.

The Legislature at the Centre and a few States have made laws to formally recognise this category of workers and make them eligible for social security coverage and insurance benefits. However, the laws made by the Centre are pending enforcement and those made by a few States are not yet fully implemented. The Judiciary has been receiving cases involving rights and obligations of employers of gig workers. In 2017, the Delhi Commercial Drivers Union had filed a suit against certain cab aggregators before the Delhi High Court to claim 'workmen' status and related statutory benefits under the Indian law. This issue was not decided due to withdrawal of the petition.

The Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) filed a writ petition before the Supreme Court in 2021 to claim recognition of gig and platform workers as "unorganised workers" under the Unorganised Workers' Social Welfare Security Act, 2008, which is currently sub judice.



During the peak summer months, the Labour and Employment Ministry had issued an advisory to chief secretaries of States and UTs to ensure that proactive measures including rescheduling of work hours and assessing the urgency of physical work during peak heat hours were undertaken to minimise the impact of heat waves on labourers and casual workers across India. It is noteworthy that this advisory was broad enough to include gig and platform workers. However, several corporates such as Flipkart, Eternal and

Amazon, to name a few, had voluntarily taken suitable measures in this direction prior to issuance of such advisory.

The Supreme Court's decisions during Covid-19 had clarified that an advisory which was in the nature of an order made by a public authority would attract penal provisions and all State Governments, public authorities and citizens were expected to comply with the directives, advisories and orders issued by the Centre in letter and spirit in the interest of public safety.

Accordingly, it was arguable that the Labour and Employment Ministry's advisory was not binding in nature since it was not structured as an order and did not specify penal action against defaulters.

Against this backdrop, it may not be incorrect to conclude that employers of gig workers/aggregators have leeway to determine terms and conditions of gig workers based on their specific business needs. While the Supreme Court's decision in IFAT's case is likely to bring the much-needed clarity on the status of gig and platform workers, it is notable that despite absence of law giving "workman" status to gig and platform workers, the registrars of trade unions in some States are registering trade unions formed by "such workers".

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways had formulated the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2020 under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 to, amongst others, regulate working hours and provide insurance benefits to drivers onboarded by aggregators. Pertinently, not only have these guidelines been in existence for a while now but are also proposed to be superseded in the coming months by the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025, which seek to provide wider coverage and enhanced benefits to such drivers.

In the prevailing dynamic economic conditions, there is an urgent need for clarity on the legal status of gig workforce under the employment laws. Before enforcing and/or implementing the Central and State-specific employment laws on gig-workers, the concerned authorities could take a cue from the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025. This will aid in striking a balance between "traditional employment relationships" and "new age negotiated work relationships/economic arrangements" to create modern equitable working relationships and shift the focus to successful business outcomes which advance India's interest as a nation.

(The writer is Partner at JSA Advocates and Solicitors and Co-authors : Prashaant Malaviya & Ritwik Ghosh)

Is the Supreme Court becoming India's super-Legislature?

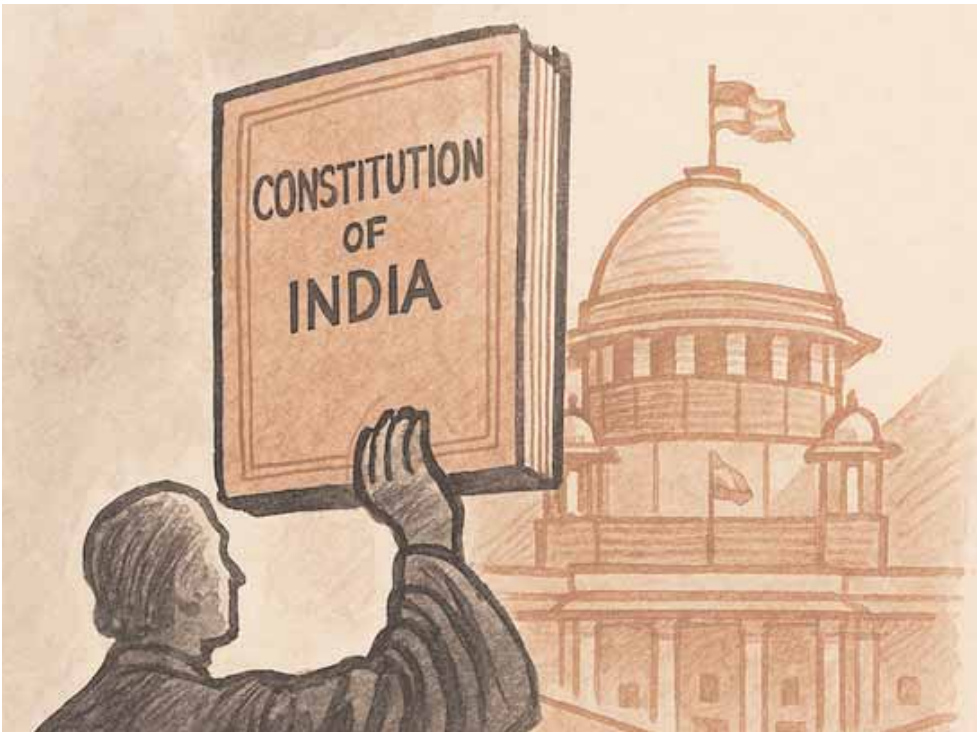


ADITYA SHANKAR
AGARWAL

The Supreme Court's order of May 5, 2025, delivered by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar in Vishal Tiwari v. Union of India, reads at first as an exercise in judicial restraint. Confronted with inflammatory remarks from Nishikant Dubey, a BJP MP who accused the Court of being "responsible for civil wars" and "inciting religious wars," the bench declined to invoke contempt powers, calling the statements "ludicrous" and "highly irresponsible" but ultimately harmless to public confidence. The Court, in an eloquent turn of phrase, noted: "Courts are not as fragile as flowers to wither and wilt under such ludicrous statements."

But beneath this rhetorical poise lies something more consequential: a quiet yet firm entrenchment of judicial authority. While the Court refused punitive action, it seized the moment to articulate its constitutional self-image — and in doing so, made a sweeping affirmation of its own powers. "Each branch of the State... acts within the framework of the Constitution. It is the Constitution that is higher than all of us," the Court declared. And then, unmistakably: "Statutes are subject to judicial review to test their constitutionality."

At one level, these are familiar constitutional truisms. But at another, they reflect a judiciary that is not merely reaffirming its role but subtly reinforcing its position as the final gatekeeper of constitutional meaning. The order does not merely assert the existence of judicial review; it frames that review as a function that cannot be questioned, cannot be limited, and cannot be contested by any other organ of state. "To deny the power of judicial review to the courts," the



"JUDICIAL REVIEW PROTECTS THE CONSTITUTION. BUT WHO PROTECTS THE BALANCE OF POWER WHEN INTERPRETATION ITSELF BECOMES ABSOLUTE?"

bench warns, "would be to rewrite and negate the Constitution." This is an odd claim, because it closes the circle: the Court declares that judicial review is a constitutional mandate, and that even Parliament has no authority to limit or contest that mandate — because any such attempt would itself be subject to judicial review. In effect, the Court becomes the final judge not only of laws and executive actions but of any institutional challenge to its own powers. This circularity raises a difficult question: is this

truly constitutional supremacy, or is it veering into judicial supremacy?

Critically, the Court's reasoning does not acknowledge — or even entertain — the possibility that judicial review, while indispensable, must be exercised with limits and restraint. Instead, the order presents judicial review as an absolute, unqualified function, insulated by the Constitution itself from any substantive check. The mechanisms of accountability cited — open court hearings, reasoned judgments,

appellate processes — are all internal judicial mechanisms, operating within the judiciary's own domain. There is no recognition that, for example — an interpretive monopoly, even when transparent, remains a monopoly.

This is not a merely academic concern. India's constitutional tradition, since Kesavananda Bharati, has recognised limits to parliamentary power through the Basic Structure doctrine. But as that doctrine evolved, critics have warned that it has progressively elevated the judiciary into an institution that not only enforces constitutional limits but also decides what those limits are, unilaterally and finally. The May 5 order echoes this trajectory.

In this framing, the Parliament's role may be reduced to that of a subordinate actor: free to legislate, but always under the shadow of possible invalidation, without any reciprocal power to challenge the judiciary's interpretation except through constitutional amendment — itself subject to review under the Basic Structure doctrine. In effect, the Court sits as both referee and final scorekeeper in the constitutional game.

To be sure, the Court's restraint in declining contempt proceedings is commendable. It signals an institutional maturity in tolerating even offensive criticism. However, the Court's decision not to punish speech does not translate into modesty about its own powers, on the contrary, the order seizes the occasion to reaffirm judicial review as a non-negotiable, exclusive judicial prerogative.

The Supreme Court's account of judicial accountability — arguments take place in open court; decisions are reasoned; judgments are subject to appeal, review, and curative jurisdiction" — is procedural, not substantive. It amounts to saying: "we are accountable because we explain ourselves." But explanation is not the same as contestability. A legislative act is subject to judicial invalidation. An executive order is subject to judicial quashing. But a constitutional interpretation by the Supreme Court? Short of a constitutional amendment — itself review-

able by the Court — there is no path for institutional contest. This structural asymmetry is at the heart of concerns about judicial overreach. The issue is not whether judicial review is necessary — it is. Nor is it whether courts have the authority to strike down unconstitutional laws — they do. The issue is whether an institution vested with such finality recognises the dangers of interpretive overreach and whether it builds guardrails into its own functioning to prevent becoming, in effect, a super-legislature cloaked in constitutional fidelity.

This is not to suggest that the Court acted in bad faith, or that its claims are illegitimate in a formal sense. Rather, it is to question whether a democracy as diverse and complex as India's can sustain institutional balance when one branch claims interpretive finality without meaningful external checks. The framers vested review power in the judiciary to safeguard rights and limits. But they did not — and perhaps could not — fully foresee the concentration of interpretive sovereignty that evolved under doctrines like Basic Structure and expansive review.

The Supreme Court's May 5 order, in dismissing a contempt petition, could have been a minor procedural footnote. Instead, it stands as a subtle yet powerful reaffirmation of a judiciary that increasingly speaks of itself not merely as a guardian but as the exclusive voice of the Constitution's meaning. Whether that voice remains a protector of constitutionalism or slides into a quiet supremacy will depend not merely on doctrinal statements, but on the cultivation of genuine institutional humility — and a willingness to share interpretive responsibility in the spirit of the checks and balances the Court itself invokes.

Until then, the danger remains that in safeguarding the Constitution from the excesses of Parliament, the judiciary may be shielding itself from the very accountability that constitutional democracy requires.

(The writer is a law researcher)

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON SUPREME COURT ON RAHUL GANDHI

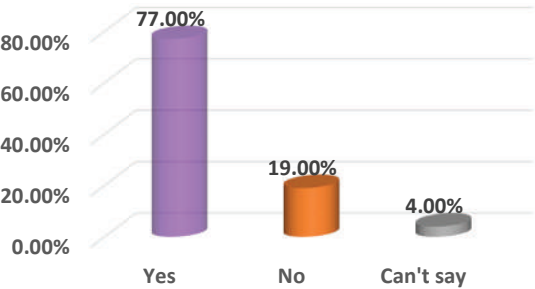
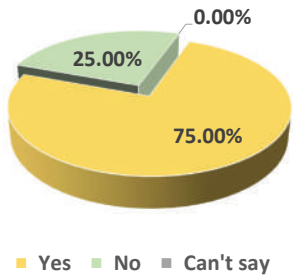
77% respondents said Rahul Gandhi made a statement without any basis.

The survey from August 4, 2025, conducted by India News, gauges public opinion on the Supreme Court's remarks concerning Rahul

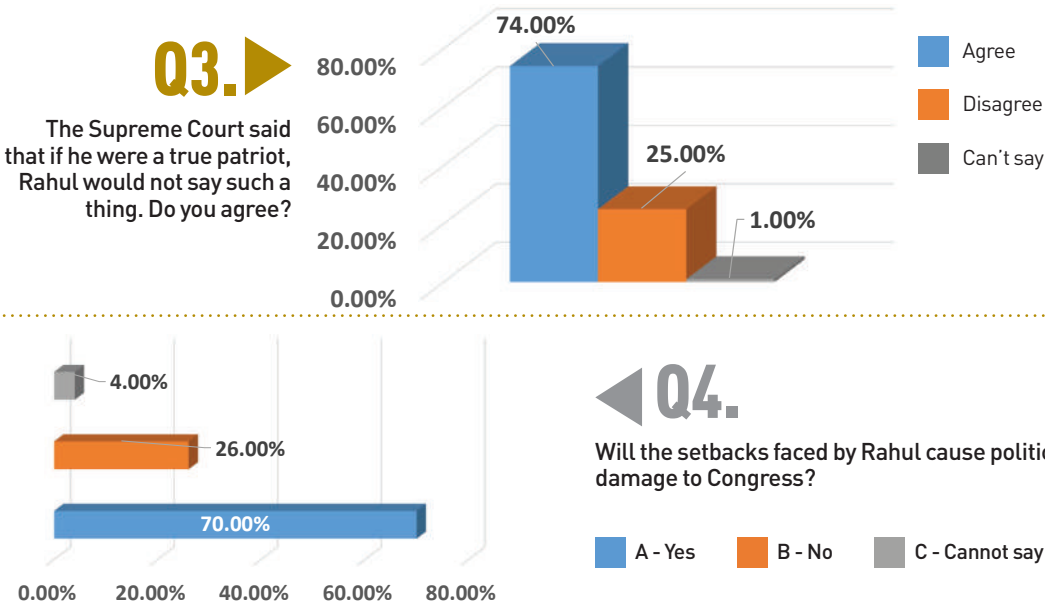
Gandhi. With a sample size of 287, predominantly male, the poll explores whether people agree with the court's strong comments, if Gan-

dhi's statements were baseless, and the potential political repercussions for the Congress party.

Q1. Do you agree with the Supreme Court's strong remarks on Rahul Gandhi?



Q2. Did Rahul Gandhi make a statement without any basis?



THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON PREMANAND MAHARAJ CONTROVERSY

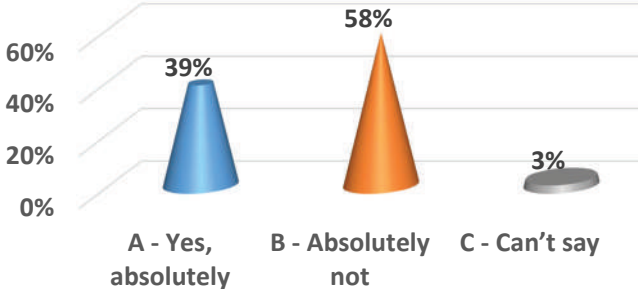
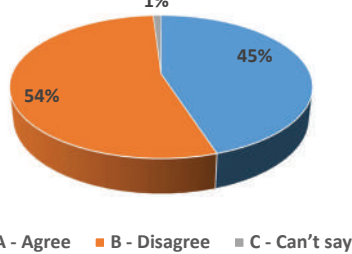
59% believe that preachers should avoid commenting on personal freedom in today's times.

A recent survey on the Premanand Maharaj controversy shows divided opinions. While 54% disagreed with his remarks on relationships,

78% believe spiritual leaders should show restraint in their statements. A majority oppose sermons targeting personal freedom, signaling grow-

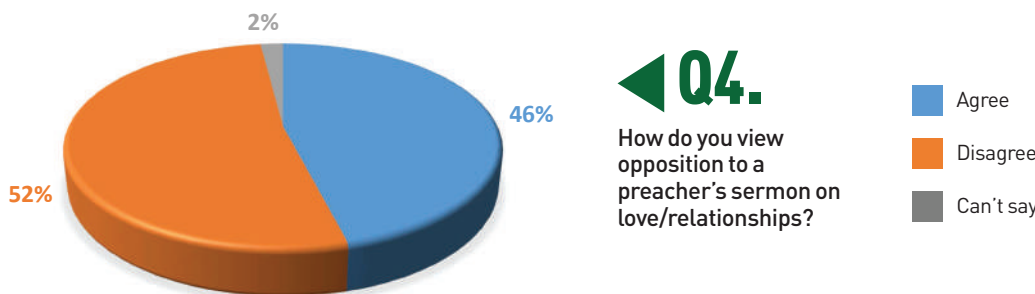
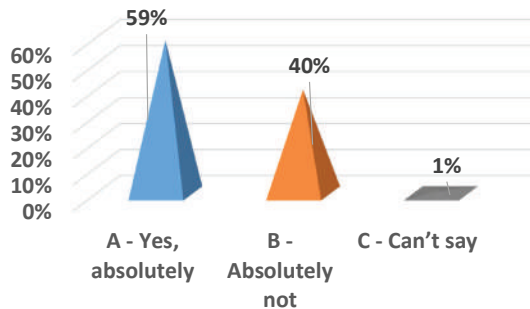
ing public discomfort with religious figures influencing private choices in modern society.

Q1. How do you view Premanand's remark "Stop making boyfriends and girlfriends"?



Q2. Does a saint have the right to attack people's personal choices through sermons?

Q3. Should a preacher avoid speaking on personal freedom in today's times?



True Indian won't say this: SC

CONTINUED FROM P1

have done it as there was a proper forum to raise such questions.

Meanwhile, the apex court stayed proceedings before the trial court and issued a notice to the complainant, former Border Roads Organisation (BRO) Director Uday Shankar Srivastava. Srivastava had filed a criminal defamation complaint in Lucknow, accusing Gandhi of demoralising the armed forces through false and baseless allegations.

The Allahabad High Court

had earlier, on 29 May, dismissed Gandhi's plea challenging the defamation case and the summoning order issued in February 2025 by an MP-MLA court. The complaint refers to Gandhi's December 2022 statement, in which he accused the government of silence over Chinese incursions, claiming, "China has captured 2,000 square kilometres of Indian territory, killed 20 Indian soldiers and thrashed our soldiers in Arunachal Pradesh."

Gandhi had challenged

the summoning order and the complaint arguing that it was motivated and lodged in mala fide manner.

In his plea Srivastava alleged during the yatra, Gandhi made several derogatory remarks about the Indian Army in context of the conflict with Chinese soldiers.

Maha Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis welcomed the court's remarks, saying, "People in high positions spreading rumours against national interest must stop. Such baseless claims affect the morale of our soldiers."

CONTINUED FROM P1

for buying "vast majority" of Russian military equipment and crude oil, but no mention was made in the notification.

"India is not only buying massive amounts of Russian Oil, they are then, for much of the Oil purchased, selling it on the Open Market for big profits," Trump said in a social media post on Monday.

"They don't care how many people in Ukraine are being killed by the Russian War Machine. Because of this, I will be substantially raising the Tariff paid by India to the USA," he added.

Cockroaches on Air India

CONTINUED FROM P1

The airline confirmed that during the flight's scheduled fuel stop in Kolkata, the aircraft underwent a thorough cleaning. "Our ground crew promptly conducted a deep cleaning process to address the issue. The same aircraft subsequently departed on time for Mumbai," a spokesperson said.

Despite routine fumiga-

■ India's imports are meant to ensure predictable and affordable energy costs to the Indian consumer. They are a necessity compelled by global market situation. However, it is revealing that the very nations criticizing India are themselves indulging in trade with Russia. Unlike our case, such trade is not even a vital national compulsion.

■ The European Union in 2024 had a bilateral trade of Euro 67.5 billion in goods with Russia. In addition, it had trade in services estimated at Euro 17.2 billion in 2023. This is significantly more than India's total trade with Russia that year or subsequently. European imports of LNG in 2024, in fact, reached a record 16.5mn tonnes, surpassing the last record of 15.21mn tonnes in 2022.

■ Europe-Russia trade includes not just energy, but also fertilizers, mining products, chemicals, iron and steel and machinery and transport equipment.

■ Where the United States is concerned, it continues to import from Russia uranium hexafluoride for its nuclear industry, palladium for its EV industry, fertilizers as well as chemicals.

■ In this background, the targeting of India is unjustified and unreasonable. Like any major economy, India will take all necessary measures to safeguard its national interests and economic security.

In response, India said it will take all necessary steps to safeguard and promote national interest and that the implications of the tariffs are being examined.

India's import of crude oil from Russia has risen from 0.2 per cent of total purchases before the Russia-Ukraine war to 35-40 per cent. New Delhi is the largest buyer of Russian oil after China.

On August 1, Trump signed an Executive Order titled 'Further Modifying the Reciprocal Tariff Rates', raising tariffs for over five dozen countries, including a steep 25 per cent for India.

BJP attacks Rahul, Congress

CONTINUED FROM P1

Reacting to the development, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said in a post on X, "The Supreme Court has once again reprimanded 'China Guru' Rahul Gandhi for making irresponsible statements concerning India's national security and terri-

torial integrity."

"Imagine, a leader of the opposition being repeatedly rebuked for speaking such recklessly," he said. Malviya also took on the Congress leader over his recent "dead" economy remark, calling it "a diplomatic disaster on multiple fronts".

Kalyan Banerjee quits as TMC whip

CONTINUED FROM P1

chief whip in Lok Sabha, as 'Didi' (West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee) said during the virtual meeting that there is a lack of coordination among party MPs. So, the blame is on me. Hence, I have decided to step down," the four-time MP from Serampore told The Daily Guardian.

In a 12-minute meeting, Mamata Banerjee also announced that her nephew Abhishek Banerjee, the party's national general secretary and a three-time MP from Diamond Harbour, would replace the ailing Sudip Bandyopadhyay, its party's leader in the Lok Sabha.

Mamata Banerjee also warned her MPs against speaking out of turn and or to indulge in activities which could harm the

party. She threatened disciplinary action against errant colleagues.

The TMC, which has 29 seats in the Lok Sabha, is a key constituent of the opposition INDIA bloc.

On his part, Kalyan Banerjee spewed venom against his party's colleagues.

He slammed Sudip Bandyopadhyay for not being present for long periods. The party's deputy leader Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar's frequent absence from Parliament also came in for criticism. He also pointed out that his party's South Kolkata MP Mala Roy had "not spoken more than once in her seven years as a parliamentarian." He also named many other party MPs for their sparse attendance in the Lok Sabha.

Just minutes before the news of his resignation

emerged, Banerjee, who represents Serampore in the Lok Sabha, took to social media platform X to criticise Mahua Moitra over her remarks made during a recent public podcast.

Mahua Moitra has had frequent run-ins with the Sreerampur MP and referred to him as a "pig" in a recent podcast. "You don't wrestle with a pig. Because the pig likes it and you get dirty," said Moitra on Kalyan Banerjee slamming her for getting married to former MP Pinaki Mishra.

She also said that there are "deeply misogynistic, sexually frustrated, depraved men" in India and they are also present in Parliament across the political spectrum. Banerjee had called Moitra "anti-women" and accused her of breaking a family by marrying Mishra.

Shibu Soren passes away

CONTINUED FROM P1

Chief Minister was admitted, Shibu Soren was suffering from kidney ailment, and had suffered a stroke one and half months ago. He was on life support for the past one month.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday mourned

the demise of former Chief Minister of Jharkhand and leader of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader Shibu Soren.

PM Modi remembered Shibu Soren's work for empowering tribal communities and the poor.

Sharing an X post, PM

Modi wrote, "Shri Shibu Soren Ji was a grassroots leader who rose through the ranks of public life with unwavering dedication to the people. He was particularly passionate about empowering tribal communities, the poor and downtrodden. Pained by his passing away."

Champion of tribals

CONTINUED FROM P1

came in the 1970s with his campaigns against the exploitative landlords and moneylenders. He became a tribal icon fighting against injustice, organising agitations to reclaim

tribal lands. His fight for tribal community is the reason why JMM remains the most popular party in Jharkhand.

In 1972, alongside A.K. Roy and Binod Bihari Mahato, he co-founded the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha,

serving as its general secretary and later president, leading a movement to for a separate Jharkhand state. His dreams of a separate identity for Jharkhand people came into fruition in 2000 when a new state was created.

MP injured as her chain snatched

CONTINUED FROM P1

file a formal complaint at the police station. However, after a Police Control Room (PCR) call from Tamil Nadu Bhavan, the SHO met her and took a formal complaint, the officer added.

"Congress MP Sudha eventually addressed the

matter directly to the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah," he said, adding that she suffered minor injuries on her neck.

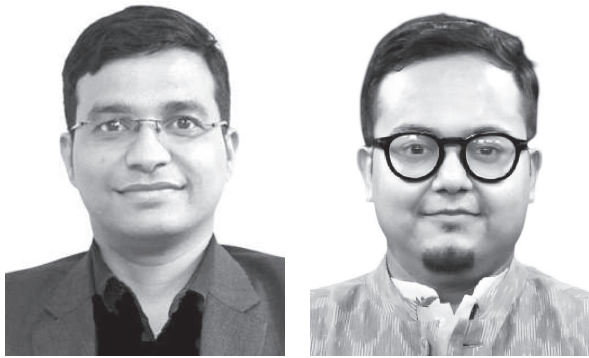
Sudha, who is attending the ongoing Monsoon session of Parliament, is staying at Tamil Nadu Bhavan in Chanakyapuri.

"A case has been registered and an investigation is underway. We are also awaiting the MLC report to confirm the nature of the injury. Multiple police teams have been deployed to trace the accused and examine CCTV footage from the vicinity," another police officer said.

NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE BILL, 2025: STEP TOWARDS MAKING INDIA SPORTING SUPERPOWER

OPINION

DR. DEEVANSHU SHRIVASTAVA
AND DR. SUBHRAJIT CHANDA



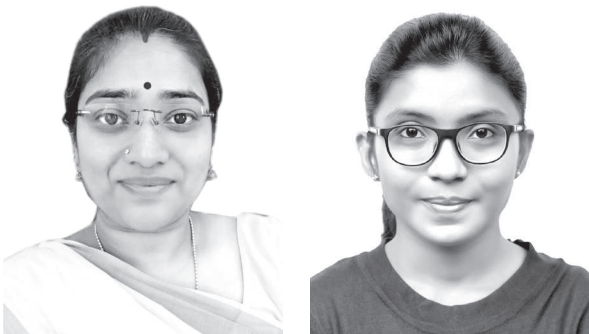
The introduction of the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025, marks a watershed moment in India's sporting history, offering a long-overdue solution to the systemic rot that has hindered the nation's athletic potential for decades. For too long, Indian sports have been shackled by inept administration, financial irregularities, and a glaring lack of accountability, with federations functioning as personal fiefdoms rather than institutions dedicated to nurturing talent. This bill, with its bold and comprehensive reforms, is a beacon of hope—a decisive step toward transforming India into a true sporting nation. At its core, the legislation acknowledges that the problem has never been a shortage of talent, but rather the absence of a robust governance framework to effectively harness it. By mandating transparency, accountability, and athlete-centric policies, the bill addresses the root causes of dysfunction, paving the way for a future where sports administration is professional, meritocratic, and free from political machinations. One of the most transformative aspects of the bill is its emphasis on governance reforms, which directly target the cronyism and infighting that have plagued organizations like the BCCI, IOA, and various national sports federations. By instituting term limits for officials, independent election committees, and strict financial auditing, the bill ensures that power cannot be monopolized by a select few, thereby democratizing decision-making and reducing internal conflicts. This is a monumental shift from the status quo, where prolonged tenures and opaque elections have allowed inefficiency to fester. Moreover, the provision for athlete representation in governing bodies is a game-changer, guaranteeing that those who understand the realities of competitive sports—the athletes themselves—have a voice in policies that affect their careers. No longer will bureaucrats with no sporting expertise call the shots; instead, the system will finally prioritize the welfare and development of players, fostering a culture where merit triumphs over connections. Financial mismanagement has been another crippling issue, with countless reports of funds meant for athlete training and infrastructure being siphoned off or misused. The bill's strict funding oversight and mandatory public disclosures will bring much-needed transparency, ensuring that every rupee allocated to sports is accounted for and utilized effectively. This is particularly crucial for grassroots development, where proper funding can unearth and nurture talent from the remotest corners of the country. By holding federations accountable for their financial decisions, the bill ensures that resources reach those who need them most—emerging athletes, coaches, and training facilities—rather than lining the pockets of administrators. Additionally, the introduction of whistleblower protections will empower athletes and officials to report corruption without fear of retaliation, further strengthening accountability. These measures collectively signal the end of an era where sports bodies operated with impunity, ushering in a new age of integrity and professionalism. Beyond cleaning up administration, the bill has the potential to elevate India's standing on the global sports stage. For years, the country's sports federations have been viewed with skepticism by international bodies due to repeated governance failures, doping scandals, and election-related controversies. By aligning with global best practices, such as the governance standards set by the IOC, FIFA, and other prestigious organizations, the bill will enhance India's credibility and open doors for greater collaboration, funding, and hosting opportunities. This is not just about reputation—it's about ensuring that Indian athletes compete on a level playing field, with access to the same resources and support systems as their international counterparts. The bill's focus on anti-doping measures and ethical guidelines further underscores India's commitment to fair play, sending a strong message that the nation is serious about fostering a clean and competitive sporting environment. Critics may argue that previous attempts at reform, such as the National Sports Development Code, have failed to deliver lasting change, but the 2025 bill is different in both scope and intent. It is not a piecemeal effort but a holistic overhaul designed to tackle every facet of sports governance. The inclusion of enforcement mechanisms, such as penalties for non-compliance and the potential establishment of an independent regulatory body, ensures that the reforms are not just aspirational but actionable. The government must now demonstrate unwavering commitment to implementing these measures without succumbing to pressure from vested interests. The stakes are too high to allow this opportunity to slip away—India's sporting future depends on it. In conclusion, the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025, is a landmark piece of legislation that promises to redefine Indian sports. It is a bold, visionary, and necessary intervention that addresses decades of neglect and malpractice, offering a clear roadmap for building a sports-centric nation. By rooting out corruption, empowering athletes, and instilling professionalism in administration, the bill lays the foundation for a future where India doesn't just participate in global sports but dominates them. This is not just a bill; it is a manifesto for change—a promise to every young athlete dreaming of representing the nation that systemic failures will no longer stifle their talent. The entire sporting community, from athletes to fans, must rally behind this legislation and ensure its unflinching implementation. The time for transformation is now, and the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025, is the catalyst India has been waiting for.

Prof. Dr. Devanshu Shrivastava, Founding Dean and Professor of Law, GL Bajaj Institute of Law, Greater Noida. Dr. Subhrajit Chanda, Assistant Professor, Jindal Global Law School, OP Jindal Global University, Sonapat.

A society without daughters: Can we survive our own customs?

OPINION

DR. PYALI CHATTERJEE AND
MAITREYEE TEMBHEKAR



Kanyadaan is a Hindu wedding ritual in which the bride's father gives her away to the groom, symbolizing the transfer of responsibility and blessings. It is considered a significant and sacred act in Hindu tradition. Kanyadaan is regarded as one of the greatest forms of donation due to its religious sanctity in Hinduism. However, once the *kanya* (daughter) is given in donation, does it mean that, as parents, you lose all rights over your daughter? This is a critical question that arises in many dowry death cases. Even today, this question has resurfaced in the recent death of Ridhanya. Legally and morally, it is deeply wrong to give your daughter to someone in exchange for dowry in the name of marriage. Such an act cannot be considered *Kanyadaan* in its true and sacred sense. By now, many of us may have heard about the tragic death of a newlywed woman from Tamil Nadu, who was forced to take her own life due to relentless harassment and dowry demands by her in-laws. Ridhanya—a brilliant, newly married woman from Tamil Nadu—lost her life to a reality darker than death itself. Married in April to Kavin Kumar, she endured continuous mental and physical abuse from her husband and his family—all in the name of dowry. Even after giving a luxury car and 100 gold sovereigns (800 grams), the demands continued. The greed never stopped. The cruelty never lessened. One devastating day, Ridhanya consumed poison while on her way to a temple. In her final moments, she recorded heartbreaking voice messages for her father—her voice trembling as she described the daily torment, betrayal, isolation, and the unbearable pain of being trapped in a marriage built on deception. The determination of responsibility in this matter implicates both familial entities. Those who demand dowry, despite its constitutional illegality, bear culpability; so too do those who provide it, perpetuating a deeply harmful practice. Dowry, often disguised as a cultural custom, becomes a symbolic exchange between families—one that can be weaponized to establish dominance, reducing interpersonal relationships to transactional social contracts. In stark contrast, marriage is traditionally revered as a sacrament. This juxtaposition exposes a poignant irony: a union meant to sanctify love is overshadowed by systemic coercion. The saddest truth about our customary rituals is that they are profoundly binding—so much so that somewhere, somehow, this bond stretches to the edge of mortality, with women bearing the gravest cost. Specifically, in this instance, when Ridhanya reported the harassment, her parents' directive to "adjust" emerges as a critical point of concern. The family's opportunity to protect their daughter was missed. Despite their awareness of the situation, they chose silence, prioritizing societal pressures over their daughter's well-being and failing to support a formal complaint against the individuals involved. This decision ultimately resulted in the loss of the girl's life. It is critically important for us to understand that silence is not a solution to violence. On the contrary, it empowers the perpetrator, making them believe that their victim is weak and will continue to endure the abuse. One must speak out. One must resist. Families, too, must recognize this reality. Supporting a daughter in walking away from an abusive marriage does not diminish a family's honour—it saves her life. True pride lies in protecting your child, not in upholding a toxic social image. It is time we shift the shame where it belongs—onto the abusers, not the survivors. It is the criminals who should fear for their pride, not the ones who dare to break free from injustice. Furthermore, the victim's reluctance to pursue legal action against the family is a reflection of broader societal issues. The fact that women in 2025 still hesitate to assert their rights indicates a significant societal lag. Ultimately, societal structures share responsibility for these tragic outcomes—a collective inertia that enables injustice to thrive behind closed doors. This situation highlights a critical deficiency in the Indian legal system, where a lack of awareness regarding rights and the fear of exercising them create a significant barrier to justice. The laws may exist, but when culture discourages resistance and institutions falter in their response, the path to justice remains obstructed. Passed in 1961, the Dowry Prohibition Act aimed to curb the practice of dowry. Still, the tradition persists—hidden, subtle, and deadly. Between 2022 and 2024, 6,450 dowry-related deaths were reported. Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for 2,218 cases, followed by Karnataka (167), Telangana (137), Tamil Nadu (29), and Kerala (11) in the southern region. In 2022, the highest number of dowry deaths occurred in Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar (1,057) and Madhya Pradesh (518). During this period, approximately 13,000 cases were registered under the Dowry Prohibition Act. According to NCRB data, nearly 7,000 dowry deaths were reported annually between 2017 and 2022. However, less than 30% of these cases were resolved within the same year. The rest? Lost to denial, dismissal, or delay—trapped in a system that too often turns away. This is not merely a failure of law enforcement. It is a deep-rooted cultural failure. This data clearly shows that even we have laws to tackle the dowry death cases and dowry related issues but the dowry customs is so much penetrated in our social culture that unless and until we all together say no for it will not stop. It's the responsibility of the today's generation whether it its male or female you have to say no for the dowry at any cost. Although the Indian government has framed well-structured laws within the criminal justice system—along with separate legislation specifically aimed at addressing dowry-related issues—women continue to lose their lives under the guise of this so-called customary practice. This clearly reflects the lack of deterrent effect these laws have in our society. India also has dedicated bodies like the National Commission for Women and State Women Commissions, where women can report such grievances. However, due to lack of awareness, and often a desire to protect family honour, many women and their family members choose not to report the abuse or harassment they face. This silence only further perpetuates the cycle of violence and injustice. Even The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations in 1979, recognizes that customary and traditional practices often perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination. In its General Recommendations, particularly General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women and General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence, CEDAW has clearly emphasized the need for state parties to address and eliminate harmful cultural and customary practices that violate women's rights. India being signatory members of CEDAW failed to curb these serious issues even after so many years. Yes, our society is patriarchal—but does that mean a woman's life holds no value or dignity? Are we so deeply conditioned by outdated customs that we allow women to be tortured, humiliated, or even killed in the name of dowry? We leave this haunting question for everyone—regardless of gender—to reflect upon: Can a society truly survive without its women? Can we call ourselves civilized if we silently watch mothers, daughters, and wives being reduced to mere transactions? It is time we confront this cruelty, not just as a legal issue, but as a moral emergency—one that demands not only stronger laws but also a complete shift in our collective conscience.

Why Punjab's economic future depends on a cultural shift?

OPINION

DEVASYA VERMA

Punjab, long celebrated for its vibrant culture, resilient people, and rich history, today finds itself at a critical crossroads. Once a hub of innovation, entrepreneurship, and modernity—with cities like Lahore, Amritsar, and Peshawar leading the charge—the state today seems caught in a loop of nostalgia and a somewhat inward-looking worldview. While its cultural values still reflect a strong sense of humanism, beneath that veneer lies a troubling undercurrent of isolationism that distances Punjab from the growth trajectory of the rest of India. The recent farmers' protests have reignited conversations around Punjab's economic direction. While the agitation highlighted genuine concerns of the agricultural community, it also revealed a deeper resistance to reform—an anti-industry mindset that is increasingly proving detrimental. The pride in agrarian identity, while historically justified due to the Green Revolution, now risks becoming a hindrance if it fails to adapt to the demands of a modern economy. Punjab's industrial legacy did not begin with agriculture. Before Partition, cities like Lahore and Amritsar were centers of education, culture, and enterprise. Even in the decades following independence, cities like Ludhiana, Jalandhar, and Amritsar thrived as hubs of small and medium-scale industries. This entrepreneurial spirit built a strong foundation—producing business leaders like Brijmohan Lall Munjal of Hero Group and Sunil Bharti Mittal of Airtel—but today, such stories are neither celebrated widely nor replicated. The state's current popular culture, as journalist Shekhar Gupta points out, suffers from a self-congratulatory tone that hinders introspection and reform. Punjab needs to evolve beyond romanticized narratives and embrace the culture of entrepreneurship, innovation, and enterprise once again. Despite having relatively high education levels, the state has failed to translate this human capital into industrial and economic success. One cannot help but ask: Why does it not have a thriving film or creative industry like it once did? Why aren't young Punjabis being inspired to become the next Mittal or Munjal, rather than migrate abroad in search of opportunity? The need of the hour is for Punjab to rediscover and reimagine its identity. Not as a victim of historical shifts or political marginalization, but as a powerhouse of industry, education, and modern enterprise. The rest of India has boarded the train of economic transformation—from digital innovation to infrastructure expansion. Punjab must catch up, not by abandoning its values, but by realigning them with the demands of the future. Punjab's resurgence lies not just in preserving its cultural legacy, but in renewing its commitment to growth. It must once again become a place where ideas are born, industries are built, and futures are shaped—not just for Punjab, but for India.

Devasya Verma is an Assistant Professor of International Relations at DAV College, Jalandhar. An alumnus of the Indian School of Public Policy, New Delhi, and the Centre for Advanced Learning at St. Stephen's College, New Delhi, he has also worked with the Punjab Government as a researcher on various land acquisition projects for social development.



STRONGER BONES, HEALTHIER JOINTS: A GUIDE FOR WOMEN

TDG NETWORK
JAIPUR

As women cross the age of 40, many begin to experience joint discomfort and signs of weakening bones. What often starts as occasional stiffness or soreness can gradually evolve into chronic pain, reduced mobility, or even serious conditions like osteoporosis. Understanding why these changes occur, how to recognize early symptoms, and what steps can be taken to prevent or manage them is essential for maintaining a healthy, active life.

WHY WOMEN ARE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE AFTER 40

Several biological and hormonal changes make women particularly vulnerable to joint pain and bone fragility after 40. The most significant factor is the decline in estrogen levels as women approach perimenopause and menopause. Estrogen plays a critical role in maintaining bone density and joint lubrication. When its levels drop, bones lose calcium faster, and joints become more prone to wear and tear.

In addition, women typically have smaller, thinner bones than men, which means that any bone loss due to aging or lifestyle factors has a more significant

impact. Muscle mass also tends to decrease with age, reducing support to joints and making them more susceptible to pain and injury.

COMMON CONDITIONS AFFECTING WOMEN AFTER 40

OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis is one of the most common bone conditions in postmenopausal women. It causes bones to become brittle and porous, leading to an increased risk of fractures, especially in the hips, spine, and wrists. Women can lose up to 20% of their bone density in the first 5–7 years after menopause.

OSTEOARTHRITIS

Often called “wear-and-tear arthritis,” osteoarthritis results from the gradual breakdown of cartilage in the joints. It commonly affects the knees, hips, hands, and spine and leads to stiffness, swelling, and pain during movement.

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (RA)

RA is an autoimmune condition more prevalent in women, especially between ages 40 and 60. It causes the immune system to attack joint tissues, leading to inflammation, pain, and potential joint deformities if untreated.



VITAMIN D AND CALCIUM DEFICIENCY

Low levels of calcium and vitamin D can weaken bones over time, increasing the risk of osteoporosis and joint pain. These deficiencies are common in women who have limited sun exposure or follow restrictive diets.

Signs and Symptoms to Watch For

Persistent joint pain, especially in the knees, hips, hands, or back

Morning stiffness lasting more than 30 minutes

Cracking or popping sounds in joints during movement

Loss of height over time

A stooped posture
Increased frequency of fractures or injuries from minor falls

Muscle weakness or fatigue

Risk Factors

Several factors can increase a woman's risk of joint and bone issues after 40:

Family history of osteoporosis or arthritis

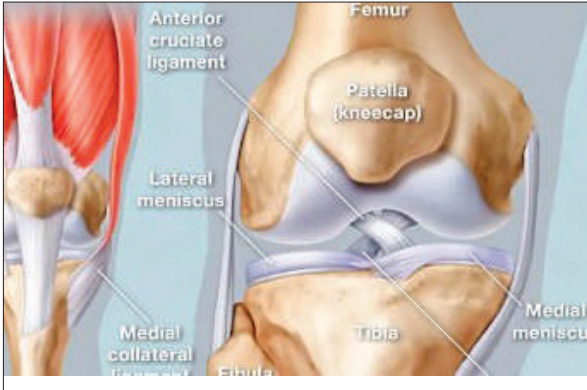
Early menopause (before age 45)

Lack of physical activity or sedentary lifestyle

Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption

Poor diet low in calcium and vitamin D

Chronic medical conditions like thyroid disorders



or diabetes

Use of certain medications, such as steroids or anticonvulsants

Prevention and Management

The good news is that joint pain and bone fragility are

not inevitable parts of aging. With the right lifestyle choices and medical care, women can maintain bone strength and joint flexibility well into their later years.

1. NUTRITION

Calcium-rich foods: Include dairy products, leafy greens, almonds, and fortified foods. Women over 50 need about 1,200 mg of calcium daily.

Vitamin D: Essential for calcium absorption. Safe sun exposure and foods like eggs, salmon, and fortified milk help, but supplements may be necessary.

Anti-inflammatory diet: Incorporate omega-3 fatty acids (from flaxseed, walnuts, and fish), fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

2. EXERCISE

Weight-bearing exercises like walking, jogging, and dancing help maintain bone density.

Strength training improves muscle support around joints and reduces stress on bones.

Stretching and flexibility exercises, such as yoga or Pilates, improve joint range of motion and prevent stiffness.

3. LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS

Quit smoking: Smoking interferes with calcium absorption and decreases bone mass.

Limit alcohol: Excessive alcohol can impair bone formation and balance, increasing fall risk.

Maintain a healthy weight: Extra body weight puts added stress on joints, especially the knees and hips.

4. MEDICAL SUPPORT

Bone density tests (DEXA scans) are recommended for women over 50 or earlier if there are risk factors.

Supplements: Calcium and vitamin D supplements may be prescribed based on deficiency levels.

Medications: For women with diagnosed osteoporosis or arthritis, medications like bisphosphonates, hormone replacement therapy, or biologics may be necessary.

Physical therapy can help improve strength and mobility in affected joints.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

If joint pain is persistent, interferes with daily activities, or is accompanied by swelling, redness, or unexplained weight loss, it's time to consult a healthcare professional. Early intervention can prevent further deterioration and improve quality of life.

While aging brings inevitable changes to the body, joint pain and fragile bones don't have to define life after 40. With awareness, proactive care, and a balanced lifestyle, women can continue to live actively and independently. The key is to listen to your body, stay informed, and take steps early—because strong bones and healthy joints are the foundation for a vibrant, pain-free life.

Rajasthan achieves national recognition for organ donation campaigns

TDG NETWORK
JAIPUR

On the occasion of Organ Donation Day, Medical Education Secretary Ambrish Kumar addressed an awareness program at Sawai Mansingh (SMS) Medical College, underlining the state's commitment to expanding organ donation and transplantation services across Rajasthan. He emphasized that efforts will be made to establish these facilities in all medical colleges to save as many lives as possible.

Highlighting a key statistic, Kumar said that Rajasthan witnesses nearly 10,000 road accident deaths annually. If even 10% of brain-dead individuals could become donors, countless patients awaiting transplants could be given a new lease on life. He described organ donation as a virtuous act that allows individuals to remain alive through others even after death, connecting humanity with the larger creation.

He also stressed the need for a healthier lifestyle to reduce dependency on organ transplants. Accidents, lifestyle diseases, and genetic issues are major contributors to the rising transplant demand. To address this, he directed medical colleges to start yoga classes and promote balanced living. He hailed organ donation and transplantation as the pinnacle of modern medicine, crediting medical science for increasing India's aver-



age life expectancy from 30 years at independence to 75 years today.

Under the Chief Minister Ayushman Arogya (Maa) Yojana, Rajasthan now offers free organ transplantation. Kumar noted that the state has developed a transparent and streamlined process to encourage organ donation. As a result, the state has seen a significant increase in organ donation and transplant cases in recent times. Dr. Deepak Maheshwari, Principal of SMS Medical College, shared the institution's progress. Since the formation of the State

Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (SOTO) in 2018, Rajasthan has witnessed notable development in organ donation. In the last six months alone, 19 cadaver transplants were conducted at SMS Hospital. The institution also boasts zero pendency in corneal transplants and operates the largest skin bank in North India. He emphasized that efforts are underway to strengthen transplant services further and make Rajasthan a premier medical hub.

Appropriate Authority Dr. Rashmi Gupta noted that

Rajasthan leads the country in online organ donation pledges. She emphasized that all institutions must strictly comply with the Transplantation of Human Organs Act (THOA) to maintain ethical standards in the process. She also highlighted the recent national recognition Rajasthan received—two prestigious awards for excellence in organ donation promotion and performance.

SOTO Joint Director Dr. Mrinal Joshi described organ donation as life's greatest gift and detailed the department's ongoing efforts to increase awareness and participation.

During the event, individuals and institutions that have made outstanding contributions to organ donation were honored. Awardees included medical professionals, NGOs, brain stem death teams, organ donor families, and transplant coordinators from SMS Hospital Jaipur, AIIMS Jodhpur, and other leading institutions. Recipients who participated in the World Organ Transplant Games were also acknowledged.

Special recognition was given to districts with the highest participation in organ donation pledges. Hanumangar secured the top position, followed by Churu and Jhunjhunu. Their contributions in raising awareness were celebrated with special citations, serving as an example for others in the state.



A minimally invasive breakthrough at Geetanjali hospital Jaipur

TDG NETWORK
JAIPUR

Monoportal Endoscopic Cervical Spine Surgery is a minimally invasive surgical technique that allows surgeons to treat cervical spine conditions through a small (6–8 mm) incision using a single portal endoscope. Unlike traditional open spine surgeries, this procedure preserves the natural anatomy of the spine, avoids implants and fusion in selected cases, and allows for faster recovery, minimal blood loss, and reduced hospital stays.

This technique is particularly effective for patients suffering from cervical disc herniation, nerve root compression, or degenerative cervical spine disease, where the goal is to relieve nerve pressure without disrupting the structural integrity of the spine.

Geetanjali Hospital Achieves Milestone with Successful Implant-Free Cervical Spine Surgery

In a first-of-its-kind success in Rajasthan, Geetanjali Hospital, Jaipur recently performed a Monoportal Endoscopic Cervical Spine Surgery without the use of spinal implants or fusion. The patient, Mamta Goyal, a 47-year-old resident of Jaipur, had been struggling with debilitating radiating pain in her right arm due to cervical disc compression. Her daily life had become dependent on painkiller injections, and multiple hospitals had suggested conventional surgeries involving implants and fusion.

However, upon consulting Dr. Dheeraj Vishwakarma, Associate Professor Neurosurgery at Geetanjali Hospital, she was offered a more advanced and less invasive solution. Through a single-stitch, endoscopic approach, the surgical team relieved the nerve compression

without altering the spine's natural biomechanics.

Post-surgery, the patient experienced complete relief — with the radiating pain that had once confined her now completely gone within just a few hours. She regained full mobility of her right arm, which had previously been nearly non-functional due to severe pain and nerve compression. Remarkably, this transformation was achieved without the use of spinal implants or fusion, eliminating the risks associated with foreign materials and long-term immobility. There was no need for extended hospitalization, and her recovery was smooth and swift, with only minimal post-operative discomfort. Within a short time, she returned to her daily activities pain-free and without dependence on pain medication.

Expanding the Scope: Advanced Endoscopic Spine Surgeries at Geetanjali

Geetanjali Hospital, Jaipur is a pioneer in offering next-generation spine surgeries. In addition to Monoportal Endoscopic Cervical Spine Surgery, the hospital performs a range of advanced spinal procedures, including:

- Monoportal interlaminar Endoscopic Lumbar Discectomy

A minimally invasive approach to treat herniated lumbar discs with quicker recovery and reduced risk of complications.

- Monoportal interlaminar Endoscopic Lumbar Decompression

Used for central spinal canal stenosis, helping patients regain mobility without the need for open decompression.

- Endoscopic Transforaminal Discectomy

For patients with lumbar disc herniation causing sciatic pain, allowing for direct access through the foramen with minimal tissue damage.



DR. Dheeraj Vishwakarma

- Percutaneous Spine Fixation (MIS)

In select cases requiring stabilization, minimally invasive percutaneous fixation is offered to reduce post-op recovery time.

- Transforaminal epidural steroid injections

For patients with severe pain who doesn't require surgery

ABOUT GEETANJALI HOSPITAL, JAIPUR

Geetanjali Hospital, also known as Geetanjali Institute of Medical Sciences, is a premier 1500-bedded tertiary care facility located in Jaipur. Sprawling over 32 acres, the hospital is a hub for multi-super speciality care, offering holistic treatment under one roof.

With a strong emphasis on affordable, ethical, and advanced healthcare, Geetanjali Hospital has become a referral centre for complex cases not only in Rajasthan but across Northern and Central India.

ADVANCED MEDICAL INFRASTRUCTURE INCLUDES:

- PET-CT & 256-Slice CT Scanner
- 3.0 Tesla MRI
- 4D Ultrasound

- Dual Cath Labs (Neuro & Cardiac)
 - Linear Accelerator for precision radiation
 - State-of-the-art Modular OTs
 - Dedicated ICUs for all specialties
 - Fully automated diagnostic laboratories
- DRIVEN BY EXPERTS, DEFINED BY EXCELLENCE**

A team of highly experienced neurosurgeons, orthopaedic spine specialists, anaesthesiologists, and rehabilitation experts at Geetanjali Hospital ensures world-class outcomes in spine surgery. Through continued innovation, clinical excellence, and a patient-first approach, Geetanjali is setting new benchmarks in minimally invasive spine care in India. Mr. Anurag Jain, Group Vice President

At Geetanjali Hospital, we believe that true progress in healthcare lies in advancing technology while preserving the dignity and comfort of our patients. The successful execution of Monoportal Endoscopic Cervical Spine Surgery — a first in Rajasthan — without implants or fusion, is a testament to our clinical excellence, surgical innovation, and deep-rooted commitment to patient-centric care. This achievement not only reinforces our position as a leader in minimally invasive neurosurgery but also reflects our unwavering mission: to deliver world-class treatment with compassion, precision, and accessibility. I commend our dedicated team for setting a new benchmark in spinal care and inspiring confidence in the future of Indian healthcare.

HEALING THE INVISIBLE: WHY BRAIN-INJURY REHABILITATION DESERVES CENTRE-STAGE IN INDIA'S HEALTH STORY

DR GAURISH KENKRE

A head-injury survivor can leave casualty with the reassuring label of “mild” trauma and a spotless CT scan, yet spend the next six months battling fuzzy memory, sudden mood swings and bone-deep fatigue. Approximately 71% of head-injury cases that are recorded in Indian hospitals fall into the “mild” band of the Glasgow Coma Scale. However, international follow-up studies confirm that up to 50% of patients who have suffered head injuries continue to struggle months after the stitches and scans have been forgotten. What silently destroy careers and classrooms are not skull fractures, but rather hidden consequences associated with the injury.

WHY VISIBILITY MATTERS

Since these disruptions and reduced quality of life seldom show up on scan, referrals to neuro-rehabilitation are often delayed or never written at all. When such referrals are missed, affected individual may have transient cognitive fog, depression and other brain related disorder that may result into lost income. According to studies from low- and middle-income settings including India, only one in six people with moderate to severe

traumatic brain injury (TBI) gets the chance to go to a specialized rehab unit. Most of these patients are discharged for ad-hoc home care. However, they have a good chance of making a good recovery if they are referred to rehab facility.

BARRIERS TO SPOTLIGHTING REHAB

Fewer column-inches are devoted to brain injuries follow-up as compared to cancer stents or drugs for cardiac diseases. This insufficiency has cost implications. In India, families are still forced to fund the continued neuro-rehabilitation of patients entirely on their own, outside of a few large city hospitals. Ayushman Bharat-PM-JAY pays for the surgery but, it does not pay for the months of outpatient rehabilitation that will follow.

Apart from out-of-pocket expenses, skilled hands are scarce. In 2023, India had only 0.60 practising physiotherapists per 10,000 people, which is less than one-third of the regional average; worldwide, the World Health Organization observes that in many developing countries, fewer than 10 rehabilitation professionals of any kind serve a million citizens. Taking into account the additional training requirement for neuro care, the gap runs into tens of thousands, which leaves large swathes of the country without



According to reports, 38 crore online consultations were done on India's e-Sanjeevani tele-medicine hub. This shows that it does not really matter to people if they connect to doctors online if travelling is expensive or not available.

speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists or neuro-psychologists.

Lastly, there are leaks in the referral pipeline everywhere. Pathways for rehabilitation are “greatly needed,” and there is no trauma registry. A man-

dated hand-off to rehabilitation is hardly ever included in discharge summaries. Furthermore, there is cultural reluctance to classify mood swings or cognitive fog as medical issues. As a result, many survivors are left unsupported as they enter the

critical neuroplasticity window. The invisible side of India's head injury tale will continue to be rehabilitation until the structural, financial, and social hurdles are removed.

TECH & TELE-HEALTH: AMPLIFYING REACH

According to reports, 38 crore online consultations were done on India's e-Sanjeevani tele-medicine hub. This shows that it does not really matter to people if they connect to doctors online if travelling is expensive or not available. A study reported that tele-rehabilitation reduced the typical Indian patient's cost by Rs 5,000 per visit, mainly bus

fare, lost wages and overnight stays for brain injury follow-ups.

Technological advances have given therapists new workouts. To enhance the speed of reactions, pilot projects in Bengaluru and Delhi, which use virtual-reality technology, make use of balance boards and games that mimic climbing stairs and catching objects on screen. According to the findings, 6 weeks of playing at home enhances the stability of walking and attention.

Policy and reform—turning recovery into a right, not a privilege

The weeks of outpatient physiotherapy, speech, and cognitive sessions that occur subsequent

to surgery are not yet covered by India's flagship health-insurance plan, Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana. The single largest breach in the care pathway would be resolved by updating the scheme's Health-Benefit Package, to include a dedicated “neuro-rehabilitation” bundle.

Finally, digital infrastructure is health infrastructure: rural wire-line tele-density was still just 0.32 percent as recently as March 2024. Accelerating BharatNet, subsidising 4G/5G data packs for low-income families and folding physiotherapy into the Telemedicine Practice Guidelines would make sure that tele-rehab is available wherever the next crash occurs—not only where the next fibre cable happens to end.

CONCLUSION

This year, India will record millions of new two-wheelers; crashes will follow. Treating the bleed is only half the battle. The actual goal is to restore cognition, livelihood, and dignity to the survivors. An injury unseen should never be an injury untreated. Making rehabilitation visible to all is not a luxury, but rather an economic and moral necessity for a country that wants a knowledge-driven future.

The author is Senior General Manager and Center Head, Atharva Ability, Mumbai

SEED YOUR WAY TO BETTER HORMONAL HEALTH



FOOD IS MEDICINE DR ANISH DESAI

Hormonal balance is central to women's health, impacting menstrual cycles, fertility, mood, and conditions like Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS). While medications and lifestyle changes are key to managing these issues, the role of functional foods especially seeds is gaining widespread attention.

A blend of pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, flaxseed, and chia seeds offers a natural, nutrient-rich approach to support hormonal regulation, reduce menstrual discomfort, and complement PCOS management.

Research suggests that incorporating a combination of seeds such as pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, and flaxseed may offer significant benefits for women with PCOS when used alongside standard treatments. These nutrient-dense seeds have been associated with improvements in hormonal balance (including LH, FSH, and testosterone levels), enhanced menstrual regularity, better lipid profiles,

and increased insulin sensitivity.

This synergy is largely due to the unique bioactive compounds in each seed that target the root causes of hormonal imbalances: inflammation, oxidative stress, and poor metabolic health.

Pumpkin Seeds: Rich in zinc and magnesium, they support progesterone production, ease menstrual cramps, and reduce PMS symptoms like acne and mood swings.

Sunflower Seeds: High in vitamin E and selenium, these seeds help fight oxidative stress and support detoxification, particularly in the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle.

Sesame Seeds: Known for their phytoestrogens and lignans, sesame seeds assist in modulating estrogen levels, especially beneficial when estrogen dominance leads to heavy or painful periods.

Flaxseeds: A top source of lignans and omega-3s, flaxseeds help balance estrogen during the follicular phase and ease

inflammation linked to PCOS and menstrual discomfort.

Chia Seeds: Tiny but nutrient-packed, chia seeds provide plant-based omega-3s (ALA), which reduce PMS-related bloating, mood swings, and inflammation. Their fiber and gel-like texture also support digestion and hormonal detoxification.

These seeds can be easily added to your daily meals sprinkled over smoothies, salads, yogurt, or oatmeal. Some women also follow “seed cycling”, a practice of consuming specific seeds during different menstrual phases to promote hormonal harmony.

Incorporating pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, flax, and chia seeds into your diet is a gentle, natural, and evidence-backed strategy for supporting menstrual health and managing PCOS. While not a replacement for medical treatment, these nutrient-dense seeds offer a simple way to nurture hormonal balance one spoonful at a time.



World's first fully autonomous robotic joint replacement surgery performed at Shalby Multi-Specialty Hospitals

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Arthroplasty Team at Shalby Multi-Specialty Hospitals achieved a historic medical milestone today by successfully performing surgery using the world's first fully autonomous robotic system for joint replacement.

This revolutionary robotic technology—featuring the world's only saw-based robotic arm with 7-axis movement—is designed to dramatically improve surgical accuracy, bone-cut precision, and enable minimally invasive procedures, result-

ing in faster recovery and improved patient outcomes.

In a major global collaboration, the team of eminent surgeons from the United States, including the CEO of the company that developed this robotic system, specially flew in to perform this first-ever surgery using the technology. Their presence highlights the global significance of this achievement and Shalby's role in pioneering next-generation medical care.

“We are proud to be part of a pivotal moment in medical innovation. The reason our hospital was selected for this global clinical trial



is the high surgical volume we manage and the need for precision in the Indian healthcare landscape. This new-generation robotic system offers unmatched accuracy, enhanced bone-cutting precision, and sup-

ports minimally invasive techniques. It's a leap forward in joint replacement surgery, providing better outcomes, quicker recovery, and greater consistency. With over 20% of our surgeries already performed

robotically, we believe this technology will shape the future of surgery in India.” — Dr. Vikram Shah, CMD, Shalby Hospitals

Shalby Hospitals, founded by world-renowned joint replacement surgeon Dr. Vikram Shah, has consistently led the way in orthopedic innovation. With this breakthrough, Shalby once again reaffirms its status as a center of excellence in joint replacement surgeries.

This advancement is expected to benefit millions of patients globally, making joint replacement procedures safer, more precise, and less invasive.

Skip the myths, not the sessions: Why advanced treatments are worth

DR PALKI SHARMA

Misinformation about hair removal is surprisingly common, and many of us still believe things we probably heard in school or from well-meaning elders around us. Let's bust some of the most popular myths and talk about smarter, safer, and more effective choices for long-term hair reduction.

Myth 1: Shaving Makes Hair Grow Back Thicker

It's probably the oldest myth in the book and still completely untrue. Shaving only cuts hair at the surface and has zero impact on how fast or thick it grows back. The reason hair might look coarser is that it's been sliced bluntly at the top, not because the follicle has suddenly become Hulk-sized. Wondering what the better way is? Advanced laser hair removal technology targets the root of the hair, gradually reducing its growth. Devices like the Soprano Titanium Special Edition use powerful yet gentle energy to safely remove hair from virtually any part of the body without

affecting the skin around it.

MYTH 2: LASER HAIR REMOVAL ONLY WORKS FOR FAIR SKIN

Not anymore. Earlier technologies did struggle with deeper skin tones, but that's no longer the case. Today's systems are designed to work across a wide range of skin types and hair colors.

Advanced treatments have built-in cooling systems and multiple wavelengths to safely and effectively treat all skin types, all year round. So whether you are planning a beach vacation or just want to ditch the razors, there's a smarter option waiting in the market.

MYTH 3: LASER HAIR REMOVAL IS PAINFUL

We have all heard the “it feels like a rubber band snapping” comparison, but here's the truth: the discomfort varies from person to person and from technology to technology. Some older devices might be less forgiving, but newer ones are designed with comfort in mind.



The advanced treatments now use a unique ICE Plus cooling technology that soothes the skin while working its magic, making the whole experience feel more like a warm massage than a sci-fi zap session.

MYTH 4: YOU NEED TO LET HAIR GROW BEFORE TREATMENT

No, it is not true. It's usually recommended to shave before your laser appointment. Unlike waxing (where you need a certain length for the wax to grip), laser hair removal works best when the hair is short. That way, the energy can go straight to the

root without wasting time on what's above the skin.

MYTH 5: YOU'LL BE HAIR-FREE AFTER JUST ONE SESSION

While laser hair removal does deliver long-term results, it's not a one-and-done process. Hair grows in cycles, and lasers can only target the active growth phase. This is why most people need around 6-8 sessions, spaced a few weeks apart, to see optimal results.

Each session gets you closer to smoother, lower-maintenance skin—with fewer ingrowns, bumps, and irritation along the way.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Hair removal doesn't have to be a guessing game or a painful one. With smarter technologies and better awareness, it's easier than ever to ditch the myths and make informed choices.

This season, let's opt for results backed by science. Whether you are prepping for monsoon or just tired of the constant shave-wax-repeat cycle, know that smoother days are well within reach.

The author is Aesthetic Doctor, Skin Expert, Chief Consultant at PS Body Skin Hair Clinic

OUR VIEW



A tourism boom could offset export adversity

This sector offers India much scope to make good any losses from weak exports on account of higher tariffs. Its use as a shock absorber is within our control but demands resolute action

As India grapples with the adverse fallout on its economy of higher tariffs on exports to the US, steeper barriers elsewhere and global supply-chain dislocations, one cushion that is seldom padded up to absorb a foreign-exchange shock lies in plain sight: tourism. With US tariffs expected to average close to 18%, the highest since 1934, we must brace for their impact on our export income. The US is our largest trade partner. According to commerce ministry data, our merchandise exports to the US stood at \$86.5 billion in 2024-25, as against \$77.5 billion the previous year. Service exports are unlikely to suffer, but overall forex earnings could soon take a blow, even if we somehow seal a trade deal with the US. Yes, capital inflows are holding up for now, thanks to portfolio investors, but it is not for nothing that it's called 'hot money': easy come, easy go. Meanwhile, net foreign direct investment dropped below \$1 billion in 2024-25 as overseas investments by Indian corporates surged and foreign businesses repatriated more. It is thus imperative that we look for other avenues to earn hard currency.

India's tourism sector offers the best of both worlds: A steady source of forex earnings and, better still, mass employment in an inescapably labour-intensive sector. As estimated by the government, it created 76 million jobs over the decade since mid-2014. Many of these roles are not at risk of an AI takeover. Domestic travel has been an expansionary force, no doubt, but on international arrivals, India lags many smaller countries on the itineraries of globe-trotters. Even within Asia, a big draw, our industry punches below the country's weight. Ironically, our ancient civilization has so much more to

offer than many rival destinations and to almost every class of tourists. From budget visitors to uber-rich holidayers and from religious arrivals to medical guests, India has something to offer almost everyone, with its diverse climatic regions and natural beauty only part of the appeal. Yet, we have not been able to capitalize on these advantages for reasons that are not only preventable, but of our own making. High hotel taxes, differential tariffs for Indian and foreign guests, harassment of women around tourist sites, poor infrastructure, untrustworthy service agents and weak law-and-order are just a few commonly cited deterrents. As the government's India Tourism Data Compendium for 2024 notes, although international tourist arrivals rebounded to their pre-pandemic level in 2023, the country accounts for just 1.5% of total overseas arrivals and 2.1% of worldwide tourism receipts. The result is that we rank a lowly 39th on the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Development Index of 2024, having fallen 10 places since 2019.

If India is to elevate its tourist experience and overturn the image of a country where it is unsafe for women to travel alone, we need to move fast on all fronts. Today, the tourism sector is estimated to contribute only around one-twentieth of GDP. Contrast this with Thailand's one-fifth and China's one-tenth. We already have an example within India of how tourism can transform an economy. Kerala, a state that has not been able to attract much corporate investment, has reaped rich dividends from this sector, which now chalks up 12% of the state's GDP. If we move swiftly to capitalize on the advantage conferred by nature's bounty and our rich heritage, gains from tourism could outweigh any losses from an export slowdown.

GUEST VIEW

India-UK CETA: Let's not forget all we gave up to secure the deal

New Delhi made concessions that may not just hurt but also set a template for future agreements



ABHIJIT DAS
is an expert on international trade issues.

Most reports on the recently-signed Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between India and the UK have focused on positive aspects of the agreement. But the CETA, as with any negotiated outcome, is also a compromise between the competing interests of the two countries. It is therefore important to understand the possible implications for India. Here are some key takeaways from this trade pact.

First, with the UK eliminating customs duties on almost 99% of India's exports, significant opportunities would open up for labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and clothing, gems and jewellery and leather products, which currently face 4-16% duty. This will provide an edge for these exports over competitors from Bangladesh, China and Vietnam. However, an increase in India's exports of manufactured products would depend on the UK not imposing a carbon tax. The ability of exporters in labour-intensive sectors to scale up production of high-end products and comply with sustainability requirements will also be key.

Second, in the agriculture and marine sectors, most of India's exports will enjoy duty-free access. But two products of India's export interest—milled rice and sugar—will not receive tariff cuts. Further, to convert export potential into actual consignments, India's

exporters of agricultural and marine products will have to comply with the UK's onerous health standards and traceability requirements. Due to high costs and technical complexities, this may be problematic for small exporters, thereby limiting their ability to benefit.

Third, India's service exports to the UK, presently around \$20 billion, are set to gain significantly, especially business services, IT/ITeS and professional services. In addition, the Double Contribution Convention is likely to benefit almost 75,000 Indian workers in the UK. That said, with the CETA silent on the UK granting 'data adequacy' status to India, our negotiators appear to have missed a golden opportunity to boost exports of digitally delivered services.

Fourth, India has given deeper access to its government procurement market to the UK than it conceded to the UAE in its free trade agreement (FTA) with it. In procurements to be made under the Preference for Make In India Order, UK suppliers will be treated at par with Class 2 Indian suppliers, a concession that was not extended to UAE. This could undermine the Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India programmes.

Further, India has sharply lowered the threshold above which non-discriminatory treatment would apply to the procurement of goods and services from ₹225 crore in its FTA with the UAE to merely ₹5.5 crore under the CETA with London. This could hurt micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) seeking government contracts, as they would now have to compete with UK suppliers even for low-value contracts above the ₹5.5 crore threshold.

Since India has given the UK greater access to its government procurement market than it did to the UAE, it is likely to face strong pressure to offer even deeper concessions in ongoing trade talks with the EU and possibly the US.

As annual procurement by the UK government from sources outside its territory and the EU has historically been very low—estimated to be less

than £10 billion—Indian exporters are unlikely to make any substantial export gains in the UK government procurement market.

Fifth, by recognizing that the preferable and optimal route to ensuring access to medicines is through voluntary licensing, India appears to have almost given up the possibility of using a provision for policy flexibility under the TRIPS Agreement at the World Trade Organization (WTO) to promote affordable healthcare—compulsory licensing. Arguing that voluntary licensing is a 'global best practice'—as is being said in favour of the CETA's provision—would support Big Pharma's attempts at preventing developing countries from using WTO-compliant provisions such as compulsory licensing. This also risks eroding India's credibility as the voice of the Global South on international platforms related to health issues.

Sixth, by agreeing to the broadly aligned template of developed countries on non-trade issues such as labour, environment and gender, India's implementation of its domestic laws and regulations on these will be subject to monitoring and scrutiny by London through various committees under the CETA—this looks like a loss of sovereignty for no obvious gain.

These provisions could also open the door for more onerous and legally enforceable commitments in future trade agreements, including the imposition of trade sanctions for non-compliance. The fact that the CETA offers the UK extraordinary concessions on government procurement is a sombre reminder of what could happen on non-trade issues in India's ongoing bilateral negotiations.

Overall, in the short-term, the India-UK CETA has the potential to lift India's exports to the UK to about \$4 billion each year, as estimated by the UK government. However, alarm bells may start ringing if some of the possible adverse impacts materialize.

These are the author's personal views.



JUST A THOUGHT

If our nation wants to reduce global warming, air pollution and energy instability, we should invest only in the best energy options. Nuclear energy isn't one of them.

MARK Z. JACOBSON

THEIR VIEW

Nuclear energy is a story of more frisson than fission

SOUMYA SARKAR



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As India's energy transition gathers pace, nuclear power is being positioned by its champions as the anchor of a decarbonized power grid capable of supporting economic growth. The government is aiming for 100 gigawatts (GW) of capacity by 2047, up from 8.2GW today, with supporters of nuclear power projecting it as the backbone of our transition to clean energy. Yet, as the announcement-heavy and progress-light decades behind us show, translating this vision into reality is a tough test.

Undeniably, nuclear power has virtues unmatched by rival technologies. Capacity factors typically exceed 80%, delivering electricity untroubled by monsoons or dust storms. The land footprint is modest compared with solar or wind installations, and life-cycle emissions rank among the lowest of any energy source. For planners who need to replace dependence on coal-fired plants with clean sources without sacrificing grid stability, nuclear appears to be well-suited, at

least in theory. India's nuclear energy mission, detailed in the Union budget for 2025-26, earmarks investments for large and small modular reactors, while opening doors for private and multilateral capital. Conglomerates like the Jindal, Adani, Tata and Reliance groups have promised resources and multilateral funders like the World Bank have reversed exclusions on nuclear investment. These moves mark a turning point.

Reaching the 100GW target requires vast amounts of capital—\$180 billion in public and private investment, or \$5 billion per gigawatt constructed, according to estimates by the International Energy Agency. In addition, execution barriers are formidable. Nuclear plants often require a decade or more to commission and India's past performance offers little reassurance. The prototype fast-breeder reactor project in Tamil Nadu's Kalpakkam, for example, started in 2004, but is yet to be commissioned.

The sector's operating model in India preserves state control over the nuclear core and revenue, while expecting outside capital to absorb the risks of construction and infrastructure. Liability reforms are on the agenda, but haven't been enacted, and insurance coverage is limited. It's not surprising that global players have confined themselves

to expressions of interest and technology transfer but not committed capital.

The challenge extends beyond the scale of investment to the layering of risk. Regulatory delays, social opposition, land conflicts and global uranium market dependencies undermine delivery timelines often by decades. Combined with higher financing costs for long project cycles, investors ask if capital might be better deployed elsewhere.

India's nuclear sector has struggled to convert strategy into delivery. Over the past 30 years, nuclear power's share in electricity output has hovered below 2-2.5%. Plants have overrun initial cost and time projections, with some experiencing decades of delays. These represent not just lost momentum, but opportunity cost: think of the resources diverted from lower-risk decarbonization pathways.

Underlying these disappointments is structural rigidity. Regulatory approval, land acquisition and environmental clear-

ance remain Byzantine and unpredictable. Tariff and revenue models offer little flexibility. Public engagement and risk communication is limited, allowing local resistance to derail projects after planners approve them. Much domestic capacity depends on imported uranium, creating economic and geopolitical vulnerabilities. Small modular reactors remain unproven at commercial scale, with cost projections varying widely.

On the other hand, India's renewables sector has seen a transformation. Solar and wind now account for more than 80% of the annual capacity addition, with tariffs of solar-plus-storage projects approaching a record low of ₹3-3.5 per kWh. These often have build-times of under two years. Battery storage is no longer distant. The Central Electricity Authority projections target 47GW of grid-scale storage by 2032, which will enable renewables to supply near-baseload power.

Pumped hydropower storage and thermal energy storage conversions of retiring coal

plants add despatch flexibility to the grid. Advances in grid management such as smart meters to enable a demand response to dynamic pricing and transmission upgrades have started flattening load curves.

No single solution exists to decarbonize the power grid baseload. Instead, a portfolio of nuclear, renewables, storage and grid innovation can help us meet emission and reliability goals. This would retain nuclear as a pillar, but not make it our principal bet for carbon neutrality. Energy prudence dictates flexible planning by deploying renewables and storage where economics and delivery allow, while clearing regulatory and liability bottlenecks if nuclear is to become more than a marginal contributor.

India must ensure that every rupee spent on capacity passes tests of system value, scalability, affordability and risk. This requires a focus on regulatory reform, project execution, indigenous manufacturing and innovation, apart from the humility to scale what works while rethinking what does not. Delivering a decarbonized and stable power grid will not come from faith in any single technology, but through adaptation that marries reliability with cost-efficiency. Ambition is laudable. But India must not repeat past mistakes.



The IndianEXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

EYE ON THE GOAL

In wake of Trump’s latest moves, Delhi must push ahead with the trade deal while focusing on the domestic reform agenda

DAYS AFTER US President Donald Trump announced a 25 per cent tariff on Indian imports, and an unspecified penalty for defence and energy imports from Russia, the Indian government has initiated an exercise to thrash out concessions across sectors that can be put forth in trade talks between the two countries. As reported in this paper, key ministries have been directed to examine what can be offered to make the deal more attractive to Trump, with the US said to be pushing for greater market access than what has been on the table so far, bringing down tariff walls and doing away with non-tariff barriers. Another round of talks is slated to be held in the last week of August.

There will be red lines, of course. The government, for instance, is reluctant to give concessions on some agri items, even as it must negotiate to increase market access to the world’s largest economy — in 2024-25, India exported goods worth roughly \$87 billion to the US, led by electronics (17.6 per cent of exports), pharma (11.8 per cent) and gems and jewellery (11.5 per cent). The imposition of higher tariffs on the country as compared to those levied on its competitors such as Vietnam and Indonesia will impact export competitiveness and have implications for the broader economic momentum. Assessments by various agencies have provided some sense of the possible impact on the Indian economy — ICRA, for instance, has lowered its GDP growth forecast for the year to 6 per cent from 6.2 per cent earlier, while CareEdge Ratings has estimated the direct export loss to be around 0.3 to 0.4 per cent of GDP. Some of the options before the government reportedly involve increasing purchases of defence equipment and oil, and greater nuclear engagement, among others. Indian refiners have already cut down on oil imports from Russia to 1.6 million barrels per day in July, down 24 per cent from the month before. This decline has been offset by higher imports from countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, US and Nigeria. Concessions to the US could also be granted in areas of public procurement — in line with the India-UK trade agreement.

Delhi’s sober response, in the face of Trump’s broadside — the US President has called India a “dead economy” — reflects pragmatism when faced with pressure tactics designed to extract concessions. But, in a changed global order, where Trump is undoing the rules that underpinned the global trading system, a business as usual approach is unlikely to work. India should continue to sidestep the loose rhetoric, while moving ahead with negotiations to conclude a deal that delivers benefits to both sides. Alongside, it should press forward the domestic reform agenda to boost competitiveness, improve ease of doing business, and increase the attractiveness of the country as an investment destination.

GURUJI SHIBU SOREN

He revived the Jharkhand statehood movement and gave a new life to Adivasi politics

ON A WINTER day in 1957, a 15-year-old boy in Gola block in undivided Hazaribagh district in Jharkhand was waiting for his father, who never returned. School teacher Sobaran Manjhi was killed by moneylenders, and young Shivcharan’s life changed forever. The teenager pledged to end the exploitation by moneylenders and to fight for his people, the Adivasis. In the coming decades, the young man who came to be known as Shibhu Soren and later affectionately called Guruji, became the fulcrum of Adivasi politics. Shibhu Soren, 81, who died Monday, leaves behind a legacy of inspiring political vision and indefatigable grit mixed with some persistent controversies.

After his father’s death, Soren led a band of youth in Santhal Pargana and initiated a movement called Dhan Kati. The group encouraged Adivasis to harvest crops from lands that were illegally grabbed by moneylenders when they failed to pay off the debt. Soon, this movement became an organised struggle for the recognition of Adivasi rights over *jal, jungle, zamkeen*. In 1972, Soren, along with AK Roy, a Marxist leader and Binod Bihari Mahato, founded the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and revived the movement for statehood. To bring the industrial workers, sadans, the non-tribal natives of Jharkhand, and Adivasis together was not an easy task. Soren realised that the dream of a separate Jharkhand would not be fulfilled without the participation of non-tribal communities. He sought to change the definition of Diku — for him, the term no longer only meant “outsiders”, but referred to those who exploited Jharkhand’s resources. His dream of a separate sstate materialised only in 2000.

Political instability, allegations of corruption and violence didn’t let any of the CMs complete their tenure in the new state until 2014, when the BJP made Raghubar Das the first non-Adivasi chief minister. Soren’s own political life was also shadowed by controversies. In 2004, within two months of becoming Union minister of coal and mines, he had to resign due to an arrest warrant for his alleged role in the Chirudih massacre of 1975, in which 10 people were killed. In 2008, a fast-track court acquitted him, citing lack of evidence. He faced allegations of taking bribes to save the minority government of PV Narasimha Rao in 1993. The SC in 1998 ruled that legislators enjoy impunity from criminal prosecution in bribery cases related to their votes and speeches in Parliament — the judgment was overruled in 2024. However, controversies could not take away from Soren’s achievements. After *Marang Gomke* Jaipal Singh Munda, *Dishom Guru* Shibhu Soren was the leader who successfully reimagined Adivasi politics beyond the limits of identity, sub-nationalism and language.

POTAYTO, TOMAHTO

A Miocene-epoch romance gave the world its beloved tuber

FRENCH FRIES And tomato ketchup may be a match made in fast food heaven, but the meet-cute that changed the world occurred nine million years ago in the freezing cold of the Andean slopes. A recent study published in *Cell* has traced the origin of the beloved potato to another pantry essential, the tomato, and its fling with a wild potato species known as the *Etuberosum*. The research conducted by a team at the Agricultural Genomics Institute at Shenzhen, China, solves a mystery that has long gripped the world of botany: How is it that the potato plant, which bears a strong outward resemblance to its wilder relative, is genetically closer to the tomato?

The discovery is exciting for at least two reasons. One, it shows that genomes can help solve the mystery of how much of today’s flora evolved — a significant breakthrough considering the rarity of plant fossils (soft vegetative matter doesn’t preserve as well as, for example, the hard shells of marine invertebrates like snails). Two, it shows how looking to a plant’s past may help preserve its future; the potato, it turns out, could only evolve because a key gene in the tomato unlocked the tuber-producing gene in the *Etuberosum*, with the resulting hybrid growing a new starchy organ that resembles the modern spud. Given its importance to food security — potatoes only rank behind rice, wheat and maize in global production volume — there are already attempts to use tomato genes to create even harder varieties of the tuber.

Despite its wholeness and endless flexibility, adding heft, texture and flavour to cuisines everywhere since the Spanish shipped it to Europe in the 16th century, the potato has all too often been reduced to playing a supporting role in meals. In a world obsessed with limiting carbs, it has been vilified and villainised, held responsible for ballooning weights and expanding girths. Could the discovery of the Miocene-epoch romance, a random encounter that led to the birth of a food that can feed billions of the Earth’s hungry, help rehabilitate its image? The world says potayto, genetics says tomahto.



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

IT WILL BE a huge mistake for India to treat the trade negotiations with US President Donald Trump just as a trade negotiation. The “concede to America lobby” in India, which is surprisingly ideologically strong in elite circles, is spectacularly misreading the moment. They start with obvious truisms. India and America can be extraordinarily productive partners. India needs vigorous domestic economic reform. And we have to realise that there is a capitalist reset underway and we will need to adapt. Just look at the fact that many countries are rushing for a deal. We do not want to be left out.

But these truisms disguise the most spectacular fact about the moment: It is a profoundly imperial moment. Trump is not simply resetting capitalism into a new form. If the objective of the reset of capitalism was protectionism for the sake of industrial policy, reembedding capitalism in new social relations favourable to labour, regulating immigration, countries like India could deal with it, and even ought to make intelligent concessions to enable it. But the reset that Trump is demanding is very different. It would be foolish to rush headlong into enabling it without resistance.

Consider this thought experiment. Suppose a powerful country wants to both impose tariffs and achieve bilateral balance of trade. Suppose, further, that there was no reciprocity in the tariffs. The powerful country rather implausibly complained that it has been exploited by the rest of the world. It now wants to reverse that trend. How? By imposing asymmetric tariffs. This power is asking everyone to lower their tariffs to zero, while itself continuing to impose tariffs, almost as if this were a 19th-century imperial tariff regime. Further, this power gets you to buy particular goods it wants to sell, not as part of a give and take, but basically under threat. This government reserves the rights to its own industrial policy, unhealthy subsidised agriculture, but wants you to upend your entire agriculture policy. Suppose, further, that this power now does not believe in the rules of the game, but keeps coming up with discretionary favours and exemptions at will. Suppose, further, that this power has no interest in, and is the single biggest obstacle to, dealing with one of the profoundest transitions humanity has to

Giving in to emerging US state, in name of reform, realism, capitalist reset, is affront to India’s dignity

face: Climate change. It wants a fossil fuel economy on steroids.

Imagine, further, that this power constantly seeks to interfere in plausibly defensible regulations in all countries. It does not want to leave them alone, but insists that the regulation of technology, content moderation, should be according to its values. Imagine, further, that this power was interested in extractive mercantilism for which it will not hesitate to use its military might. Imagine, further, that this power no longer thinks that advantages accrue to it because of the credibility of its monetary system. It seeks to retain the privileged status of its currency, not by making its institutions attractive, but by trying to coerce others through tariffs. It now maintains its exorbitant privilege by more threats.

To add to this volatile mix, it encourages what is, from a developmental point of view, the most useless and insidious form of speculation: Cryptocurrency. It also creates a system where the rulers directly benefit from the system. It further undermines the credibility of the global system by basically saying that anyone who gives bad news about the economy will be penalised.

But its ambition goes further. It is constantly meddling in other countries’ affairs in the most damaging way possible. It claims to eschew democracy promotion, but does something worse: Meddle in the rule-of-law processes of other countries. It imposes stiff penalties on one country simply because that country was following the rule of law and defending its democracy against those who plotted a coup. It wrecks every international institution that could provide global public goods. But worse, it sanctions international officials who were simply doing their job and penalises them. Every country has the right to regulate immigration, and even close its borders. But this power decides that it has to send a message through the sheer cruelty and arbitrariness of the process. Its own model of capitalism is not a reset to a new model. It is, rather, the culmination of the most oligarchic and deals-based tendencies of the old model.

Imagine, further, that this system, and not just the leader who represents it, gets used to a new symbolic and material tributary system: World leaders showing up,

grovelling for deals, willing to be humiliated. Imagine, further, that this power is unwilling to stop one of the most horrendous moral catastrophes of the 21st century, which is being carried out with its support. Not only is it unwilling to stop it, it is penalising, across the world, people who might be moved and outraged by this catastrophe. All countries want to get ahead. But imagine, further, that this country wants to retain supremacy, by force of arms if necessary. Imagine, further, that this country treats its longstanding allies like pieces of dirt. It drips with contempt for them. This is not a power with whom even an alliance is possible. It will accept only vassals. Now what would such a country be called? There is no other word for it: Imperialism.

It’s mind-boggling that we have to hesitate to use this word. It is also a mistake to think this is just about managing the ego of one leader. There is no pushback in the system to this imperial project. Great powers are always imperialist. Weaker powers always have to adjust. That is a debate for another occasion. But Trump is imperialism on steroids. The reset of capitalism is not in favour of mitigating environmental risk, more social protection or even coherent industrial policy.

If this is a reset, it is towards a more coercive domestic political system, accelerating oligarchy, increasing discretion, throwing capitalism into a more speculative tailspin, and outright coercion of others. Our pro-America lobby is loudly proclaiming that this model is working. Let us put it as modestly as we can, the jury is out on that one, though pro-Trumpists in India are declaring premature victory on his behalf. But in any case, it is not clear what the rest of the world gains.

India and America should, at their best, stand for shared political values — zones of liberty, constitutionalism and open society. But capitulating to this emerging American imperial state, under the euphemisms of reform, realism, or capitalist reset, is an affront to both India’s dignity and its interests. And it will be terrible for the future of the world.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



SHAMBO SAMRAT SAMAJDAR AND SHASHANK R JOSHI

HEART’S TRUE HOME

Tagore’s poetry, Adi Shankaracharya’s teachings connect us all

IMAGINE STANDING QUIETLY by a river at sunset. The sky glows softly, painted in shades of amber and violet. As twilight deepens, two gentle voices seem to speak from within the heart: One belongs to the poet Rabindranath Tagore and the other, to the sage Adi Shankaracharya. Although separated by centuries, their voices blend seamlessly, guiding us to one profound truth: The universe is a unified ocean of endless joy and consciousness.

Tagore’s poetic spirit saw life as a dance of eternal bliss, shimmering within every leaf, every drop of rain, every rising sun. He invited us not just to observe this divine harmony but to feel it intimately, within ourselves. Tagore believed our everyday existence is bathed in sacredness, connecting us with something infinite and joyous.

Shankaracharya echoed this with clarity, gently reminding us that beneath the layers of daily life — our desires, sorrows, virtues, and vices — exists a realm untouched by change. It’s a place of pure awareness, blissful and boundless. For Shankaracharya, we are not limited individuals struggling through life; rather, we are infinite consciousness itself.

IN GOOD FAITH

At first glance, these two great minds seem distinct: Tagore spoke poetically, from the heart, while Shankaracharya illuminated truth through reason and insight. Yet, together they show us two paths to the same destination — the realisation of our unity with the universe.

At first glance, these two great minds seem distinct: Tagore spoke poetically, from the heart, while Shankaracharya illuminated truth through reason and insight. Yet, together they show us two paths to the same destination — the realisation of our unity with the universe.

Imagine yourself as a wave upon a vast ocean. The wave rises, travels, and eventually returns to the water. While each wave appears separate, its essence is forever merged with the ocean. Tagore and Shankaracharya teach us to recognise ourselves as waves in the ocean of life — never truly separate, always part of the greater whole.

Both masters also transcend religious rituals and boundaries, inviting us into a spirituality rooted deeply in silence. Tagore described profound devotion as a silent bowing of the heart — a communion beyond words, rituals, and temples. Shankaracharya similarly taught that spiritual awakening is simple: It means recognising our inherent freedom and bliss, not searching for them outside ourselves.

Their teachings become especially powerful in our busy modern lives. Doctors, healers, teachers, caregivers — indeed, all of us —

find profound meaning here. When we begin to see the divine in everyone we meet, each act of kindness becomes sacred, each moment becomes significant, and life itself transforms into spiritual practice.

Tagore’s gentle invitation is to embrace life as a divine celebration — to feel sacredness in ordinary moments, such as sunlight filtering through leaves, shared laughter, or quiet acts of compassion. Shankaracharya adds the depth of insight, teaching us to dissolve barriers that create loneliness and separateness. Together, they gently guide us towards a deeper understanding of our true selves, leading to lasting peace.

In their combined wisdom, we rediscover our heart’s true home — an endless stream of joy and serenity. Their voices blend into a harmonious melody, affirming that within us and all around us flows infinite bliss, connecting each soul eternally with the cosmos.

Samajdar is a clinical pharmacologist and diabetes and allergy-asthma therapeutics specialist in Kolkata. Joshi is a Mumbai-based endocrinologist and former chair, International Diabetes Federation Southeast Asia

AUGUST 5, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PUNJAB POLLS

WHILE THE CENTRE is assessing whether to hold elections in Punjab before October 5 when the fourth six-month term of President’s Rule expires, new factors are emerging which may prompt it to postpone elections by a few months by extending Governor’s rule through a constitutional amendment. According to informed sources, Harchand Singh Longowal favours the elections to be only after four or five months. It is not yet known if he has conveyed his views to the Centre.

VICTIMS UNDERCOUNTED

A NATIONAL DELEGATION of the PUCL and the PUDD, which visited the gas-affected areas of Bhopal, said that the state government had “grossly underestimated” the number

of gas victims. The members of the delegation, including Justice VM Tarkunde, George Fernandes and Rajni Kothari said the under-estimation of deaths as well as the extent of the suffering of gas victims will only serve the interests of Union Carbide, which was responsible for the disaster.

KASHMIR TALKS

TO END THE present instability in Kashmir, the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, is to have a final round of talks with Kashmir leaders. Gandhi, who has summoned the PCC (I) chief, Mufti Sayed, to Delhi to meet him, is also expected to call the former chief minister, Farooq Abdullah and discuss with him the pros and cons of a Kashmir “solution”. NC (F) leaders expect a “good” gesture from Gandhi, particularly after Abdulla has publicly declared that

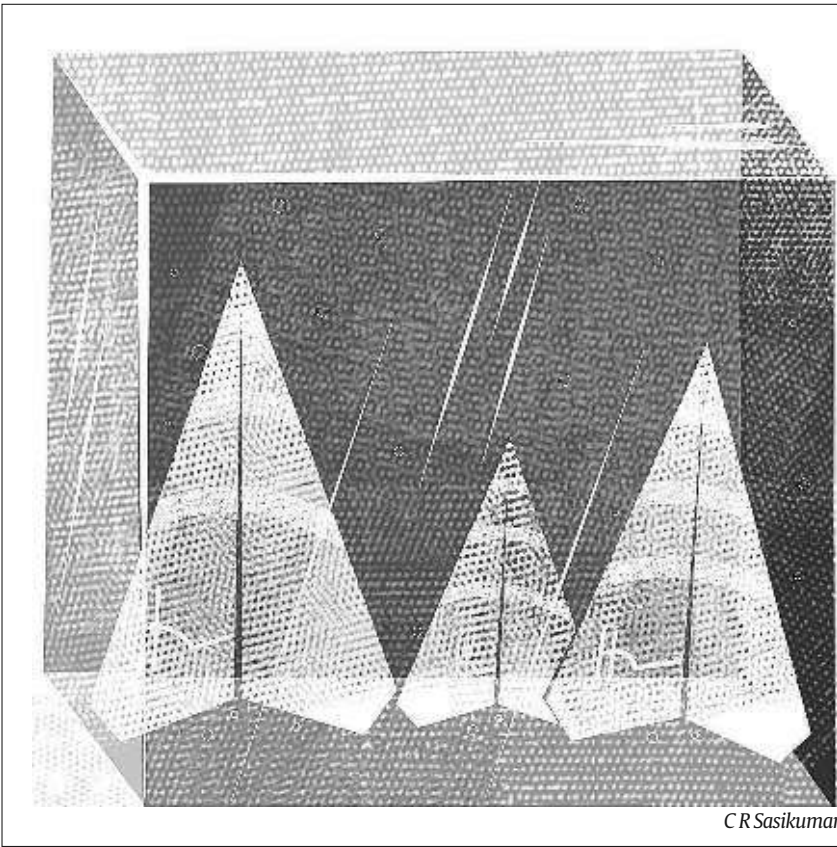
he would cooperate with the Centre.

BENAZIR BHUTTO’S PLAN

THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE, from which Benazir Bhutto was expected to gain on her return to Pakistan with the body of her brother, Shahnawaz Bhutto, may now gradually fade out if she further postpones her departure from Paris. Left to herself, the acting chairperson of the Pakistan People’s Party is ready to fly as early as possible to Karachi with the body of her brother to be buried along the grave of his father, the executed prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Shahnawaz Bhutto was found dead in his flat in Cannes, south of France. Foul play was suspected. So, the police carried out three autopsies and may order the fourth, if it is not able to find out the exact cause of his death.

Six years on, standing still

Abrogation of Article 370 has belied promises of increased investment, economic development of J&K



C R Sasikumar



HASEEB A DRABU

Article 370 was seen as a development dampener. Its abrogation was expected to bring about economic transformation in Jammu and Kashmir. The promised bargain underlying the constitutional, governance and administrative downgrade was an era of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. The development dividend that Kashmiris had been deprived of for the last seven decades and more would be shared with them, as in the rest of the country.

Today, J&K completes six years as a Union Territory. This anniversary, like a forced pause, allows us to take stock of how J&K's economy has fared as a centrally administered unit. Has the promise of opening the floodgates of corporate investments and the promises of prosperity been delivered? Far from it. The macroeconomic performance of J&K post-2019 is disappointing.

J&K's \$30 billion economy has grown at a much slower pace, post the abrogation. The growth in Gross State Domestic Product has declined both in nominal and in real terms. The fall is much sharper in real terms, placing J&K far below the national rate of growth. As a result, the contribution of J&K to the national GDP has declined to 0.77 per cent. The tertiary sector, which accounts for 60 per cent of the local economy, has borne the brunt of the slowdown with its rate of growth getting halved to 5.8 per cent in 2023-24 from 11 per cent in 2022-23. Income growth from hotels and restaurants declined from 38 per cent to 13 per cent. The growth in real per capita income has also been halved — from 6 per cent to less than 3 per cent. In 2011-12, J&K's per capita income was 84 per cent of the national average, but now has declined to 76 per cent. The gap between the two is the highest ever in 2024.

Besides the slowdown in income growth, unemployment has been volatile post-2019 with temporary spikes much higher than earlier peaks. The unemployment rate spiked to 23 per cent in March 2023 and remained at 17 per cent in 2024. In the 15-29 age bracket, the unemployment rate of more than 30 per cent is almost double the national average. J&K is now among the states with the highest unemployment rate. It is high despite an increase in the labour force participation rate as well as the worker population ratio — this reflects economic instability. The number of workers in industry reached a decadal low in 2022-23. Even the number of factories has been stagnant at the 2016-17 level.

Underlying the slower growth and higher volatility, be it output or employment, is a drop in fixed capital. J&K's fixed capital, which peaked in 2016-17, has halved by 2022-23. This drop is quite unprecedented and has not been distorted by the separation of Ladakh.

The UT's government recently stated that J&K has attracted investment proposals worth Rs 84,544 crore across 42 industrial sectors. In 2023, actual investments on the ground reached Rs 2,518 crore, with 266 industrial units registered in Jammu and 148 in Kashmir. Yet, the official statistics collated by the central statistical bodies, such as the Annual Survey of Industries, show a decline in the invested capital in J&K. Capital investments started gaining momentum in 2015-16 and peaked the next year. By 2022-23, this had declined in absolute terms. In 2022-23, less capital was invested in J&K compared to what it was five years earlier. It should be obvious that the capital intensity of the economy has declined.

The decline in fixed and invested capital has been accompanied by a sharp rise in borrowings — a sure recipe for a fiscal crisis. Despite better revenue mobilisation, J&K's fiscal health has deteriorated significantly with higher debt and deficits compared to pre-2019. Internal debt has almost doubled in just five years. The total liabilities of the government have also surged, making them more than half of the GDP. The total outstanding liabilities of the government are now almost 60 per cent of the GDP. The all-India average of states is less than half of

J&K: KEY MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS

Economic Indicator	J&K Pre 2019*	Post 2019**	National Average+
I. GROSS STATE DOMESTIC PRODUCT:			
i) Nominal growth (%)	10.2	8	9.65
ii) Real growth (%)	6.91	3.97	8.24
II. PER CAPITA INCOME :			
i) Nominal growth (%)	9.64	6.89	9.81
ii) Real growth (%)	6.02	2.93	6.54
III. Average Inflation:	5.41	5.87	5.49
IV. Unemployment (%)	10	17	8
V. Fixed Capital (Rs crore)	10039	5553	NA
VI. Internal Debt (Rs crore)	42221	82299	NA
VII. Outstanding Liabilities (% GSDP)	49	51	27.65
VIII. Credit-Deposit Ratio (%)	51	61	80
IX. Bank Deposits (%)	14.84	8.44	11.26
X. Own Tax: (% of GSDP)	6.32	8.44	6.61

*Data relates to the period 2014-15 to 2018-19

**Data relates to the period 2019-20 to 2023-24

+Data relates to 2023-24.

NA: Not Applicable

Source: Central Government, State Government and RBI data

this figure. The fiscal deficit continues to hover around 6 per cent, way above the stipulated FRBM limits. All this is despite the government earning more and spending more. The state's own revenues have increased threefold in eight years. The tax-to-GDP ratio has increased sharply from 6.3 to 8.4 per cent, a consequence of implementing the GST in July 2017. Yet, they are also borrowing much more.

Without investment growth, the sharp improvement in the credit-deposit ratio can be problematic. A higher credit growth is likely to be financing consumption, which can lead to a debt trap. The impact of credit growth has also been dampened by the negligible share of J&K in national credit, which is not even 1 per cent. The share in deposits, which has been growing at a slow rate, is around 1 per cent, indicating a net resource outflow. This continued low level of credit is validated by the credit-to-GSDP, which is as low as 38 per cent in 2024, compared to, say, Maharashtra, where it is 99 per cent. The low level of credit adds to the shortage of capital in an already capital-scarce economy and will have a crippling effect on the growth potential of the economy.

Inflation has normally been aligned with or slightly above the national averages. This is expected of an import-dependent sub-national economy like J&K. There was a sharp spike in 2019, after which the inflation threshold has remained the same, even as the average rate of inflation has been marginally higher than earlier. J&K is a high-wage economy. Inflation has resulted in the average daily wages of agricultural or construction labour in the UT being the second-highest in the country, after Kerala.

In the last six years, the historical structural features of J&K — a high-cost, import-dependent economy with parts of it being export-oriented — have only accentuated. An expansionary public expenditure policy continues as in the past, with the added feature of an over-leveraged budget. Hardly the signs of an economy set for a take-off a la Rostow. It is unlikely to engender long-term sustainable economic growth, let alone transformation.

The writer is former finance minister of Jammu and Kashmir

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"After Putin strung him along for months...Trump took steps this past week against India...The President now has an opportunity to press his advantage by doing the same with China."
— THE WASHINGTON POST

A journey from the margins

For Adivasis, Shibu Soren was a guiding light in their struggle for political self-determination



SANTOSH K KIRO

IT WAS 2019. The Jharkhand assembly elections had already been announced. On an early winter morning, I was sitting beside the ageing Shibu Soren at his house in Dumka. A huge crowd, cutting across caste, creed and community, had gathered there and was waiting for their leader to flag off the campaign for the day. When we finished our conversation, Soren stood up and wished them good luck.

Two kilometres away, another crowd had gathered for the same reason — Prime Minister Narendra Modi was about to come and address the election campaign.

Days later, Soren's magic worked again. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) formed the government, and broke all previous records.

Soren's death marks the end of an era in the national life of Adivasis. He instilled in them a sense of political struggle. Soren was destiny's child. The gruesome murder of his father, Sobaran Manjhi, who was a teacher at a school in Gola near Nemra, his ancestral village, changed his life. Sobaran stood against exploitation by moneylenders and was eventually killed when Shivcharan, as Shibu was known in his early life, was still very young.

This incident turned Shivcharan into an adult overnight. From Shivcharan, he became Shibu, later Guruji and then *Dishom Guru* — all through a life dedicated to eradicating moneylending, exploitation and oppression of Adivasis in the region. Legend has it that Shivcharan had promised that he would not shave his beard until he took revenge for his father's murder. However, his revenge did not stop at curbing moneylending. The struggle led him to mainstream politics and resulted in the formation of Jharkhand as a separate state in 2000.

After the murder of his father, Soren raised a band of youth and led a movement against moneylenders in his region, who used to collect exorbitant interest against loans. Failure to pay them off would result in crops being snatched from the tribal farmers' lands. Often, the moneylenders

would grab their lands and till them. Against this practice, Soren led a *dhan katni* (harvesting) movement. His supporters harvested the standing crops that the moneylenders had grown on the "grabbed" lands.

Due to the violent nature of the movement, many FIRs were filed against Soren. But the police could never catch him. In 1972, Soren, along with veteran communist leaders Binod Bihari Mahato and A K Roy, formed the JMM. However, he continued to lead the life of a fugitive due to police lookouts and his conflict with the moneylenders. To his own people, Soren was a messiah, but to others, including the then-ruling Congress, he was anathema. Stories of Soren soon reached the corridors of power — both in Patna and in Delhi. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reportedly wanted him "under control".

A young Indian Administrative Service officer, K B Saxena, was sent to Dhanbad as its deputy commissioner to deal with him. Saxena, however, soon learnt that the government's notes on Soren were not all true. Eventually, Saxena met Soren in the deep forest of Tundi, where Soren ran a *ratri pathshala* for the people in the region. He found Soren's struggle legitimate and convinced him to surrender before the law. He even sent a letter to Mrs Gandhi briefing her on Soren's life and struggle. This letter changed Soren's political destiny. When he surrendered in 1975, Congress was willing to join hands with the JMM, under the leadership of united Bihar's chief minister, Jagannath Mishra. Mishra arranged a meeting between Soren and Mrs Gandhi.

In 1980, Soren became an MP and emerged as the undisputed leader of the tribal people, who had long been fighting for a separate state. Although he was accused in many cases of violence, including the Chiruhdi massacre, he was acquitted in all these cases, one after another.

From 1980 to 2000, Soren led the Jharkhand statehood movement from the front. He worked with leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L K Advani, Lalu Prasad, and many others to achieve his goal — statehood for Jharkhand.

The tribal people of India will remember Soren for his grit, determination and leading the struggle for political self-determination, while for the people of Jharkhand, he will always be alive — in their thoughts and in their resilience.

The writer is head of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, St. Xavier's College, Ranchi

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MALEGAON INJUSTICE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Malegaon questions' (*IE*, August 4). The acquittal of the seven accused in the 2008 Malegaon blast case is a wake-up call for all the sections of the criminal justice system. There has been no justice in the case of this bomb blast, which killed six people and injured nearly 100 others. The lack of serious and fair investigation is not only a blatant denial of justice to the affected people but also raises pressing questions about the investigation process of the various agencies. The NIA must appeal the verdict and justice must be served to the victims.

Indrajeet Shukla, Lucknow

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Malegaon questions' (*IE*, August 4). There is a requirement of "proof beyond reasonable doubt" in the criminal jurisprudence for conviction. The editorial rightly points at the delay, loopholes, glaring lapses, inconsistencies, omissions in the investigation and missing of witness statements. The judgment refers with concern to the serving military officer's connection to Abhinav Bharat. The trial court's observation of grave suspicion and lacunae in the delayed investigation is sufficient ground for the NIA to appeal.

Vasant Nalawade, Satara

FORESIGHT, NOT FEAR

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Needed: More bargaining chips' (*IE*, August 4). Ashok Gulati's piece rightly underscores the need for India to diversify exports and reduce overreliance on the US market. But the crux lies not just in diversification but in long-overdue structural reforms in Indian agriculture and manufacturing. Without addressing inefficiencies, export diversification becomes wishful rhetoric. Tariff retaliation cannot be India's sole bargaining chip; policy consistency, quality infrastructure, and streamlined compliance must shape our global

competitiveness. The trade war offers an opportunity if we reform with foresight, not fear.

Zainab Irshad, Patna

A REASONABLE DEAL

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Stand up to Trump' (*IE*, August 4). A reasonable agreement with the US would require both some genuine but non-detracting real concessions and also pandering to President Donald Trump's ego. Several economic concessions are under consideration. Tapering off further the already declining oil imports from Russia, a major irritant, and increasing the same from the US, should be and is likely to be already under consideration. Damaging the agriculture or dairy sectors or cutting off ties with BRICS, among other things, would be off limits for the Indian establishment.

Vijay Khosla, New Delhi

DISTURBING TREND

THIS REFERS TO the report 'Army officer assaults 4 SpiceJet staff in Srinagar, one has spinal fracture' (*IE*, August 4). The rising number of incidents of air travellers losing their temper and abusing or assaulting airport staff or fellow passengers is disturbing. The alleged assault by a senior army officer at Srinagar airport, which inflicted severe injuries to the airline's ground staff, is especially alarming because the officer is part of an organisation that demands the highest level of discipline from its personnel. Just days ago, a flier on a Kolkata-Mumbai IndiGo flight struck a fellow passenger, who had suffered a panic attack, without provocation, causing tense moments for everyone on board. Such violators should be dealt with severely under the relevant DGCA regulations. Now that air travellers are rising in numbers exponentially, we must show zero tolerance for even minor transgressions to make air travel safe.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru



SHUBHRA GUPTA

A BEST ACTOR National Award for Shah Rukh Khan has set tongues wagging. Since the announcement, WhatsApp groups have been abuzz, and Insta DMs and Reddit sub-threads have been on fire. Whichever group — Boomers, Millennials, Gen Z (I won't be surprised if his famed charm spreads to Alphas at some point as well) you belong to, everyone has an opinion on SRK and the fact that he has received this award 33 years after he came into the movies, and 30 years after he delivered one of the biggest blockbusters in Hindi cinema, which redefined how mainstream romances were made.

This October will be the 30th anniversary of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, in which SRK bore Kajol away with the blessings of her uber-strict dad Amrish Puri. Since then, the superstar, who has indubitably been one all through these decades regardless of his hits and pits, has amassed a clutch of honours, including the once-much-coveted Filmfare black ladies, and honorary doctorates around the world.

But a National Award, the highest film award handed out by the Indian government, has been elusive. Until now. Atlee's *Jawan*, which came to theatres two years back (2023), and its lead — SRK in a double role as both the

grizzled war veteran and the Robin Hood-esque younger vigilante — are at one with their agenda. Setting wrongs right in a system creaking under corruption, raising the flag for those who need it most — farmers struggling under debt, soldiers on the border dying by the use of faulty guns, empty oxygen cylinders in hospitals — with the help of an army of determined young women.

More than the fact that it's taken him this long to get to the National Award podium, I'm surprised at the choice of the film. SRK, coming off the back of five fallow years in which both his professional and person lives took a beating — his previous films had crashed, and his son was implicated in a false case and imprisoned — had roared back with *Pathaan*, a zingy spy saga, in which he went loud and proud, reclaiming his identity, which had been (and still is, from trolls) under attack.

Pathaan would have been an easy choice. It's comic-book enough for us not to take any of the fun and games seriously. On the other hand, *Jawan* is messy and messy, yes, but it is also unapologetically political, with SRK holding up his hand, fanning his fingers, and saying press that button and make the right choice of neta, while slipping in a line about

the beta. There's also a batty sequence which involves the stealing of electronic voting machines. They may have been wrapped up in Atlee's loud, full-tilt filmmaking, but they all demand notice, exactly the things the present dispensation is very sensitive about.

Clearly, someone or more than one member of the jury either had a sense of humour or was not as aware of the visceral impact of that film which came in the year SRK bounced back to doing what he does best: Entertain his viewers and please his fanbase across the world. Or, it could well be that whoever was batting for him felt it was high time: If you want a comparison, Aamir Khan has four National Awards, two for films he did as a newcomer in 1988, for *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*, as well as *Raakh*. It is another matter altogether that Rani Mukerji, who has also got her first National award for Best Actress after almost 30 years for *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway*, has been nearly forgotten in all the *der aaye-durust aaye* chatter.

What the SRK award feels most like is a reflection of both the state and the actor having found a pragmatic middle ground, the former perhaps using this as a gesture of conciliation, and the latter accepting with grace and

humour. In an Instagram post, you can see him with an arm in a cast (he is reportedly recovering after a procedure) thanking the "jury and the I&B ministry, Atlee sir, my team and my wife and kids, and Bharat *sarkar* and my fans" for the "honour", and stretching out his uninjured arm in his trademark move, promising he will be back soon, serving cinema with truth. Although irony must have died, because the same jury handed the blatantly Islamophobic *The Kerala Story* two big awards.

Nitpickers, and there are plenty, are claiming that the "honour" has been diluted because the award has been split between him and Vikrant Massey, for Massey's terrific turn as an underprivileged student who cracks the civil services in Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *12th Fail*. There may be some truth in it, and it may be a case of damning with faint praise, but the jury could just as easily and comprehensively have ignored SRK all over again, just as they did with *Swades* (2004) and *Chak De! India* (2007), which are the two films he should have got the Best Actor award for, no ifs, no buts.

So here we are, and there he is: *SRK, naam toh suna hogi?*

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

What ICJ's landmark climate ruling means for Kyoto Protocol

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 4

WHILE DEFINING the obligations of countries in the global fight against climate change, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) last month noted that the 1997 Kyoto Protocol is still in force and legally relevant, and that countries are under a legal obligation to comply with its provisions.

The ICJ's landmark ruling is the first authoritative assertion on the legal status of the Kyoto Protocol in the post-Paris Agreement period. The common understanding thus far had been that the Kyoto Protocol was replaced and superseded by the 2015 Paris Agreement, meaning it became non-operational once the Paris Agreement came into effect in 2016, or at the most when the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment period ended in 2020.

But the Kyoto Protocol was never formally terminated or abrogated. The ICJ's clarification goes against the recent understanding about the landmark climate treaty, and effectively cements its status in international law.

tively cements its status in international law.

What was the Kyoto Protocol?

The Kyoto Protocol, which was finalised in 1997 and came into effect in 2005, was the first legal instrument under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The agreement sought to operationalise the provisions of the UNFCCC through specific climate actions from countries.

It assigned specific targets to rich and developed countries to reduce their emissions in particular time frames, called commitment periods. Developing countries did not have any such targets, and were encouraged to take "nationally appropriate" actions to help the fight against climate change.

This was in keeping with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), one of the foundational tenets of international climate law. This principle, in effect, says that while the whole world has a responsibility to take actions against climate change, the bulk of the responsibility lies with rich and

developed countries who have accounted for the overwhelming majority of the climate change-causing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the last 150 years.

The Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period ran from 2008 to 2012, and the second from 2012 to 2020.

Developed countries, a group of about 40 mentioned by name in Annex-I of the UNFCCC, had to reduce their GHG emissions by assigned amounts during these periods from baseline values in 1990. These countries also had to provide finance and technology to developing countries to help them tackle climate change, in accordance with the provisions of the UNFCCC.

Why has the Kyoto Protocol's validity been questioned in recent years?

The United States, the world's largest emitter historically, never ratified the Kyoto Protocol, thus escaping any obligation to reduce its emissions. Several other countries,

such as Canada and Japan, either walked out of the Kyoto Protocol at a later stage, or refused to accept binding targets for the second commitment period.

Developed countries argued that climate objectives could not be achieved if large emitters, such as China, did not contribute to the effort. China overtook the US as the world's largest emitter of GHGs by the mid-2000s. But since it was classified as a developing country in the UNFCCC, it did not have any obligation to reduce its emissions.

This spurred efforts to create another climate agreement that would ensure the participation of every single country. This eventually took the shape of the Paris Agreement. Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, this agreement did not assign emission reduction targets to any country but let the countries themselves decide what climate actions they would take in what would be called nationally-determined contributions (NDCs).

The Paris Agreement did not officially su-

persede or terminate the Kyoto Protocol. But a third commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol, beyond 2020, was never defined. Its legal status thus remained muddy. Since it was not terminated, it continued to exist, but the common understanding was that it did not have any relevance.

What does the ICJ ruling mean for the Kyoto Protocol?

The ICJ on July 23 ruled that the Kyoto Protocol remains in force, and countries party to it still have to fulfil their legal obligations under its provisions.

"The Court considers that the lack of agreement on a further commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol after the adoption of the Paris Agreement does not mean that the Kyoto Protocol has been terminated. The Kyoto Protocol, therefore, remains part of the applicable law," the ICJ said. The court further ruled that non-compliance with the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol would constitute an internationally wrongful act.

The ruling has clarified that compliance

with the targets of the first commitment period is still open for assessment. Note that not all countries have fulfilled their relatively modest emissions reduction targets in the first commitment period.

The ICJ ruling came after it was asked by the UN General Assembly to give its advisory opinion on the obligations of countries to protect the climate system, and the legal consequences of not fulfilling them. To give its ruling, the court examined the provisions of the three climate treaties — the 1994 UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement — and several other environment-related international laws that have a bearing on the climate system.

Although the ICJ has held that countries are under a legal obligation to take steps to reduce GHG emissions and can be held liable to pay compensation if they fail to do so, ICJ's advisory opinion is not binding on countries. However, the ruling opens up the possibility of increased climate litigation, seeking greater accountability from countries to take more effective climate actions.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

CAN PALESTINE BECOME A FULL MEMBER OF THE UNITED NATIONS?

MOMENTUM SEEMS to be building for more countries to recognise a Palestinian state in Israeli-occupied territory after France said last month it would do so in September. Britain also said it would follow suit at the UN General Assembly unless Israel had taken steps to ease the Gaza crisis and bring about peace.

The Palestinian Authority, which represents the Palestinian people at the United Nations, where the delegation is officially known as the State of Palestine, is not a full member and has no vote in the 193-member General Assembly.

What is the current status of Palestinians at the UN?

The Palestinians are a non-member, observer state at the UN — the same status as the Holy See (Vatican).

The General Assembly approved the de facto recognition of the sovereign state of Palestine in November 2012 by upgrading its observer status at the world body to "non-member state" from "entity". There were 138 votes in favour, nine against and 41 abstentions.

What happened last year?

In May 2024, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly backed a Palestinian bid to become a full member by recognising it as qualified to join and recommending the UN Security Council "reconsider the matter favourably".

That resolution also granted the Palestinians some additional rights and privileges from September 2024, like a seat among the UN members in the assembly hall. The May vote by the General Assembly amounted to a global survey of support for the Palestinian cause to become a full member — a move that would effectively recognise a Palestinian state — after the United States vetoed the step in the Security Council in April 2024.

The Palestinians remain a non-member observer state as the 15-member Security Council has not acted on the General Assembly recommendation.



Israeli shellings destroyed buildings in the Gaza Strip on Friday. AP

How does the UN admit new member states?

Countries seeking to join the UN usually present an application to the UN secretary-general, who sends it to the Security Council for an assessment and vote.

A council committee of 15 members first assesses an application to see if it satisfies the requirements for UN membership. The application can then either be shelved or put forward for a formal vote in the Security Council.

Approval requires at least nine votes in favour and no vetoes by the US, Russia, France, China or Britain.

If the council approves the membership request, it then moves to the General Assembly for approval. A membership request needs a two-thirds majority to be cleared by the assembly. A country cannot join the UN unless both the Security Council and the General Assembly approve.

What happened to the Palestinian application in 2011?

A UN Security Council committee assessed the Palestinian application for several weeks to see if it satisfied requirements for UN membership. But the committee was unable to reach a unanimous position, and the Security Council never formally voted on a resolution on Palestinian membership.

Diplomats said the Palestinians lacked the minimum nine votes needed to adopt a resolution. Even if they had won enough support, the United States had said it would veto the move.

REUTERS

SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 4

LEADER OF Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi last month admitted that the Congress had "fallen short" in its relationship with Other Backward Classes (OBCs), which allowed the BJP to build political support among these communities.

"I do feel that when it came to OBCs, the Congress party's understanding of their issues, the challenges they were facing and the type of actions that the party should have and could have taken, we fell short," Rahul said at a gathering of his party's MPs and Telangana leadership on July 24. "We opened the space for the BJP because we were not responsive to the aspirations, to the desires of the OBCs," he said.

Rahul was not wrong. Congress has indeed missed several opportunities to reach out to these castes. It has also failed to claim credit for policy changes with regard to OBCs that were, in fact, initiated by Congress governments. Here's a short history.

Inaction on Kalelkar report

The clamour for greater political representation for the backward classes, as well as demands for reservation for these communities on the lines of the quotas in government jobs for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), began soon after Independence.

In 1953, the government of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru set up the first Backward Classes Commission under Rajya Sabha member Dattatreya Balkrishna Kalelkar, popularly known as 'Kaka' Kalelkar.

The Kalelkar Commission report, submitted to the government on March 30, 1955, formulated criteria for identifying socially and educationally backward classes, and made several recommendations for their uplift. These included a caste census in 1961 that was to be advanced to 1957, treating all women as a class as 'backward', and reserving 70% seats in technical and professional institutions for qualified students from backward classes.

The recommendations were, however, not unanimous, and three of the members were opposed to the acceptance of caste as a criterion for social backwardness and reservation in government jobs. Kalelkar himself wrote a long letter to President Rajendra Prasad expressing his disagreement on a number of issues.



In recent years, Rahul Gandhi has been a vocal advocate of the Caste Census, an exercise that was first suggested in 1955 but never implemented. PTI

The report was tabled before both houses of Parliament but never discussed. Nehru's government did not implement it.

First quota for OBCs

Meanwhile, OBCs in the Hindi heartland had already begun to move towards the socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia. Until Lohia's untimely demise in 1967, his anti-Congress politics was powered by these communities.

By the 1970s, OBC politics had gained significant momentum to pressure state governments to take decisions regarding OBC reservation.

For instance, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna in October 1975 appointed the Most Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of Chhedi Lal Sathi. This first push for an OBC quota in UP came under a Congress government. And it was another Congress government, of Chief Minister N D Tiwari, that the state cabinet announced a 15% quota in government jobs for OBCs in UP, in April 1977.

Within a week of this decision, however, Tiwari's government was dismissed by the Janata Party government of Prime Minister Morarji Desai that had routed the Congress in the Hindi heartland in the post-Emergency elections of March 1977. As a result, it was the Janata government in UP, led by Ram

Naresh Yadav, which ultimately implemented the OBC quota — and also took the credit for it.

The Mandal challenge

In 1978, Prime Minister Desai constituted a new commission for the OBCs. The Second OBC Commission, headed by former Bihar Chief Minister B P Mandal, submitted its report to the government on December 31, 1980.

By this time, the Congress under Indira Gandhi was back in power. Over the next nine years, however, neither Indira nor her son and successor Rajiv Gandhi implemented the Mandal Commission report, which recommended a 27% quota for OBCs in central government jobs and public universities.

It was only in 1990, that the government of Prime Minister V P Singh announced its intention to implement the report, unleashing a wave of OBC assertion and fundamentally altering the politics of North India — to the Congress' detriment.

In his 2006 biography of VP Singh, *Manzil Se Zyada Safar*, Ram Bahadur Rai quoted the former PM as having said: "Congress leaders were obsessed with power equations. They were least concerned with the social equations and changes taking place... and thus unable to read the Mandal phenomenon."

EXPLAINED POLITICS

Congress & the OBCs

Over the decades, the Congress party has missed several opportunities to reach out to OBCs in North India. It has also failed to claim credit for policy changes beneficial to OBCs that Congress governments initiated

The BJP, at that time still considered a largely Brahmin-Bania party, however, was far more flexible.

For instance, it projected OBC leaders such as Kalyan Singh, a Lodhi Rajput, in UP, to counter Mulayam. As Mulayam's support base outside the Samajwadi Party's Yadav-Muslim core started to fragment, Kalyan rallied smaller OBC communities behind the BJP, eventually forging a non-Yadav OBC vote bank. The BJP would eventually revamp its leadership at every level to accommodate OBCs politically.

This was crucial from the late 1990s onwards, as the Panchayat Raj Act and reservation of seats in every level of three-tier rural and urban panchayats, provided an avenue for many OBC leaders to emerge from the grassroots.

This was even as Congress' organisation continued to erode, and struggled to truly accommodate OBC politics.

In UPA years

In 2006, Union Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh pushed through 27% reservation for OBCs in admissions to central educational institutions, which had been pending since the implementation of the Mandal report.

This was one of the biggest decisions in favour of OBCs, and a defining moment in OBC politics — but hardly any political gains accrued to the Congress.

In 2010, the UPA-2 government tried to move for a caste census. Then Law Minister Veerappa Moily wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about collecting caste/ community data in Census 2011. But Home Minister P Chidambaram opposed the decision in Lok Sabha. Singh's government ultimately decided to conduct a full Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) instead.

The SECC data was published in 2016 but remains unavailable today. The Narendra Modi government has said it is "not reliable". This means that seven decades after the Kalelkar Commission recommended a caste census, there is still no precise estimate of India's OBC population.

Rahul Gandhi's push for a caste census in recent years is an acceptance of the many missed opportunities during decades of Congress rule in the past, and a realignment of the party's politics with a view of taking on the BJP.

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Himmat Shah's heads: at the apex of his investigation into human condition

VANDANA KALRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 4

RENOWNED FOR his experimentation with material and form, Himmat Shah's studio in Jaipur was a laboratory of sorts, with disparate tools, found objects, and *mitti* (clay) that he personally ground by hand and soaked in water for years, to make art.

His signature creations were elongated and abstracted human heads, which were distorted yet expressive. First making an appearance in the mid 1970s, these heads

were reimagined in a range of diverse mediums, from terracotta and bronze to intricate pen and ink drawings that Shah was working on up until his passing in March this year. "In modern Indian art, his head sculptures stand out as distinctive and pioneer-

ing, with their pronounced features, intense eyes and a compelling tactile and gestural quality achieved through the exploration of their texture," Mamta Singhania, director, Anant Art Gallery, told *The Indian Express*.

She added, "Treating them as silent witnesses to history and conflict, he imbued them with a certain timelessness, reminiscent of excavated artefacts."



SIGNATURE MOTIFS
A SERIES

Born in 1933 into a Jain mercantile family in Lothal, Gujarat, Shah was always an artistically-inclined child. In an

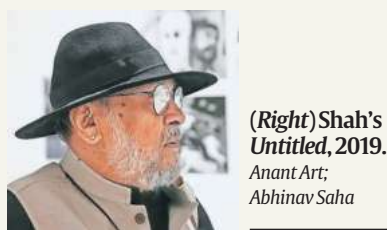
interview to *The Indian Express* in 2024, he recalled how he would often sit with potters to learn their craft, and return home with clay objects that he created for his grandmother.

His distinguished stylised heads too were inspired by his childhood, with Shah



attributing the form to memories of playing in the pond with friends.

"I did not know how to swim, so I would just sit and watch. As they dived in, their heads emerged from the water at first — that image stayed with me," Shah said in the interview, adding that the textured and



(Right) Shah's Untitled, 2019.
Anant Art; Abhinav Saha

uneven surfaces of his sculptures mirrored the terrain of dried-up pond beds.

Experimenting with material

It was in the mid-1970s, at the Garhi Studios in Delhi, that Shah made his first sculpture of a head. Shah often recalled how his first head, made of clay, was fired by fellow sculptor PR Daroz. Soon, Shah began experimenting more frequently with the form, using earth (terracotta) sourced from the potter's colony near the railway station.

"For almost two years, I photographed every sculpture I created to understand the

nuances of its expression. Living alone in that small room at Garhi, I would work all day and sometimes even wake up at night to continue. My teachers instilled in me the belief that our goal should always be to create something new. The material guides me and I follow," Shah said in 2024.

While he developed his own slip-casting technique for terracotta and ceramic, some of his earliest plaster heads were also reportedly immersed in linseed oil to harden, and then overlaid with silver-foil. Later, he also began casting in bronze, producing some of his bronze heads at a foundry in London.

In his 2017 essay 'Internationalism: The Determined Strength in Himmat Shah's Art', art critic Arjun Kumar Singh wrote, "From the mid-1980s Himmat's work took on the look it bears until today — an array of heads and object-forms in plaster, ceramic and terracotta, sometimes enveloped with silver and gold-leaf that gives them the aspect of icons, shrines and votive object."

Examining human condition

In her essay 'An Unreasoned Act of Being: New Sculptures by Himmat Shah' on the website Critical Collective, art critic and curator Gayatri Sinha wrote, "Himmat Shah's suite of large heads comes at the apex of his investigation of the human condition... The sculpture gains its vitality not in its definition, but in the process of arriving at a form..."

Gayatri added: "Occasionally divested of features, they present models of classical introversion, of the gaze turned inward, still and contemplative... Stubborn and unrelenting, these heads become expressive of a state of resistance, one that bears the marks of isolation perhaps, but also of a commitment to life and endurance."

This is a part of a series on Indian masters and the motifs that appear repeatedly in their works.

Next: Tyeb Mehta's Bulls

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Speaking for Jharkhand

Shibu Soren was a rare Adivasi leader who mobilised and won a state for his followers

Not always do people who emerge as leaders from the grassroots successfully translate their popularity into electoral success. This is especially the case when the leaders belong to marginalised communities that lack the economic resources and legacy advantage to build and sustain a political party. Shibu Soren was an exception. His public life, which spanned over six decades, saw many ups and downs, but it stands for his remarkable endurance as a politician who straddled the complex worlds of Adivasi identity in Jharkhand and coalition politics at the Centre. He was thrice the chief minister of Jharkhand and multiple times a Union minister. But his political legacy extends beyond the short tenures he had in office: In fact, his political biography is synonymous with the history of the rise of the Jharkhandi identity and the Jharkhand state.

The movement for a separate state for the native residents of the Chhotta Nagpur plateau, divided into many tribes and speaking numerous tongues, goes back to the 1950s. But the early decades after Independence, a period that marked the consolidation of an umbrella Indian identity, sought to delegitimise the identity concerns of marginalised communities. Leaders such as Soren challenged this narrative and fearlessly organised at the grassroots on social and economic agendas. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), established in the 1970s with Soren as one of the founders, brought together identity concerns and working-class agendas, which enabled the movement to build solidarities beyond Adivasis. It fought the liquor mafia, instituted direct action to end land alienation among locals, ran literacy campaigns and advocated the establishment of schools, and worked to create parallel credit networks. The statehood demand was revived in the 1980s, which culminated in the formation of a separate state in 2000.

The JMM in office embraced the vices of the establishment and abandoned the lofty ideals of the movement. This is perhaps the fate of all movement-centric outfits — the Congress, CPI and CPI-M, the Dravidian parties, Bahujan Samaj Party, among others — as they transition to parties of office. That said, Soren will be remembered as a leader from an underprivileged community who fought for his people, established their political agency, and enabled the founding of a state centred on the Jharkhandi identity. The allegations that continued to dog Soren through the course of his political career — they ranged from murder to corruption — are a reflection of the political economy of the resource-rich region he emerged from. His party may have failed in transforming how politics is played, but the very fact that it was a player made it, and him, unique among tribal mobilisations.

Limits of Dhaka’s showtrial politics

Nearly three months after Bangladesh’s interim government banned all activities of the Awami League under an anti-terror law, the country’s International Crimes Tribunal has begun the trial of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina on charges of crimes against humanity linked to the crackdown on protests against her regime last year. This appears to be yet another move aimed at discrediting the Awami League and erasing its role from the political history of Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina’s administration displayed an authoritarian impulse at times, especially in its final months, which was reflected by its high-handed actions against the Awami League’s political opponents. But excessive targeting of a single leader misses out the larger structural fault lines in play that influence politics in Bangladesh.

The decision by the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus to ban the Awami League can hardly be perceived as impartial, especially when Bangladesh appears to be on the road towards a general election, and student groups that were once aligned with Yunus are trying to strengthen their new political party. There are no valid grounds for prohibiting the activities of one particular political party even if its leader is on trial *in absentia*. Barring the stabilisation of the internal situation, there are few signs that Bangladesh’s interim government has implemented other reforms or really begun preparing for free and fair elections. For New Delhi, hopefully, Hasina’s trial will not turn into an anti-India campaign at a time when bilateral ties are at a fresh low.

New doctrine & the terrorist food chain

India’s counter-terrorism template has to be broad-based to exploit the chinks in Pakistan’s terror ecosystem

Union home minister Amit Shah recently detailed the killing of three terrorists in the forests of Dachigam, and recounted the forensic evidence linking them to the Pahalgam attack. Much is yet to be revealed about their movements and their handlers as their communication sets and other electronic equipment are examined. What is certain is that these are highly trained terrorists, almost irregular, able to virtually disappear into the forests and with little contact with the population. More such groups are understood to be in the forests, waiting for a signal to move.

In this context, we must evaluate India’s new doctrine, which states that any terrorist attack will be considered an act of war, and retaliation not just against terrorists, but also against their backers. That’s a much-needed drawing of red lines in the face of a persistent terrorist threat. But wars of any kind, limited or otherwise, are an expensive business, in this case, requiring almost continuous military readiness. Certainly, it can be done, and actions towards that are well in hand. But ideally, it would be as well to prevent terrorists from gaining their objectives in the first place. That means dealing with it in its entire spectrum.

First, it is now obvious that the

Pahalgam attack had several simultaneous objectives. In descending order, the first was to light a fire in Kashmir that would end the influx of tourists into Kashmir, and to coerce the security forces to once again launch forceful counter terrorism (CT) operations in the Valley. Both are linked issues, and both have the potential to send Kashmir back to the 1990s.

Though the Amarnath yatra has picked up in full scale, together with security measures, tourism is a different kettle of fish. The sight of thousands of soldiers standing around is hardly likely to enthrall the average selfie-seeking tourist. But oversight is vital, and it is time to shift from the time-tested method of blanketing the area with troops to one that involves intense surveillance camera coverage, paired with facial recognition, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data.

China’s Safe Cities projects are a flourishing business, using both foreign vendors and local manufacturers, and are exported elsewhere, including Pakistan. Islamabad is now fitting another 3000 AI-enabled cameras in addition to the 2,500 already there. Notice that Islamabad has largely escaped terror. Even as soldiers disappear from the streets, tourism can take off safely, giving Kashmiris their income and preventing a relapse to supporting terrorists for money. This also leaves the security forces with manpower to do other CT tasks. This time round, ways have to be found to knit CT operations into a public programme for local safety.

Second, the methodology of Pahalgam, deliberately separating Muslims from Hindus, and gunning down the latter, is aimed at the larger Bharat, and is the most dangerous tool yet. That an almost derelict terror group, the Al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent, called for Muslims to rise against the present government in a holy war, and that too in both English and Urdu, is one indication. Then, there is a spate of disinformation; for instance, a recent video of a man from a minority community allegedly beating his Hindu wife. A fact check showed this as completely false. Others

are aimed at communally sensitive areas like Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh, where a video claiming an alleged attack on Hindu devotees on their way to a temple by a group of jihadists was a fight within the group over fruit. Guidelines prepared by the ministry of home affairs need to be updated, particularly in border areas like West Bengal, where a variety of criminal elements operate together with *jihadis* from Bangladesh. Local politics hardly helps. An empowered committee comprising experts from different fields — from information warfare to social sciences — needs to review the ways to deal with a communal divide that is being further fostered, with imaginative solutions rather than sops to any community.

Third, there is the reality of near round-the-clock operational readiness. That includes not only making or buying critical weaponry for stand-off war, but also a commitment to stock inventory for a conflict which may break out at any time and at very short notice. The



Tara Kartha



Wars of any kind, limited or otherwise, are an expensive business — in this case, requiring almost continuous military readiness.

AFP

challenges are outlined extensively elsewhere in terms of creating a conventional capability that will deter in itself, promising multiple ways of punishment that will prevent Islamabad’s usual recourse to crying wolf with nuclear weapons.

But in terms of CT, what is vital is better “eyes and ears”. That is, the ability to listen in to terrorist conversations, not just to intruders, but also their handlers, entire families, and everybody around them. Terrorists have become tech smart, not just in communication with so-called “ultra sets” that completely bypass mobile towers and self-erasing messages, but in raising and moving money. That means better technical solutions, and highly boosted human intelligence. In sum, all our major intelligence agencies need more funding, as well as partners from countries with a strong self-interest in such operations.

Finally, terrorism in Pakistan is sponsored by less than 0.0002% of the population, which is the army and its proxies. Generally, civilian leaders

have an interest in prosperity and turning Pakistan into a hub for cross-continental trade, because it promises money for themselves and their voter base. This was once proposed by then army chief General Bajwa, and backed by then prime minister Imran Khan. Diplomacy must focus tightly on regenerating a flailing democracy-first narrative, ensuring that international aid is tied to democracy, and publicising that considerable largesse awaits if the Pakistan army steps back into the shadows. It’s a tall order, but not impossible. A post-Sindoor Gallup poll showed high praise of the army, but also strong support for reviving trade and sports links with India.

To deal with terrorism, understand the whole food chain — from ambitious generals to the *hawala* traders. As seen recently, war only gives them the oxygen they crave. Peace would choke them to death.

Tara Kartha is a former director of the National Security Council Secretariat. The views expressed are personal.

Why agriculture is key to building Viksit Bharat

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, continuous reforms and farmer-centric initiatives have led to steady growth in the agriculture sector, and the country has achieved record production of paddy, wheat, maize, groundnut, and soybean. As per the third Advance Estimates for the production of major crops for the agricultural year 2024-25, total food grain production is estimated at 353.96 million tonnes (mt). India’s highest production so far; it is also 40% more than it was in 2014-15.

Indian agriculture has gone from stagnation and food insecurity before the 1960s to large surpluses today, disproving the Malthusian belief that population growth would outstrip food production. In 1967, William and Paul Paddock predicted a famine in India, claiming it couldn’t feed its growing population and controversially argued against food aid, fearing it would worsen future starvation.

The Green Revolution, driven by high-yielding rice and wheat varieties, agrochemicals, and irrigation, proved the Paddocks wrong by boosting India’s foodgrain production from 74 mt in 1966-67 to 130 mt by 1979-80. Annual gains peaked at 8.1 mt (2014-2025). Horticulture also surged from 40 mt in the 1960s to 334 mt in 2024-25, with recent annual increases of 7.5 mt. Crop production has also become more stable due to advances made in developing stress-tolerant varieties and the adoption of resilient farming practices.

India’s dairy, poultry, and fisheries sectors have seen remarkable growth. The White Revolution, starting in the 1970s, boosted milk production from 20 mt to 239 mt by 2023-24, rivaling Europe. The Blue Revolution in the 1980s raised fish output from 2.4 mt to 19.5 mt by 2024-25, making India the second-largest seafood producer and exporter. Poultry evolved from being a backyard activity to an industry, with egg production rising from 10 billion to 143 billion, and poultry meat from 113,000 tonnes to five million tonnes over the same period.

Between 2014-15 and 2023-24, animal-source food production saw unprecedented growth: Milk rose by 10.2 mt annually, eggs by 6.8 billion units, broiler meat by 217,000 tonnes, and fish (mainly aquaculture) by 780,000 tonnes. Technological advances in breeding, resource management, and skilled manpower have driven this surge. High-value foods like fruits, vegetables, and animal products now outpace foodgrain growth, underscoring technology’s key role in agricultural diversification, improved nutrition, farmer income, and resilience to climate shocks.

India’s food production success highlights

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH HOLDS IMMENSE POTENTIAL TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY, RESILIENCE, AND RESOURCE EFFICIENCY WHILE LOWERING COSTS AND MANAGING RISKS. AI AND DATA ANALYTICS ARE TRANSFORMING GLOBAL AGRI-RESEARCH

the transformative role of technology and policy in boosting nutrition, farmer incomes, climate resilience, and exports. Research by the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) underscores high returns on investment in agriculture — ₹13.85 and ₹7.40 for every rupee spent on research and extension. Recent government initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (irrigation), PM-KISAN (direct farmer support), the National Livestock Mission, and Blue Revolution have further strengthened agricultural growth by enhancing resource use, reducing risks, and promoting technology adoption across the agri-food system.

By 2047, India aims to become a developed nation. Its economy must grow at 7.8% annually, with a projected population of 1.6 billion — half in urban areas. This shift will double overall food demand, with demand for fruits, vegetables, and animal-based foods expected to triple, while cereal demand remains stable, leading to surpluses.

However, rising urbanisation and industrialisation will shrink agricultural land from 180 million hectares (mha) to 176 mha, and average land-holdings from one hectare (ha) to 0.6 ha. This will increase pressure on water and agrochemicals, risking resource degradation. The climate crisis poses an even greater threat, endangering sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods.

India’s evolving agri-food challenges call for a realignment of production strategies. Even as the country exports 20 mt of water-intensive rice annually, groundwater sustainability is at risk. Meanwhile, it relies heavily on imports of edible oils and pulses. To ensure food security, protect farmer interests, and conserve resources, crop planning must prioritise water-efficient crops such as oilseeds and pulses, alongside sustainable farming practices.

India can expand pulses and oilseeds cultivation on 12 mha of rice-fallow land left unused due to various constraints. However, low yields — 18-40% gaps in oilseeds and 31-37% in pulses — highlight the need for technological advancements. The Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan (VKSA) reached 1.35 crore farmers across 728 districts, promoting improved practices through direct farmer-scientist interaction. To boost production and reduce imports, the government has also launched mission-mode schemes focused on high-yielding seeds for oilseeds, pulses, and cotton.

Agricultural research holds immense potential to boost productivity, resilience, and resource efficiency while lowering costs and managing risks. With growing demand for timely information, modern tools such as AI and data analytics are transforming global agri-research. India currently invests ₹11,600 crore annually (0.5% of the agri-GDP) in R&D, with plans to increase funding and adopt a demand-driven approach. Strengthening Krishi Vigyan Kendras, state extension systems, and Union-state coordination will link research more closely with farmers. Under the One Nation, One Agriculture, One Team vision, ICAR nodal officers are guiding state-level action plans to support Viksit Bharat.

Shivraj Singh Chouhan is the Union minister for agriculture & farmers welfare, and rural development. The views expressed are personal.



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

{ AMI AYALON } FORMER DIRECTOR, SHIN BET, ISRAELI INTERNAL SECURITY AND COUNTERINTELLIGENCE AGENCY

At first this war was a just war, a defensive war, but when we achieved all military objectives, this war ceased to be a just war

In an open letter to US President Donald Trump, urging an end to the Gaza war.

Meghnad Desai: The view from classroom

Noted economist and Labour peer Meghnad Desai passed away recently. Few individuals command such universal recognition — his impact transcended not just borders but boundaries of language, discipline, and realm of thought.

For both of us, he embodied the ideal of the great teacher. We were from the first batch of Meghnad Desai Academy of Economics. Desai, in one of his lectures, quoted Keynes’s description of a master economist: “A master economist...must understand symbols and speak in words. He must contemplate the particular, in terms of the general, and touch abstract and concrete in the same flight of thought.”

Desai’s style of teaching changed the way we engaged with ideas and understood the world.

We were in the international political economy course he taught. Through this class, I (Patel) became fascinated by the effects of the Industrial Revolution on weavers in India and wrote a short paper exploring how the Lancashire model and its replication in Britain impacted these communities. I approached him at his office. He immediately invited me to sit; enjoying his pizza and coke, he read through my work and, almost offhandedly, began discussing the various arguments that scholars have debated around this topic. What he considered a casual ramble could easily have passed for the literature review section of a scholarly paper on industrialisation in India.

During one of his lectures where he was working out a proof (perhaps of the Heckscher-Ohlin model), I (Misra) had asked him a question related to the math on the board but not directly to the topic. Without missing a beat, he adapted the equations to tackle the query, but after a brief pause, admitted with a twinkle in his eye that he had momentarily lost his way. With characteristic wit, he referenced his age, joking that he would revisit the question the following day.

Later, when I dropped by his office to discuss another doubt, I found him completely absorbed, meticulously working through lines of equations — determined to pinpoint

exactly which sign or step had eluded him earlier. Before him, along with his notebook, was an open box of pizza and a can of Coke, leftovers from a working lunch that he had put aside in his pursuit of clarity.

We recall many water-cooler conversations with peers marvelling at how he didn’t need to be this way — but perhaps he simply couldn’t help it. That was the only way he knew.

He cared deeply for knowledge, for his students, and for their learning. He remained committed to that ideal.

In the midst of all this, he was very alive to humour, too. He once made a joke about the oddity of naming an institute after someone still alive — which had the entire hall erupting in laughter.

His passion rubbed off on us in many ways. When I (Misra) reached out to him for advice on doctoral studies — confessing a preference for “real-world problems” over purely theoretical work — he shared a perspective that fundamentally shifted my outlook: “You know, Prakhar, the biggest advantage of theory is that theory saves time. Imagine being able to work out what the outcome of a policy will be before actually implementing it!” After that, theory no longer felt like an abstract exercise detached from reality.

Desai left an indelible mark on us. His last message to one of us was: “Keep reading widely and hang on to some of your ideas but you will have a lot more to learn than you realise”. Young minds need that kind of energy — that pushes you forward but also slows you down just enough to learn, reflect and grow.

It is far beyond our abilities to discuss his contributions to academia and literature or to comment on the large body of knowledge he has left behind. What we can say is that he did fit very well this verse: “Jis jaanib bhi mitti uda doon, naye aaf-aab paida ho jaaye. Filhaal bachchon mein hoon, sabun ke gubbaare banata hoon”. (Wherever I fling dust, new suns rise. When I’m with children, I shape bubbles).

Prakhar Misra is at Johns Hopkins University and Ayush Patel is with L74 Craft Ciders. The views expressed are personal.



Prakhar Misra



Ayush Patel



Breaking the immunity of privilege

The conviction of Prajwal Revanna, grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, marks a significant moment in India's justice system. A former MP from an influential political dynasty receiving life imprisonment for rape sends an unambiguous message that power and privilege are no longer a guarantee of protection. Prajwal was found guilty of repeatedly raping a 47-year-old domestic worker, which marked the first verdict among the four sexual assault cases against him. The scandal erupted when multiple explicit videos, allegedly recorded by Prajwal himself, surfaced before the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The sheer scale of abuse and perversion triggered public outrage, forcing the government to form a Special Investigation Team (SIT). The evidence was damning: digital evidence, the survivor's courageous testimony, DNA samples, and a groundbreaking forensic technique—genital mapping—sealed his fate. This case sets a legal precedent, proving that advanced forensic science, when combined with meticulous investigation, robust prosecution, and judicial resolve, can dismantle the immunity of the powerful.

Equally alarming was an *ex parte* injunction issued by a lower court barring 86 media houses from reporting "defamatory" content against Prajwal. The legal gag delayed public scrutiny and further derailed the case. Had a whistleblower not leaked the videos, the truth may have been buried. This case exposes the dangers of courts granting injunctions without due diligence or hearing the media. Worse, it reveals a disturbing pattern: over a dozen politicians have secured such gag orders. The question thus arises: what incriminating evidence is hidden in their pen drives? How many more victims are being denied justice while the powerful shield the truth? Prajwal's conviction is significant not only for its legal precedent but for its societal reckoning. That a man from one of Karnataka's most influential families, backed by caste and political clout, has been held answerable signals a long-overdue shift. The idea of elite inculpability is punctured. For survivors of sexual violence, this verdict is a beacon of hope, proof that justice can prevail even against the mighty. This is also a morale booster for all survivors. However, this case also highlights a glaring disparity as several victims still languish in legal limbo waiting for justice. The true test of progress will be when such efficiency becomes the norm, not the exception. May this verdict mark the end of unchecked privilege and usher in a new era in accountability, ensuring that no predator, regardless of power or pedigree, escapes justice again.

The sentencing of Prajwal Revanna sets a precedent in its legal and societal implications

The mini crisis presents an opportunity for accelerated progress in economy, education, and other key sectors

AJIT RANAHE

It is not the time to teach basic international macroeconomics to the President of the United States of America. Renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs put it very well in a public speech. He said that high trade deficits, which are bothering President Donald Trump, are not the result of trade policies like low tariffs. They simply mean that Americans like to buy beyond their productive or earning capacity. It is like a consumer on a buying binge with a credit card. America's production, earning, investing, saving, and buying activity is captured by a basic equation, called an identity, in the macroeconomics textbook. The equation says that the trade deficit is equal to the savings investment imbalance. In other words, the excess of imports over export earnings of America is just the mirror image of the excess of investment over domestic savings. This basic equation identity is unaltered by changes in import tariff rates, sanctions imposed on Russia or China, or any military spending or aid given to Israel or Ukraine. It reflects consumer behaviour and investor preferences. It is not an expression of business sentiment such as that expressed by the stock market. We may observe that America's stock market remains at historic highs, despite the tariff mayhem.

The above equation identity means that any dollar shortfall needed to pay for the trade deficit is supplied by foreign investment inflow, which is the savings investment imbalance. But that inflow comes at a cost. It is a debt capital inflow. It increases the country's indebtedness. No wonder the aggregate debt of the US sovereign alone is \$37 trillion, representing 125% of its GDP. The cost of this debt, i.e. the long-term interest rate, is close to 5%, even though inflation is quite low. The difficulty of continuing to attract foreign inflow of capital means interest rates will remain stubbornly high.

The bottom line is that harsh tariff policies against trading partners of the

US will not drastically reduce the size of the deficit, but will hurt domestic imports because of higher costs, and will hurt exporters from foreign countries as their net earnings and volumes may go down. Production, volume of imports and exports (to some extent), and incomes will go down, hurting GDP in the medium term. The tariffs are not a tax on foreigners but are paid by importer companies in the US, who pass along the cost to their customers via higher prices. Exporters may face lower profits or volumes, but one estimate is that exporters bear only one-fifth of the rising costs from tariffs, while Americans will bear most of the brunt. But President Trump's policies change



so frequently that it is impossible to make a firm prediction based only on current policy action.

Despite showing a great willingness to negotiate a mutually beneficial trade deal and despite cultivating friendship and goodwill with Trump and his team, the outcome has been very bad for India. The 25% tariff on all merchandise exports to America, plus unspecified penalties, makes India's position worse than peers like Vietnam, Indonesia, or Mexico. It will bring down GDP growth by 0.2% to 0.3%, and badly affect the exporting sectors of textiles and garments, gems and jewellery, electronics, mobile phones, auto components and metals, steel, and aluminium.

Points of contention

India drew the line on three things. First, no liberal access to the agriculture and dairy market in the country. This is especially for maize, corn, soybean, and dairy produced from cattle led on animal product. Second, no access for generically modified crops or

agricultural products. Third, no import of ethanol for fuel. An additional fourth point, proving to be sticky, is India's insistence on its freedom to import crude oil from Russia. This seems to have irritated Trump the most, since he sees it as a direct affront to sanctions against Russia.

India must now ponder its response to Trump's harsh actions. It is a testament to Trump's peculiar strategy that he puts the other side always in reactive mode. Most of the trading partners end up either giving too much for too little (like the UK, the EU, or Indonesia) or use the leverage to counter-strike (like China with the rare earths export ban). India was tilting towards giving in too much, given the critical importance of the US market, and it being the only large economy with which India enjoys a substantial trade surplus.

This mini-crisis must be used to accelerate the progress on various economic, administrative, and other reforms. This is certainly not a 1991 model of crisis when India had to beg for short-term foreign credit to fill its forex coffers. There is size, resilience, diversification, and will that can withstand this shock.

But let us not lose sight of worrying economic signs. Near-zero net foreign direct investment, stagnant private sector investment spending, 30% unemployment among college graduates who scramble for UPSC jobs, low productivity across agriculture crops, water stress, the increasing burden of debt to beneficiaries, the large mismatch between skills demanded (in age of AI and automation) and output of educational institutions, and most importantly, the continued shuffling of the farmer, at the mercy of procurement policies, fickle hands, prohibition on forward trading, and illiquid land markets.

The farm laws need the consensus and consultative approach. The cabinet laws passed in parliament need to be accepted and implemented via the four codes in all states. And the education sector needs massive reforms, whose spirit is embedded in the National Education Policy, but which awaits full implementation, to make the education-to-employment pathways effective. India needs to use this Trump Tariff fiasco to push all these reforms, to make the economy chug faster and inclusive for all sections.

(The writer is an economist; Syndicate: The Billion Press)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Pawprints of gratitude

Kindness doesn't just feed a hungry stomach; it nourishes souls

A S NAGARAJAN

For the last few years, I have been feeding the community dogs in our area every day. Over time, what began as an act of compassion has grown into a deep and unspoken bond. These dogs, once wary and distant, now wait for me at the same hour daily. They recognise not just my vehicle but even the scent of my clothes and bag.

Many of the dogs I befriended years ago are no longer here; they have lived their brief lives on the streets and passed on quietly. Yet those who remain, and the ones who joined later, share a trust and affection that is difficult to describe. It is something you can only feel when you see their eyes light up as you approach—something that is beyond words.

A few days ago, heavy rain kept me from going out. Community dogs usually seek shelter during storms and continue to rain. I avoid venturing out, knowing they may not show up for food. But what happened next moved me.

On the morning of July 27, when I opened my main door, I noticed that one slipper from a pair was missing. I searched everywhere. Curious, I checked the CCTV footage. What I saw stunned me! Around 2:30 am, a small pack of dogs (that I usually feed) had quietly made their way to my home. They sniffed around the porch, likely following the familiar scent of my vehicle, and searched for me and, perhaps, for food. After a while, they left—but one of them picked up a slipper and carried it away.

That simple act—a dog carrying a piece of my belonging—wasn't their way. It was a connection. It was their way of saying, "We came looking for you. We missed you." Perhaps when I meet them again, that same dog may return my slipper—or maybe not. It doesn't matter.

What matters is that they found their way to me in the middle of the night, through rain and darkness, because of the bond we share.

History has countless examples of the profound relationship between humans and dogs. From ancient hunters who shared their meals with wolves thousands of years ago, eventually giving rise to the first domesticated dog, to loyal street dogs in modern cities who silently guard neighbourhoods they call home, this bond is as old as humanity itself.

And yet, so often, we humans forget. We see a street dog and choose to ignore it, throw a stone, or treat it as an nuisance. We fail to realise that behind those wary eyes lies trust waiting to be earned, love waiting to be given, and a loyalty that often exceeds our own.

That night reminded me of a simple truth: kindness doesn't just feed a hungry stomach; it nourishes souls, both theirs and ours. When an animal braves the rain at 2:30 am just to find you, it isn't merely looking for food. It's looking for you.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Malegaon blasts: A stark reminder of systemic failure

Apropos "So who set off the Malegaon blasts?" (Aug. 4), the case starkly reflects the failure of India's justice system. Initially investigated by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad under Hemant Karbare, the case seemed to be progressing with the arrest of right-wing Hindu extremists, including former BJP MP Pragna Singh Thakur. However, the transfer to the National Investigation Agency led to charges being dropped, key evidence going missing, and witnesses turning

hostile. The situation worsened when Special Public Prosecutor Rohini Salian claimed she was pressured to "go soft" on the accused before resigning. Prolonged delays, questionable acquittals, and lack of accountability undermine public faith in the justice system. The families of the victims and the nation still await closure, denied justice by a system crippled by political interference and inefficiency.

K Chidnand Kumar, Bengaluru

Accountability for all

I refer to "Free speech on trial: An avalanche of gag orders" (July 25). The article rightly points out that this judicial trend of issuing gag orders is highly disturbing, posing a threat to democratic discourse and individual dignity. While greater judicial circumspection in issuing gag orders is necessary, media organisations must also be held accountable for their publication decisions. Like the judicial trend highlighted by the article, the trend of media trials is disturbing. Media organisations must establish robust editorial protocols

to evaluate whistleblower claims and avoid building accusatory narratives without giving the other party a chance to respond. A self-governing media council with clear guidelines would protect editorial independence, expose bad actors, and ensure post-publication accountability.

B S Ajakumar, Bengaluru

Bold precedent

Prajwal Revanna's life sentence marks a watershed moment in India's fight against sexual violence. The survivor's courage, the SIT's tenacity, and the judiciary's swiftness

deserve applause. The SIT's use of advanced forensic methods, despite resistance, sets a bold precedent for future investigations. The judge's decisive role in authorising vital evidence, capacity building, and technology transfer. India must continue advocating for a GA architecture rooted in urgency and equity, moving beyond top-down metrics. The real test lies in how these lessons are implemented and to what extent: Are vulnerable communities protected? Are climate-resilient practices reaching rural populations and women farmers? Are urban sys-

SPEAK OUT

Our government is working for the public. Before 2017, these people had turned Uttar Pradesh into a hub of looting criminals roamed the streets openly with guns. Today, UP is number one in the entire country in terms of infrastructure, law and order, and development...

Brajesh Pathak, UP CM

I'd like to congratulate myself, and thank myself, and give myself a big pat on the back.

Dee Dee Ramone

TO BE PRECISE

AMID THIS, IS IT POLITE TO ASK OUR CITIZENS TO FOCUS ON 'MAKE IN INDIA'?



IN PERSPECTIVE

Aligning growth with climate action

NDCs and GGA Offer India pathways that balance economic progress with climate resilience

INDU K MURTHY

As the dust settles on the Bonn climate talks, discussions on the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) have gained momentum, but key questions remain unresolved. With the global 2025 climate milestone (setting updated climate targets and a new finance goal) and COP30 in Brazil on the horizon, the spotlight is on enhancing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and advancing the GGA. Beyond fulfilling climate obligations, these frameworks will help India carve the path to a resilient, economically thriving future.

As the fastest-growing major economy, India faces the dual challenge of development and climate change. From erratic monsoons and heatwaves to rainfall events and sea level rise, climate risks are intensifying, threatening lives and livelihoods. As the country works to meet the needs of a growing population and rapidly urbanising regions, the path ahead, therefore, requires climate action and development to be pursued together as a cohesive national strategy.

A recent OECD-UNEP report, *Investing in Climate for Growth and Development*, suggests that bold climate action is a powerful driver of economic transformation. It estimates the global GDP to be 0.2% higher by 2040 and up to 13% higher by 2100 under a high-ambition scenario, incorporating enhanced climate action and accelerated investments aligned with the Paris Agreement's 'well-below 2°C' goal.

For India, green growth is both an environmental imperative and smart economics. It enhances energy security, supports rural livelihoods, and builds resilience of vulnerable communities. Aligning economic strategy with sustainability is key to accelerating development while navigating resource constraints and climate risks.

Investments in renewables, clean mobility, and energy efficiency reduce emissions and boost innovation, jobs, and long-term savings.

While India is drafting National Adaptation Plans for key sectors, its adaptation response remains nationally underfunded and fragmented, with international support proving slow, inconsistent, and insufficient. The promise of the GGA lies in its ability to support implementation through funding, capacity building, and technology transfer.

India must continue advocating for a GA architecture rooted in urgency and equity, moving beyond top-down metrics. The real test lies in how these lessons are implemented and to what extent: Are vulnerable communities protected? Are climate-resilient practices reaching rural populations and women farmers? Are urban sys-

tems flood-proofed? India should also push for frameworks such as the New Collective Quantified Goal (a global target to mobilise climate finance for developing countries) and the Baku to Belem Roadmap (guiding global action on the Paris Agreement's Adaptation Goal) to serve not as checklists but as frameworks guiding countries to translate global ambition into local action.

As India prepares its 2025 NDC update, it has a strategic opportunity to set bold decarbonisation targets aligned with its low-carbon development goals and net-zero vision. Ambitious, implementable, and investable enhanced NDCs can become powerful instruments to drive inclusive growth.

This requires integrating climate goals into sectoral and sub-national policies. Since key levers of adaptation and mitigation, including transport, agriculture, water, and land management, are a state's prerogative, states can become co-architects of national climate ambition.

Financing the future

Finance is central to India's net-zero journey, with over \$10 trillion needed by 2070. While global adaptation finance remains limited, India must champion predictable, accessible, and need-based funding; scale up domestic instruments like Sovereign Green Bonds and infrastructure investment trusts; enhance state-level climate budgeting; and de-risk private investment.

As India shifts to a low-carbon economy, labour transitions will be key. Sectors like coal, construction, and transport, often employing informal workers, will need targeted support. With the right planning, green transitions can create quality jobs. India's renewable sector, for example, employed over 1.02 million people in 2023. Ensuring a just transition means investing in reskilling, social protection, and community development.

Equally important is investing in Nature-based Solutions (NbS), which can support both climate resilience and green jobs. Global estimates indicate a requirement of over \$484 billion/year by 2030 for NbS, yet current finance flows fall short, highlighting a critical investment gap.

India's blend of scale, credibility, and developmental urgency positions it to lead efforts for an inclusive global climate framework. An inclusive, investment-ready NDC in 2025 can help India set global standards in emissions reduction and climate action.

In the GGA negotiations, India must continue to frame adaptation as a survival imperative, not a donor-driven priority. It must also position climate action as both a shield against risks and a catalyst for ensuring long-term economic vitality. The real test lies in how these lessons are implemented and to what extent: Are vulnerable communities protected? Are climate-resilient practices reaching rural populations and women farmers? Are urban sys-

Propaganda as award-winning art

The conferment of two awards on *The Kerala Story* at the recent National Film Awards has a political subtext that has invited widespread criticism. The 2023 film, which won two awards – for best director (Sudipto Sen) and best cinematography – further a right-wing conspiracy theory that women in Kerala are being converted to Islam en masse and are being shifted to countries such as Syria, where they are forced to fight for ISIS. At the time of its release, the film had triggered a major controversy over gross misinformation, unverified claims that shaped its story, and a propagandist narrative that showed the Muslim community and Kerala in a poor light. Initially, the makers even promoted an inflated number of radicalised women – 32,000 – before retracting the claim in the face of criticism.

It is disappointing that such a film has been chosen for a prestigious national award, instituted to recognise and honour artistic excellence and originality. The juries of the National Film Awards have in the past considered the spirit of secularism and national unity while selecting films for top honours. When a film with a divisive agenda that seeks to target a state with misinformation is honoured, especially with awards constituted by the government, it sends out the wrong signal. The patronage for *The Kerala Story* does not set a precedent; it is seen as fitting into an existing template where popular art is increasingly finding greater acceptance by taking divisive political positions. That the film received tax exemptions in some of the BJP-ruled states is significant. The film also had Prime Minister Narendra Modi's endorsement. It needs to be noted that in 2023, the jury's decision to honour the controversial film *The Kashmir Files* with the award for Best Feature Film on National Integration had triggered sharp political reactions.

The National Film Awards have been involved in various controversies in the past. They have been criticised for partisan decisions, personal, regional, and linguistic biases, vested interests, and ignorance. With *The Kerala Story*, the political impetus on these awards may have been further exposed. Critics have noted that the awards would give legitimacy to the untruths put forward in the film. The courts had cleared the release of *The Kerala Story* as it is protected by the right to freedom of speech and expression, but the film has tested the boundaries of the right. Top billing in the country's premier film awards can be seen as all-out backing for what the film sought to propagate.

National Film Awards for 'The Kerala Story' may further normalise the film's divisive messaging

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.com. Invoxy letters (not handwritten) – will be accepted. All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

Why the HECI Bill matters for higher education in India

CHETAN SINGAI

The Ministry of Education is currently working on a draft bill to establish the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)—a crucial step towards fulfilling the promise of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). First proposed in the draft National Education Policy 2019 (DNEP-2019) and reiterated in the NEP 2020, HECI was envisaged as a “large-scale and far-reaching” remedy for the persistent challenges plaguing India’s higher education system—fragmentation, obsolescence, and over-regulation.

To bring this vision to life, the system must adopt transparency through data-driven governance, public disclosure, and outcome-based assessments. Equally important is the adoption of differential regulatory mechanisms; institutions should be regulated based on their performance, not through a one-size-fits-all approach. With real autonomy, credible accreditation, and Centre-state cooperation, these principles could transform the sector from a culture of control to one of trust.

The DNEP 2019 conceived the HECI as “a mechanism to ensure integrity, transparency, and efficiency in higher education and its institutions by having ‘only one regulator for all higher education, including professional education’.” The DNEP 2019 and the NEP 2020 reiterated this and advocated that regulation should be “light but tight” and “outcome-based,” with self-disclosure and accountability. Institutions for decades have buckled under the weight of three or more overlapping regulatory authorities: the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), each with its conflicting mandates and overlapping procedures. The HECI Bill proposes to replace this complex system with a single, transparent, and operationally independent authority. According to the proposed

HECI regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standards are segregated along four verticals: namely, the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA), National Accreditation Council (NAC), Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), and General Education Council (GEC). This split is more than just bureaucratic reengineering; it’s a philosophy that moves from control to enablement. Such a shift is essential to ensure the regulatory system empowers institutions rather than “disempowering” them.

One policy, many realities
Education falls under the Concurrent List, meaning both the Centre and the states share legislative responsibility. This dual control often leads to fragmented regulation and inconsistent implementation, particularly affecting state-run universities that educate the majority of Indian students. NEP 2020 envisages the spirit of cooperative federalism, with states and national priorities in education needing to converge. However, application in each state varies greatly due to differences in political commitment, administrative capability, and financial sufficiency. As a matter of fact, state universities are often plagued by too much bureaucracy, political appointments, and not getting enough funding.

For the HECI framework to be successful, it is critical to ensure that the role of states is not marginalised. On the contrary, they must proactively involve themselves in the preparation of implementation roadmaps, the formulation of State Higher Education Councils/Commissions, and bringing reformulations to university acts in alignment with the NEP vision. Central to NEP’s philosophy is the freedom of each higher education institution to govern itself—academically, financially, and administratively. Today, however, the system is one of micromanagement and has little scope for decision-making. NEP 2020 seeks graded autonomy, given on the basis of accreditation and performance. Institutions could create curricula, handle finances, recruit talent, and innovate with full public disclosure. Further, the regulatory change will also need to be supported by capacity building, transparent funding models, and protection from the tentacles of political interference. “Autonomy is not a matter of virtue; it is a condition of excellence.”

Even government employees like elementary school teachers and nurses have been ordered to hand in their passports, to enforce “discipline”

VIVIAN WANG

When Tina Liu was hired to teach literature in a public elementary school in southern China, her contract included the usual warnings about absenteeism and job performance.

Then came another line: Traveling abroad without the school’s permission could get her fired.

The rule was reinforced in a staff group chat. “According to regulations from higher-ups, teachers need to strengthen their disciplinary awareness,” the message said. “We will currently not permit any overseas vacations.”

Across China, similar warnings are spreading as authorities tighten control over state employees’ contacts with foreigners. Some kindergarten teachers, doctors and even government contractors and employees of state-owned enterprises have been ordered to hand in their passports. Some cities make retirees wait two years to reclaim their passports.

In many cities, travel overseas by public employees, even for personal reasons, requires approval. Business trips abroad for “ordinary research, exchange and study” have been banned. And in most provinces, those who have studied abroad are now disqualified from certain public positions.

Officials cite various reasons, including protecting national security, fighting corruption and cutting costs. But the scope of the restrictions has expanded rapidly, sweeping up employees who say they have no access to sensitive information or government funds. The New York Times spoke to seven public employees, including an elementary school music teacher, a nurse, and a literature professor, who confirmed the restrictions.

The rules are part of a push by the central authorities to impose greater so-called political discipline and ideological loyalty on government workers. Two of the people the Times spoke to said they were also ordered to disclose their personal social media accounts to their employers. Another person said she had to notify her employer if she left the city where she worked. Some local governments have banned civil servants from cutting out in groups of more than three, measures that came after several reports of excessive drinking at official banquets.

But authorities are especially vigilant about overseas contact. The Chinese government has long been wary of the threat of espionage and what it sees as hostile foreign forces seeking to sow discontent. In July, People’s Daily, the Chinese Communist Party’s mouthpiece, published an article declaring that people-to-people diplomacy “exists because of the party” and should be led by the party.

The result is that even as Beijing advertises itself as eager to attract foreign businesses and tourists, it is preventing many of its own people from leaving.

“On the one hand, you want foreigners to come to China. You advertise Chinese culture. You hope they’ll boost the economy,” said Liu, who is in her 20s. “But on the other hand, why are you trapping us here, rather than letting us see more of the world?”

Some restrictions for some state employees are not new. Since 2003, high-ranking officials or those handling

No passports, no study abroad: China limits its staff travel

ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARCHANDAN

state secrets must report foreign travel in advance. Their names are given to border officials to prevent unauthorised exits.

But under Xi Jinping, China’s most powerful leader in decades, the controls have extended to far lower-level workers.

Full-time officials at six fishing villages near the city of Zhoushan, in coastal Zhejiang province, were told to surrender their documents, a local government notice shows. In a city in Jiangxi province, a public health official also told employees to report any overseas trips they’d taken since 2018.

A music teacher at an elementary school in central Hebei province said that she had applied to go to Malaysia this summer because her sister would be studying abroad there. Her school principal refused the request, said the teacher, who gave only her surname, Wang, for fear of retaliation.

A nurse at a hospital in Zhejiang said she would need four layers of approvals to travel abroad. The nurse, who also asked to be identified only by her surname, Zhu, for fear of retaliation, said she had not applied, even though she had long dreamed of visiting Vietnam. The restrictions, she said, seemed to show a fear that even ordinary workers might flee with sensitive information or illicit funds—an idea she scoffed at.

If there are any secrets, would people like us know about them? she said. “What money do we have to abscond with?” Those who are allowed to travel abroad are sometimes required to pledge not to endanger national security or speak ill of China while away.

The Inner Mongolia University of Technology told employees not to accept any media interviews or to meet with any “outside parties” while abroad, without authorisation. Encounters with “anti-China forces” should be reported to Chinese embassies, the university said.

Failure to hand in one’s passport within a week of returning could lead to a five-year travel ban.

The restrictions are also creeping into hiring. For new graduates hoping to join China’s civil service, some of the most coveted positions are in the programme known as “xiaodaozheng,” which loosely translates as “selected students.” Those students, who are recruited from top universities, are put on a fast track to leadership positions.

Each province determines which schools it will recruit from, and many, including Guangdong in the south, used to include overseas universities. This year, Guangdong listed only Chinese universities; so did five other regions in the past year. Only Shanghai now explicitly accepts graduates of foreign universities for the elite programme.

Laoning province, in the northeast, went even further. Anyone who had lived overseas for more than six months, and whose “experience and political performance abroad” were hard to investigate, was deemed ineligible this year.

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: AUGUST 1975

SC lawyer, 3 Margis held for homicide on Chief Justice
New Delhi, August 4
One Supreme Court lawyer and a gang of three “fanatic Anand Margis” have been arrested in connection with the throwing of two hand grenades into the car of Chief Justice A.N. Ray on March 20 last. This was disclosed in the Rajya Sabha by Minister of State for Home Affairs, Mr. Mohanlal Shetty, in a statement on the CBI investigation. He gave the name of the lawyer as Ranjan Devdasi. He was reported to have identified the Chief Justice to the assassins.

25 YEARS AGO: AUGUST 2000

Dr. Raj’s audio message
Bangalore, August 4
The following is the text of the recorded message of Kannada movie icon Dr. Rajkumar in an audio cassette, sent by forest brigand Veerappa, to the governments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu: “Having heard about it over All India Radio, I thought it was wise to respond to the situation. The incident was unforeseen by me also. When two students making family members after dinner on July 30 night, all of a sudden, about six to eight persons entered my house at Gajipur and I was taken by surprise.”
Such inspirational impersonations,

OASIS | SURYAKUMARI DENNISON

Let us learn to deal with deception

In the movie *Jodhaa Akbar*, Emperor Akbar moves among his subjects in disguise. He acquaints himself with their concerns so that he can redress their grievances.

I recently watched something similar in a video on a social media platform. As a woman moves the office floor, her co-workers are either rude and haughty or kind and polite in their interaction with her. The cleaner turns out to be the CEO, who has gone incognito to check on her employees. When she reveals her identity, she denounces discourtesy and rewards respect.

With feel-good finales, tend to be fanciful. In real life, people seem to be what they are not, and the key word is ‘seem’.

Those indulging in masquerades can do so with the aim of helping others; in fact, quite the reverse. Nor do they require a change of costume to delude and defraud. They need only pretend to be well-intentioned.



Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, which depicts its human nature, depicts this dichotomy between actuality and appearance. In the play, Lady Macbeth urges her husband to kill King Duncan, who will soon be their guest, but warns him to behave like a genial host. “Look like the innocent flower,” she tells him, “but be the serpent under it.” Later, Lady Macbeth welcomes the king with blatant insincerity.

Ironically, Duncan has experienced betrayal earlier. “There’s no art to find the mind’s own truth,” he says, “but to see the face,” he says sadly, speaking of someone he thought was loyal, but proved to be treacherous. Certain that Macbeth and his wife are true to him, Duncan fails to discern the duplicity

The India-China dilemma
Said India and China ever form a truly universal security alliance? It sounds ideal for two major powers to stabilise the region through cooperation. But geography and history stand in the way. As far back as the 4th century BCE, Indian strategist Chanakya observed that neighbouring states are natural rivals. That remains true today. India and China remain locked in long-standing border disputes. China’s sustained support for Pakistan

diplomatically, militarily, and economically keeps India off balance. In this climate, the idea of shared defence seems implausible. Still, the issue is not whether universal security would be easy. It is that exclusion makes conflict more likely. When security is treated as an exclusive club, it generates suspicion, rivalry, and competition. That is the world we inhabit now.

This logic of exclusion extends beyond military alliances. It shapes how history is written, how voices are remembered, and which regions are seen as central. Consider India’s historical narratives. Much English-language scholarship on modern India continues to prioritise the north. Dalit movements in Bihar or Maharashtra are often highlighted, while equally significant struggles in the Madras Presidency, Telangana, or Tamil Nadu receive little attention.

Even towering national figures like B.R. Ambedkar are often framed primarily through their engagements in the north. His speeches and political activity in Chennai (then Madras) or Mysuru are routinely overlooked. Similarly, post-independence leaders like C.N. Annadurai, who shaped Tamil politics and identity, receive cursory treatment in standard texts. It reflects how knowledge systems often mirror power structures, privileging certain regions, figures, and ideologies while marginalising others.

In *Ali Baba*, the maid disrupts the thieves’ plot by confusing their targeting mechanism. She doesn’t confront them directly; she scrambles the logic of attack. That’s the kind of strategy the world needs today. We must move toward a global order in which solidarity is not restricted to select allies, safety is not transactional, and strategic protection is not reserved for countries that fit a particular ideological or economic mould.

Such a vision would require new institutions, deeper South-South cooperation, and a fundamental shift in how security is imagined. But without it, global peace will remain fragile, subject to alliances that exclude and structures that privilege a few. Until then, NATO’s open-door policy remains a convenient fiction. The treasure chest of collective security still responds to a particular accent, speaking the correct password: Open Sesame.

(The author writes about politics, material culture, and economic history)

Resolution process

Govt must address emerging gaps in the IBC

“Prima facie, we are of the view that the impugned judgment does not correctly consider the legal position as has been laid down by a catena of judgments,” remarked last week a Supreme Court Bench comprising Chief Justice of India B R Gavai and Justice Satish Chandra Sharma. It recalled the May 2 apex court judgment that declared the resolution plan for Bhushan Power & Steel Ltd (BPSL) illegal and ordered its liquidation. In the Supreme Court, something like this doesn’t happen often, but this extraordinary situation needed extraordinary action. The May 2 judgment had caused considerable discomfort, not only among the direct stakeholders but also in policy circles. If a resolution plan passed by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) can be declared illegal after several years and a corporate debtor can be ordered to be liquidated, it would seriously undermine the basis of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), with an extraordinary long-term cost to the economy.

While the final word on the case is not yet out, it should comfort stakeholders that Justice Gavai also addressed the ground realities in the context of the case and the fact that nearly ₹20,000 crore had been invested by the acquirer, JSW Steel. Moreover, thousands of jobs are at stake. He also noted that the commercial wisdom of the committee of creditors could not be interfered in, particularly when it has been upheld by the NCLT and the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). The apex court’s intervention and the review of the May 2 judgment are positive, but it would also be critical that the matter is settled at the earliest. Any delay in the judgment could affect decision-making in the company, with potential loss of output or asset valuation, which the bankruptcy process intends to avoid in the first place.

Even as the matter is being heard in the court, the government would be well advised not to ignore the earlier judgment. There are several areas where the government needs to focus on and strengthen the bankruptcy process. It must be noted that the judgment under review practically questioned the process at every stage. The government should study it carefully and address the gaps to avoid a repeat of the situation. The implementation of the IBC is considered one of the biggest reforms in recent decades, and the government must always be ready to strengthen it. Further, it needs to immediately tackle the capacity issue in the NCLT and NCLAT. It is worth noting that the NCLT was constituted to administer the company law and has been given the responsibility of adjudicating bankruptcy cases without much improvement in capacity.

As reported by this newspaper, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance recently contemplated the possibility of establishing a dedicated NCLT and NCLAT to improve the pace of insolvency resolution. All such possibilities must be explored. It is vital that the adjudicating authority has the capacity to perform the intended role. As things stand, the resolution process is taking far too long. The data from the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India shows that close to 1,200 cases that have yielded a resolution plan till March 2025 took an average of 597 days. Cases that ended up in liquidation also took over 500 days. The time taken needs to be substantially reduced because delays can erode value. Finally, it is critical to decide the finality of the process. Every time a case gets dragged to the Supreme Court, it induces delays and undermines the process.

Law and disorder

Recent judgments highlight poor police capabilities

Two verdicts two weeks apart concerning terrorist attacks in Maharashtra have highlighted the profound weaknesses in the basic capabilities of the police and investigative agencies. Both cases have vitiated the lives of the accused for almost two decades and precluded closure for the families of the victims. The sheer length of time involving the investigation and judicial process added to their distress. The serial accusations by the courts of missteps raise serious doubts about the fairness of the police service and security agencies. In the case of the coordinated blasts on a Mumbai suburban train in July 2006, killing 187 people and injuring 824, the accused had spent 18 years in jail, during which one of them died of Covid-19. The Bombay High Court judgment came 10 years after a special court under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) had sentenced five of the accused to death and seven others to life imprisonment. The case, which was investigated by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad, sought to establish links with Pakistan-linked terrorist organisations.

In the 671-page verdict, delivered on July 21, the high court found that the confessional statements of the accused were compromised by medical evidence, which suggested that they had been secured under torture. Most of the statements also appeared to be identical “cut and paste” jobs. The high court highlighted other practices that pointed to a troubling lack of due process and attempts to manipulate evidence. These range from a test-identification parade conducted by an officer who was not authorised to do so, witnesses who changed their statements under cross-examination by the high court, and evidence recovered from the scene violating chain-of-custody protocols (therefore vulnerable to tampering). The verdict has been stayed by the Supreme Court on grounds that some of the high court’s observations could impact pending cases under MCOCA. Though the accused, who were freed, are not required to return to prison, the uncertainty will place a heavy burden on them and the victims’ relatives.

In the case involving the Malegaon blast, a motorcycle filled with an improvised explosive device exploded in a Muslim-dominated area, killing six people and injuring over 100, during Ramzan in September 2008. Among the seven accused, the main ones were Pragya Singh Thakur, a politician from the Bharatiya Janata Party, and Prasad Purohit, a former Indian Army officer. On July 31, a special court under the National Investigation Agency acquitted all the accused on the grounds that the prosecution’s evidence was “riddled with inconsistencies”. In a 1,036-page judgment, the judge stated there was no proof that the motorcycle in question belonged to Ms Thakur (the serial number on the chassis was not completely recovered by forensics) or that Colonel Purohit sourced RDX from Kashmir to assemble a bomb at his residence. This case was investigated by the Anti-Terrorism Squad and involved such draconian laws as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and MCOCA. It is worth noting that this case went through several challenges before the Bombay High Court and the Supreme Court on various issues before the charges were framed, and the trial began only in 2018. In this case, the accused were out on bail. This double saga of error and omission points to an urgent need for a more robust training programme for the police and investigative-agency personnel to shore up public confidence in the country’s law and order apparatus.

Retail’s tug of war

India needs smart policies to help large ecommerce platforms and small local retail not just coexist but thrive together

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Retail is changing in character, and India is undoubtedly at the forefront of this development globally. It is quite evident that consumers in India have taken to ecommerce in a big way. My home, for instance, has shifted almost completely to ordering online — so much so that even the maid is doing so. And if stories are to be believed, tier-III and tier-IV cities, as well as rural India, are also seeing rapid growth in online ecommerce. No doubt, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Aadhaar and other components of India’s digital public infrastructure have helped drive this growth. Easy access to good quality digital infrastructure has enabled startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across India to jump on this bandwagon and build technical capacity.

To me, what is most important is that a large range of products is now easily available for the mass market. Ragi biscuits, ghee made traditionally, palm jaggery, *semal* pillows, *khus* mats for the cooler, and scores of other niche products that would have been impossible to obtain across India can now be standard purchases. Our consumption behaviour is consequently changing rapidly, with far more variety than was the case only a few years back. And as the consumption variety increases, so are the opportunities for the scores of small entrepreneurs, collectives and even non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who supply these goods.

A few centuries ago, it is said that there was little retail in rural India, barter and other forms of quid pro quo marked transactions in rural economic relationships. Even in urban India, customers typically approached known shopkeepers. The relationship was fairly intimate, with repeated interactions and credit being prevalent practices. Consequently, the retailer has historically also been an important creditor for Indian customers. The informal sector has also been brilliant in providing a menu of services that even the most sophisticated modern retail is unable to match. All of these practices have come about because — unappreciated by many — traditional retailers have innovated, for they are closest to the Indian



LAVEESH BHANDARI

customers and understand their needs quite well.

The retailer in India traditionally provides a low-margin service, frequently provides credit, and may source merchandise for specific needs. There is a lot of resilience in such an operation. For instance, when cash disappeared during demonetisation, this same resilience came into play. The relationship of trust between the vegetable seller/retailer and the customer ensured the supply of food, while the relationship between wholesalers and vegetable vendors ensured that their flow of food did not stop. No payments were made, simply verbal IOUs, since that was the need of the hour. During Covid as well, when uninformed policemen would indiscriminately stop vendors, this same set of retailers ensured the flow of food to many underserved areas. Note that the lockdown rules allowed retail, but in the interiors of slums and inner cities, it was the small, and largely informal vendors who serviced customers. The point is not about human interest, though there is that element too, but that there are economic imperatives that keep this form of delivery functioning despite low margins and many difficulties.

And so now we are faced with this unfortunate conflict — the large gig economy players providing a phenomenal range of goods at low prices versus the small retailer, not always but sometimes informal. There are some similarities between the two. Just as in traditional retail, we have those who may be mobile and those who are fixed to a place, so too does ecommerce provide such options. Just like traditional retail was always innovating (home delivery from the *kirana* store appeared in the last millennium), so is ecommerce, changing with quick commerce and 10-minute delivery being the latest offering. So then what is the difference? And why might this distinction be important?

The biggest difference between the two classes is that traditional retail operates within the framework of a market, where there are many vendors and there are many people they may source from. Most importantly, historically, the barriers to entry have been limited for this segment. This ensured high levels of

India’s overlooked vulnerabilities

United States President Donald Trump’s angry outburst and the immediate application of 25 per cent tariffs on all goods from India have once again brought into focus our economic vulnerabilities, despite being the fourth-largest economy in the world. But the Trump tariff tantrums also tend to divert attention from two other threats to the Indian economy that briefly caught some media attention.

The first involved China putting the brakes on rare earth and rare earth magnets exports, which have thrown our automobile industry in a tizzy. The second was the sudden denial of services by Microsoft to Nayara Energy, 49 per cent owned by Russia’s Rosneft, ostensibly because the EU has sanctioned Russia and its companies. Nayara Energy, which bought and operates the erstwhile Essar Refinery in Vadinar, Gujarat, also operates over 6,500 petrol pumps in India. Microsoft backed down and restored services once Nayara filed a case against them in India, but the event did bring into the spotlight one of our economic vulnerabilities — our sheer dependence on the US and others in many key areas.

While our vulnerability to oil shocks is well known, other vulnerabilities often get less attention. Take, for example, our dependence on China for critical raw material supplies — such as electronic chips, active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), and rare earths, as well as minerals such as lithium and cobalt. Our weakness in new emerging technology areas such as artificial intelligence models, apart from our dependence on US companies for the operating system and data centre services like Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Microsoft Azure, are also areas we need to address as a rapidly growing economic power.

We have allowed these vulnerabilities to grow over the decades because of inaction. Neither our

governments nor our highly profitable big companies and business groups have focused on the problems that put us at the mercy of certain countries.

In some cases — oil, lithium, and cobalt — we do not have enough proven reserves. China doesn’t either, but its economy is far less vulnerable today to supply shocks because it had the foresight to build and protect its supply lines.

In lithium and cobalt — crucial requirements for electric vehicle (EV) batteries — China has spent years forging deep relationships with countries where these minerals can be sourced, and then built processing capacities while even the US and Europe were content to depend on imports. It was also the first country to recognise the importance of rare earths and develop its own mines while building rare earth processing capacity. India has enough supplies of rare earths, but there is just one public sector company mining a small quantity of it — and even this used to go to Japan for processing.

Then there is the area of pharmaceutical APIs — critical ingredients that we need to ensure our pharma industry keeps humming. Over the years, we have let China become our main supplier, while our domestic capacities have withered. Lately, we are trying to get back into the API game, but it will take much longer before we can say we are completely immune to production shocks because of raw material supply problems.

Ditto for electronic chips — which are crucial for our automobile, consumer electronics, and durable goods industries. We are now belatedly trying to build up integrated circuit (IC) manufacturing capacity in the country, but it will take time — and probably a decade or more — for us to build competence and reduce our dependence on a handful of suppliers.

There is also the weakness of our overall manu-

competition and low margins. It is argued by some that this form of retail could not innovate enough, as it never had adequate surpluses to enable innovation. The new e-commerce is, however, mostly an oligopoly. A few large players compete with one another and with the traditional retail industry, using large-scale operations and stronger bargaining power to ensure low-cost merchandise sourcing.

Despite being around for some time now, most such ecommerce players are not profitable. Are these ecommerce losses part of a diabolical strategy to eliminate traditional retail and then raise prices later? If true, it would be good policy to either tax this form of retail higher or place regulatory or policy hurdles in its growth. If, on the other hand, that is not the case, then policy would need to study how best to ensure that the employment, innovation, and price outcomes of this new form of retail are promoted.

Economics literature provides some insights. The first is related to the form of competition. It is difficult for firms to sustain high profits when they compete on prices. In the ecommerce space, service differentiation would need to be very high for ensuring sustained high profits. Second, profits can be high in the long run only when entry into that segment is difficult. Given that there are a multitude of both domestic and global players, that’s already taken care of — unless the incumbent firms collude to divide up different customer or product segments among themselves. Third, if indeed the objective is to eliminate conventional retail, future entry of small retail players would have to be prevented. Given the dynamism of the small entrepreneur, how might that be ensured?

On the face of it, the answers to each of the above three questions are self-evident. But another question needs to be introduced to this equation. How can policy ensure that traditional retail innovates and prospers? Note that traditional retail, whether of the *kirana* variety or in the informal sector, does create surpluses, serves customers, innovates and, of course, creates employment at a massive scale. Therefore, good retail policy would enable them to be more dynamic. Such policies would probably include a range of well-known solutions, including adequate space, easier credit, freedom from corrupt municipal inspectors and local policemen, and fewer regulations.

But arguably the most important policy contribution would be to empower traditional retail and ecommerce to work with each other. For instance, what might enable conventional retail to access the lower-cost merchandise available to ecommerce firms? Similarly, what might enable ecommerce players to access the customer knowledge and networks of local retailers? If that were possible, then the benefit of long-term trusting relationships and customer knowledge of traditional retail can complement the scale economies and process-driven methods of ecommerce. We are already seeing such models being piloted. How can policy help in their rollout?

The author heads CSEP Research Foundation. The views are personal

Truth bombs about climate change



CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

If United States President Donald Trump’s imposition of 25 per cent tariffs on all Indian imports — to penalise India for its protected economy and for buying military equipment and energy from Russia — seems like bullying, let us pause to consider what happened when the US negotiated a deal with India in 1985. This event from four decades ago seems instructive for anyone who believes that the relationship between the two countries has suddenly hit a new low.

Jagadish Shukla, a professor of climate dynamics at George Mason University, tells this incredible story in his memoir *A Billion Butterflies: A Life in Climate and Chaos Theory*. Apparently, in 1985, over tea at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi told President Ronald Reagan that India needed a supercomputer for monsoon forecasting. Reagan agreed. However, his “national security council and other federal agencies...tried to dissuade him from approving the sale”. Reagan kept his word but not before getting India to comply with “a few humiliating stipulations”, as Dr Shukla puts it.

India could buy a supercomputer, a Cray X-MP/44, by paying the “full list price — about ten million dollars”, and securing the facility that would house the computer with fences and rifle-wielding guards. Only Cray employees and American citizens were permitted to enter. The agreement was that no one of

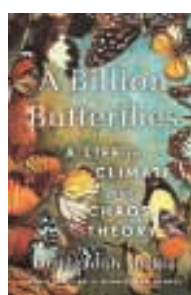
Indian origin, except Dr Shukla, would be allowed near the machine. He was not an American citizen then but he was working at the University of Maryland, and had worked with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration earlier.

In retrospect, the conditions that India was required to comply with come across as racist but India needed to invest in a modern supercomputer and stop relying on the “ancient machines” that were still in use in the mid-1980s. Dr Shukla recalls how “the best supercomputers were built by American companies”, and it seemed unlikely that the American government would authorise the sale of one to India, which was “a Soviet ally at the height of the Cold War”.

Apart from people working in the field of climate science, this book will appeal to those who are curious about how politics, international relations and

diplomacy impact scientific developments. “An Indian supercomputer might become a Soviet supercomputer, the thinking went, and be put to use developing nuclear weapons or cracking American military code,” Dr Shukla adds. This book equips us with a historical understanding to look at current developments as a continuation of past insecurities that stay unresolved despite the claims of friendship that President Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi made not so long ago.

The author also reveals that his letter requesting Mr Modi to persuade Mr Trump “not to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement” went unanswered, and so did his appeal for India to “launch a comprehensive national climate assessment, which is necessary for climate adaptation.” While the reluctance to push Mr Trump is



A Billion Butterflies: A Life in Climate and Chaos Theory
by Dr Jagadish Shukla
Published by Macmillan
288 pages ₹699

understandable, the lack of enthusiasm to benefit from Dr Shukla’s expertise is surprising as he is one of the lead authors of the 2007 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and was part of a team that shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Vice-President Al Gore. His work studying monsoons is “the direct result of seeing how vital the rains were” for farmers in Mirdha — a village in the Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh where he was raised before he went to study at Banaras Hindu University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The book ventures beyond his public role as a scientist and an academic, and does not shy away from talking about the price that he had to pay to achieve what he did — including homesickness, a divorce, financial risks, and harassment from the fossil fuel industry.

Dropping truth bombs is something that he seems to have imbibed from his mother. He recalls the occasion when she asked him, “You are doing so much around the world, going here and there... but what have you done for the village?” That inspired him to set up a college in his village, especially to enrol girls who have traditionally been denied post-secondary education. He also speaks out against the erasure of the contributions made by women who were scientists, lab assistants, and “overlooked wives of famous scholars”.

The author is refreshingly candid in his critique of the IPCC. Referring to the travel involved in working on an IPCC report, he writes, “...the joke among climate scientists was that IPCC itself was responsible for much of the carbon in the atmosphere.” This book is worth reading not only to learn about climate research but also the eventful life of an exemplary scientist.

The reviewer is a journalist, educator and literary critic. Instagram/X: @chintanwriting

Luxe It Up, Take Your Brands to Places

‘Branch out’ into upmarket out-of-hotel sites

Indian hotel chains are expanding furiously. And although growth is normalising, appetite for luxury hospitality is in a structural uptrend. The Tatas, ITC and Oberoi have driven the supply response to branded hotel rooms as occupancy and room rates keep mounting. Expansion has been in new locations, through rebranding of available inventory in top-tier cities, as well as in high-end religious tourism, which has been largely underwhelming for HNI tirth yatri. Younger, richer Indians are choosing to upgrade their travel experience as connectivity improves. This mid-term trend is expected to keep demand for luxury hotel rooms ahead of supply, which is constrained by land costs in prime locations. India’s version of convention tourism is led by the wedding industry, creating demand for lux hospitality in its smaller cities.

The challenge for hotel chains is to ensure brand fidelity while capturing growth opportunities. Tatas and ITC have created bouquets of brands catering to various market segments, from luxury to super-luxury. They are entering underdeveloped tourist geographies that have so far been left in the shadow of more celebrated attractions. This is a hedging strategy as established markets become saturated. New travel themes, such as yoga, are being tapped. Having ‘branches’ of their branded F&B services in upmarket out-of-hotel sites — say, ITC’s Bukhara at Delhi’s Khan Market or even Dubai’s Palm Jumeirah — would be the next logical step while ensuring strict brand non-dilution.

All this marks a maturing of the hospitality industry, driven principally by domestic demand. Indian hotel chains have an edge here because they are better placed to customise hospitality to local tastes. Branded hospitality improves the supply response across all segments in which leading players operate. It also makes tourism in India more sustainable by easing infrastructure pressure on established markets. Going abroad for a lux getaway can increasingly be an option, not a necessity, for the high-living, high spender.

Delhi Police, Your Role Mustn’t Be Trumpland

The recent arrests by Delhi Police of people suspected of being Bangladeshi nationals illegally residing in India demonstrates how out of depth the police reporting to the Union home ministry can be. The eight were arrested on the basis of ‘documents written in Bangladeshi’. That’s like police arresting Hispanics in the US on the basis of their speaking in ‘Mexican’. Predictably, the West Bengal government, whose help the police sought to translate the documents, isn’t amused. Bengali is spoken by some 97 mn Indians, accounting for 8% of the population. FoGs — friends of Gol — are now trying to cast doubts about the veracity of the Delhi Police notice. Every government is within its rights to act on illegal migration. But such a right requires it to act with responsibility, especially towards its own citizens. The more troubling aspect is such ignorant shortcuts becoming a tool for political manipulation and divisive agendas, not to mention vigilante action.

The class aspect to the Delhi Police action is glaring — the targeted are domestic workers, daily wagers and others in low-income jobs. Instead of catching those genuinely involved in criminal activity like trafficking and illegal migration, such Keystone Cops-style ‘enthusiasm’ ends up punishing the powerless. Identifying illegals based on language, religion and class is a dangerous minefield. Gol must rely on SOPs developed by the UN’s International Organization for Migration based on a structured and rights-based approach, involving initial screening, data collection and verification processes. Sure, all this is tougher than to conflate Bengali with Bangladeshi. But it would do India a world of good not to look like its role model is the land of Trump and honey.

JUST IN JEST

Boy, can it produce an endless supply of documents no one reads

Reports of UN Reports Aren’t Exaggerated

The UN HQ in New York is an iconic structure — part-museum, part-diplomatic fortress, part-college debating society on a transnational scale. A guided tour takes you past oil paintings of former UN chiefs, grand chambers like the general assembly and security council, and exhibits of global projects that may or may not have delivered results. But the real marvel is something else: the staff’s capability to generate reports on anything and everything. A UN report has revealed that... um, no one reads UN reports. Bossman António Guterres said the organisation held 27,000 meetings last year, producing 1,100 reports — a 20% jump since 1990. The top 5% get downloaded 5,500 times. 1 in 5 documents gets fewer than 1,000 downloads. And, let’s be honest — downloading doesn’t mean reading. We’ve all saved things we never opened. ‘The sheer number of meetings and reports is pushing the system — and all of us — to the breaking point,’ Guterres said. Alarming? Perhaps. Guterres launched the UN80 taskforce in March as the organisation — which turns 80 this year — faces a liquidity crisis for at least the seventh year in a row. Because not all 193 member states pay their mandatory regular dues in full, or on time. Though, to be fair, they probably filed that report overload warning... in yet another report. Hopefully printed double-sided and on recycled paper.

GLOBESPOTTING India-US ties may be under strain, but turning to China or Russia is unwise

Let’s Not Go On a Rebound



Indrani Bagchi

In hindsight, the India-China disengagement détente of October 2024 may have been prescient. The border patrolling arrangement did not go far enough to de-escalate troop positions. But it did help lower the intensity of the ‘China border problem’ by several notches, particularly before the US elections.

As Donald Trump stomps angrily on the India-US relationship — a difficult one, but built painstakingly over the past quarter of a century — we may regret the relative innocence of yesterday’s understanding that the India-US relationship holds great strategic importance. Trump has brought the relationship down to the bazaar — where it possibly belongs.

The Indian outrage — mostly on social media — at Trump’s intemperate language slapping India around has been playing out along different lines. But many zero-sum voices in New Delhi have already kicked in: let’s befriend China and Russia again. Even MEA has been flirting with the idea of reviving the Russia-India-China trilateral. Anyone who has lived off romance novels in their teenage years will tell you: rebound dating doesn’t work so well.

India has spent the last decade moving closer to the West, both strategically and economically. That has not gone unnoticed in Beijing, Moscow or, for that matter, in all of Asia. From Press Note 3 to Piyush Goyal describing Asean countries as China’s ‘B’ team, the Indian ship has been

pivoting westwards. Quad, I2U2 and IMEC — none of them go east. India’s markets are to its west, its tech are from the West. It’s been racking up free trade deals with countries to the west, while it wants to renegotiate the ones to the east, believing it’s been ‘ripped off’ (to use Trump-ese). India walked away from RCEP at the 11th hour for the same reason. It recast its 5G network indigenously, steering clear of Huawei and ZTE, and is currently engaged in weeding out Chinese CCTV cameras from sensitive installations.

Now that Trump has ‘exposed’ the India-US relationship, for India to seek to play nice with China on the rebound would not display ‘strategic autonomy’, but rank opportunism that begets no friends, leaving India open to exploitation. Some amount of opening up is certainly called for, and has been flagged as being ‘inevitable’ by Gol economic policy-makers.

The thing about ‘strategic autonomy’ is that we need to build leverage bigger than just the size of our market. Until then, we will end up in one of two places — beaten up by both sides, or caught in the coat-tails of one side.

But we must be clear-eyed, because the other side has agency, and is using it. Russia has rendered itself a ‘half-friend’, having surrendered its own autonomy to China in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine. India has been diversifying away from Russia for its defence supplies for over a decade.

And just in case we think otherwise, China believes in India’s ‘strategic autonomy’ as little as the US does. It has been many years since China became convinced that India has ‘pivoted’ to the Western camp, and is determined to make it difficult for India. It’s not for nothing that China blocks India’s membership in NSG.

China has not only demonstrated its strategic and defence alliance



Not the right bandwidth

with Pakistan during Op Sindoor, but it has also gone out of its way to put obstacles in India’s economic transformation journey. India might want to become a manufacturing nation. But China is not going to let that happen in a hurry.

From tunnel-boring machines for India’s bridges, highways and railroads, to skilled professionals and specialty fertilisers, China is stopping or delaying them from entering India. China has shut off exports of rare earth magnets and critical minerals, which impact India’s automotive and RE sectors.

India is now a competitive exporter of smartphones. But much of the equipment still comes from China. China has been slow-rolling, or just plain stopping, exports of this equipment. Basically, it’s saying: India won’t become a manufacturing and exporting powerhouse at our expense.

Private sector players in all these sectors can connect the dots and deduce that China is targeting sectors that can make India an integral part of GVCs. With 25% tariffs now from the US, India will increasingly find

itself constrained to remaining a global bit player. If these continue, say private players, cost of investing in India will rise — injecting the uncertainty that investors loathe.

Exports are all China has. It’s not going to allow another exporting power to grow. Instead, India should again look west. It should stitch up FTA negotiations with the EU by the year-end. The trouble with Indian negotiations is that they tend to wear everybody down without closing a deal.

An FTA with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) would be in India’s interest. India needs to open new markets for its private sector and make it easier for them to do business in a competitive environment, not behind high tariff walls. Trump has exposed the sclerotic nature of India’s trade management. New Delhi can use this Trump breather to fix its own house.

New Delhi shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that India should always keep Pakistan off-kilter. China has done that forever to India. India should learn to turn the tables.

The writer is CEO, Ananta Centre



THE SPEAKING TREE

An Innings to Remember

SONAL SRIVASTAVA

India has just levelled the cricket series in England and ended a gruelling tour with a 2-2 draw. Mohammed Siraj bowled Gus Atkinson with a sublime yorker on the 5th day of the 5th Test match, on a drying, brownish pitch that had looked greenish on day one.

A cricket pitch is fertile ground for rich narratives — stories that speak of grit and bravery, of last-minute dashes to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. New heroes emerge in every game — players who refuse to accept defeat. They turn crises into opportunities and deliver sterling performances. These narratives linger long after the match is over. Swami Parthasarathy of the Vedanta Academy, Pune, says three things are of primary importance if you wish to attain success in the game of cricket or in life: concentration, consistency and cooperation. You can concentrate only when the mind is with the action. It shouldn’t be in the past or the future.

The most intriguing aspect of cricket is that there are dry spells a player must factor into their career. A player may excel at batting or bowling, but there may come a time when they go out of form, and past glories are forgotten. Like Sachin Tendulkar, you may have hit 100 tons, but still, when you come out to bat, every game is a new game.

Eventually, senior players must hang up their boots and make way for younger players. Everything about the game, therefore, is transient; nothing lasts forever, neither fame nor records. Life, too, is ever evolving, always on the cusp of change, and everything is ephemeral. Ultimately, all that remains with us is what we have learnt and how we have used it.

Chat Room

When Oil Roils, You Can’t Recoil

Apropos ‘It’s Alive! Alive & Kicking!’ by Mythili Bhusnurmath (Aug 4), India now imports more than a third of its crude oil from Russia. That is a steep rise from \$5.5 bn in 2020-21 to nearly \$64 bn last year. The problem is not Trump tariffs or Nato’s warnings, it’s over-dependence on a single supplier. In the changed global geostrategic scenario, no country can afford to import 36% of its crude requirement from a single source. The smarter option is not appeasement but diversification. Oil is also about leverage. Bhagwan Thadani Mumbai

Unclog Microfin Lending Artery

This refers to ‘There’s Also Good of Small Things’ by Alok Misra (Aug 2). Microfinance acts as an anti-poverty remedy for those living in rural areas, and seeks to help economically disadvantaged communities increase their assets and financial resilience at all levels. Microfinance is doing well to help low-income individuals or groups access financial services, but the time has come to initiate reforms to expand its market and potential. For starters, a borrower should be able to access at least ₹1 lakh in view of the current inflationary situation. Sudhakar Pandey Thane

Gastronomy as Economy Tool

Apropos the Edit, ‘One Nation, One Samosa’ (Aug 2), standardisation is a strong lever for scalability and economic efficiency, for instance, McDonald’s Big Mac. Its uniformity in ingredients, size and weight across over 100 countries has made it a symbol of standardisation. In fact, The Economist created the Big Mac Index in 1986 — an informal yet insightful tool to compare purchasing power and cost of living across nations. This index has found practical applications in academic research and corporate domains. It would be fascinating if Indian brands take inspiration from this model. Imagine a samosa consistent in taste, size and quality representing India globally. A Global Samosa Index could be a cultural and economic indicator, showcasing India’s culinary identity on the world stage. Gaurav Modak Mumbai

Letters to the editor may be addressed to editet@timesofindia.com

ChatGPT SHAIRI OF THE DAY

Another Siraj took the stage,
At the Oval, unleashed his rage.
‘Palashi’s payback!’ he cried,
As the stumps flew wide —
History bowled out on a new page!

...

Biggest Private Companies

There are more 1,200 unicorns (private startup companies with over \$1 billion valuation) around the world, according to latest CB Insights data*. Popular former unicorns include Airbnb, Facebook, and Google. Variants include a decacorn, valued at over \$10 billion, and a hectocorn, valued at over \$100 billion. The US is home to most unicorns followed by China and India...

*As of July 3

List of top 15 unicorn companies, 2025

Rank	Companies (Countries)	Valuation \$ billion
1	SpaceX (US)	350
2	ByteDance (China)	300
3	OpenAI (US)	300
4	Stripe (US)	70
5	SHEIN (Singapore)	66
6	Databricks (US)	62
7	Anthropic (US)	62
8	X.ai (US)	50
9	Revolut (UK)	45
10	Canva (Australia)	32
11	Fanatics (US)	31
12	Safe Superintelligence (US)	30
13	Chime (US)	25
14	Epic Games (US)	23
15	Miro (US)	18

Top 4	No. of unicorns
US	705
China	157
India	68
UK	55

Source: CB Insights data; Visual Capitalist

Bell Curves ■ R Prasad



Capitalists of the rest of the world should unite. We have nothing to lose but tariffs and everything to gain from free trade.

Have Power, Will Trumple



Seema Sirohi

Donald Trump is ruthlessly changing the global trade order, making new ‘rules’ and demanding complete surrender. Countries have two options: cave in or face punitive tariffs. Ad-hoc arrangements made under duress, posing as trade deals, may not materialise as expected, but they are good enough for optics and the headlines the White House wants. Coercion, not conversion, is the preferred method. Apart from headlines, Trump is also using tariffs and the power of the US economy as a strategic weapon. If countries invest in the US in the grand numbers promised, America protects its pre-eminence and continues to maintain its technological edge.

Trump’s tariffs and rhetoric against India have strained ties. Trust and confidence are at a low, reminding many of the bad old times. Those who helped build relations are ‘gobsnacked’, while those who view the US as unreliable are out in force. Those who couldn’t stop railing against Xi Jinping as ‘emperor’ have taken to promoting more trade with China. India will find a new equilibrium in the triangle of the US, China and Russia in time, but right now it’s rough weather.

As in 1998, when faced with sanctions, Delhi has reacted calmly without getting into a tit-for-tat with Washington. But there’s no denying the shock and anger at Trump’s punitive actions and gratuitous insults. It’s time to buy more patience if you can’t buy down tariffs.

What went wrong in trade negotiations for Trump to impose 25% tariffs on India and announce an unspecified

penalty if Delhi continued to buy Russian oil? And why call India’s economy ‘dead’? Why tell a different story? Why target BRICS when India’s presence prevents it from becoming an anti-West platform?

In short, it was the nickel-and-dime approach vs the big win. India was using the first, even if by Delhi’s measure it had offered more than ever before, while Trump wanted the second — where he got billions in investments and headlines. Indian negotiators were working from small to big in the hope of forging a fair deal, the Americans from big to bigger with not a care for the other side. In the end, the number of rounds and video conferences didn’t matter, nor did an early start — the Gulf was too wide and Trump, the chief negotiator, was implacable.

Interestingly, there was optimism about a deal being announced just a few hours before Trump dropped the bombshell. Question is if India is continuing to read the signals wrong. The US side sees things differently. Americans claim they didn’t think the negotiations ‘ever’ reached a point to be ‘acceptable to the president’. Yes, there was a lot of back and forth, but Gol was ‘trying to sell the same package over and over again’.



Bullish or bully?



LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

Agriculture was the main hold-up, but India’s high tariffs were a major problem across the board, resulting in an impasse. It had to be either everything or nothing. The White House didn’t want to do ‘a half’ deal’. The only way was ‘to cave in’, as Japan and South Korea did, one insider said bluntly.

Brutal and extractive? Yes, but that’s exactly how Trump likes it. There isn’t a whole lot of sympathy for India on trade. Here’s this week’s version: ‘India’s agriculture sector is dead weight. It’s holding the country back.’ Besides, there’s ‘no meaningful investment in skill development’. IITs are one end and standard colleges the other. There’s nothing in between. India should focus on internal reforms and channel energies at home.

Another issue waiting to explode is H-1B visas, with Trump acolytes such as Charlie Kirk openly talking about ending them altogether. On Sunday, Stephen Miller, Trump’s top political aide, accused India of ‘a lot of cheating’ on immigration policies, besides ‘financing’ Russia’s war.

US trade officials were surprised when Trump threw Russian oil into an already volatile mix with India. It seems someone got his ear at the last minute. You can make an educated guess, for there is a bill being negotiated that punishes countries buying Russian products. Except fertiliser, maybe. The US is one of the largest buyers of Russian fertiliser — last year, it paid Moscow \$1.3 bn for various types.

By the way, a phone call from Modi wouldn’t have made a difference, as per conventional DC wisdom. Japanese and South Korean leaders didn’t call, but their negotiators gave Trump big wins. As did Pakistan. Exploring for oil on the coast is only the latest trick from a country that has ‘sold’ many oil and gas pipelines to the Americans in the past.



When We Cease To Understand The World Benjamin Labatut

In a medical examination on the eve of the Nuremberg Trials, the doctors found the nails of Hermann Göring’s fingers and toes stained a furious red, the consequence of his addiction to dihydrocodeine, an analgesic which he took more than one hundred pills a day...

...When the Allied forces caught him, the Nazi leader was dragging a suitcase with more than twenty thousand doses, practically all that remained

of Germany’s production of the drug at the end of the Second World War... virtually everyone in the Wehrmacht received Pervitin as part of their ration...

ns, methamphetamine tablets that the troopers used to stay awake for weeks on end, fighting in a deranged state, alternating between manic furore and nightmarish stupor; over-exertion leading many to attacks of irrepressible euphoria. An absolute silence reigns. Everything becomes alien and insignificant. I feel completely weightless, as if I were floating above my own airplane, a Luftwaffe pilot wrote years later, as though he were recollecting the silent raptures of a beatific vision rather than the dog days of war.

Translated from Spanish by Adrian Nathan West



A thought for today
The megalomaniac differs from the narcissist by the fact that he wishes to be powerful rather than charming, and seeks to be feared rather than loved
BERTRAND RUSSELL

Stat Of The Nation

Trump's sacking of a govt data official sends an awful message that all democracies must heed

Convention demands that emperors don't shoot messengers, but Trump sacked Erika McEntarfer on Friday after her Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) revised US jobs data for May and June downwards. Those were the first full months to reflect the impact of Trump's 10% baseline tariff. Initially, BLS had reported 144,000 new jobs in May, and 147,000 in June, suggesting that fears about the impact of tariffs were overblown. Now, it says only 19,000 and 14,000 jobs, respectively, were added in the two months. Initial data for July looks even weaker, with only 73,000 jobs added. Post-revision, it might turn out to be a month of net job loss.

Suddenly, Trump's tariff project is looking weak when high country-specific tariffs are about to take effect from Thursday. He's reacted predictably, alleging data was manipulated: "In my opinion, today's jobs numbers were RIGGED in order to make the Republicans, and ME, look bad." But as former US treasury secretary Larry Summers says, the charge is preposterous because the data is compiled by "hundreds of people following detailed procedures". The job numbers are off the mark every month simply because a third of the 121,000 employers BLS surveys don't send their responses on time.

Trump could have asked for better data gathering. It's a fair demand, given that investors and the Fed, with which he has a running feud, base their decisions on such indicators. But Trump's cost-cutting – remember Elon Musk's Doge? – is among the culprits here. His personal attacks on officials and sackings will only weaken global confidence in US. If he manages to "control" data somehow, he will push US into the league of dictatorships that are known to fudge economic data all the time. In 2018, University of Chicago researcher Luis Martinez made an interesting observation using satellite images: a 10% increase in nighttime lights was correlated with a 2.4% GDP increase in democracies, but 2.9-3.4% increase in authoritarian countries.

India passed Martinez's test well, but our data framework isn't strong either. The delayed Census is a blemish, and even after improvements, getting a final estimate of GDP growth takes two years. There are questions about the accuracy of PLFS data also. To improve policy formation, and to attract more investment, we must improve our data collection and reporting. And if the data is sour, spare the messenger.

Control All & Delete

Kremlin's new law restricting online search is a chilling new low

For at least 15 years, Moscow has tightened controls on the internet using centralised routing, deep surveillance, bans on websites and social media, throttling websites critical of Moscow and so on. Its latest restriction – in a new law expected to kick in Sep 1 – hits a new low, the most chilling of all. For the first time, internet users will be penalised simply for search queries govt deems are 'extremist'. And fined for using VPNs that help users bypass censorship. That's practically making reading an offence. The new law says users will be held accountable for "knowingly searching for and accessing extremist materials", including through



VPN services. Moscow's digital development minister reportedly said "ordinary users will not be affected" by the new law. How that will be possible is unknown – analysts have called it a vaguely worded legislation. Three points. First, justice ministry's list of 'extremist' materials stretches to more than 500 pages. Those banned in Russia for 'extremist activities' include entities associated with Kremlin critic and opposition politician, late Alexei Navalny. So, Putin's playing strictly by the Chinese playbook. Second, how this'll be monitored is unclear – will internet providers be expected to pass on browsing data and searches or will govt surveil? How will 'systems' differentiate those searching material for purposes of research? Third, the obscure language serves a purpose. The outcome is already as desired – creation of fear and self-censorship. Russians, reports say, are already unsubscribing from certain channels and deleting apps. Uncertainty the loosely worded law has unleashed has little to do with Moscow's claim of digital sovereignty – unlike China, it barely has the wherewithal in terms of funds, engineers or infra to do so – and everything to do with a crackdown on both Russian public and any attempts at political opposition.

Fiscal fitness

Mansplaining Donald Duck is my superpower

Anil Abraham



Nobody is focusing on fiscal fitness, I said to Kamala as we walked briskly round our neighbourhood park. She narrowed her eyes as she realised I was talking about money, then confessed she didn't understand money. Most Indians know how to make money and hoard money but are clueless about the Budget or things like American tariffs and what impact these have on our daily lives. Our basic fear is that everyone, including banks, netas, the markets and every person who calls on the phone, is trying to loot our hard-earned money. I puffed my chest out to mansplain money matters: Imagine if you had a friend – a very rich, important, delusional friend – who runs a chain of veggie shops. Imagine if you grew tomatoes in your farm and you wanted him to buy these tomatoes and sell them on... I could see I was losing Clueless Kamala so I tried to make it even simpler: If this close friend, based on his friendship alone, was charging you 25% more to sell your tomatoes in his shop, it would make tomatoes costlier in his shop while creating a glut of tomatoes in your farm. Kamala looked confused but I continued: Imagine if this friend saw you buying Kerosene from Puttaniah and levied a penalty because he didn't like that. Plus, this friend tells everyone that he also stopped the fight we had last weekend and that we would be divorced by now if not for him. She perked up: 'Were we fighting with our neighbor Pakkath Mane Parvathi because her sons kept lobbing balls into our compound and creating destruction every time they jump over the compound wall? But we are still playing cricket with them.' Kamala was finally getting the hang of international affairs. I had made the whole thing as logical as *The Kerala Story* getting the national award. She sat down on the bench and gave me a withering look: "This friend of yours sounds like a bully. I don't think he is anyone's friend." I hummed an old Shammil Kapoor song: *Tariff karoon kya uski jisne usse banaya*. I told her he was a self-made man so we couldn't blame God or Nehru for this situation. Donald Duck used to be a harmless cartoon without pants when we were growing up. He still is – but the world is not laughing anymore.

Where There's A Gill...

The new Team India proved it's a squad of unrelenting fighters in tough English conditions. Now, management must give the young talents a longer rope

Avijit.Ghosh@timesofindia.com



It happened again at the Oval. This is where Ajit Wadekar's men had carved out India's historic, first-ever away victory over England in 1971. Nearly five-and-half decades later, Shubman Gill's young and fiery side produced a wondrous win in a Test where both the game's fate and the spectator's emotions swayed to unbearable extremes. Memories are made of this. The victory, by a T20 margin of six runs which levelled the series 2-2, came from a position when all looked lost. The new Team India is a squad of unrelenting fighters.

What made this five-Test series an affair to remember is that neither side yielded an inch. England, under lynchpin-leader Ben Stokes and Ollie Pope for the fifth Test, were equally indefatigable. Stokes bowled with a grade three shoulder muscle tear. Woakes walked out to the pitch arm under a sling, wincing in pain. Bashir with a finger fracture produced a match-winning decisive delivery. Indians also battled past the pain barrier. Pant batted with a fractured foot, even struck an outrageous boundary off paceman Archer. At times cricket felt like a heavyweight boxing duel: bodies bruised, spirit unyielding.

While runs flowed, sledges also rained. The intensity of the contests acquired a negative undertone when England, frustrated at being foiled by a gritty Indian batting, turned petulant. Social media rightfully exploded in the fourth Test. It only added to the engrossing human drama which has been intrinsic to the series.

Few believed Team India had the class and the stomach to take on coach Brendon McCullum's pugnacious Bazball boys in the post-Rohit/Kohli era. The away series was meant to be part of a painful transition. But new India delivered serendipity to the billion-plus nation.

Captains often wilt under pressure. Gill flowered as a batter. His 754 runs, highest ever by a visiting captain in Test history, showcased hunger and an

upgradation of skills. But as a captain, he remains a work in progress. His management of resources, bowling changes and field placements were reactive. But this was his first series. He will learn, improve.

Team India's performance was collective. If Gill was most prolific, Jaiswal took another giant step to attaining cricketing manhood. His aggression set the tone of India's 'never step back' approach in the first two Tests. Rahul stood tall, became India's new wall, and produced the finest series of his career. The duo has become a reliable opening pair.

Pant was the most thrilling and the bravest. His calculated unpredictability stunned England. He is a rare cricketer who endears himself even to rival fans. The world needs cricketers like him. Jadeja was India's most consistent batter. He (along with Washington) saved the fourth Test and could have won the third with a little more tactical nous. Washington was India's biggest gain of the tour. He has both technique and temperament.

Tennis legend Billie Jean King once said, "Pressure is privilege." Washington thrives on it. The magical, mystical show in the final hours of the fifth Test aside, bowling

worked only in fits and starts. The pace attack failed to deliver as a pack; at least one of them often bowling great deliveries, but not great spells.

Bumrah, world's finest paceman, couldn't be the stand-out bowler India wanted him to be. But slipshod catching is partly to blame. India grassed five catches off him in the first Test. That India won both its

Tests without him speaks hugely for the team's bench strength. Siraj admirably filled his missing boots, especially in the last Test, bowling with heart and fire. He is a warrior-hero.

In the final Test, Prasidh Krishna also demonstrated that he has the making of a fine bowler. Akash Deep's 10 wickets in flat Birmingham won India the Test. It would have raised Gill's stature as a leader had he shared the Player of the Match award with him as Harmanpreet Kaur did with

newbie pacer Kranti Goud in a recent women's ODI. The prime reason for the two defeats can be attributed to eight dropped catches in the first Test and the nervy second innings batting collapse in the third Test. These Tests were lost from winning positions. But India was also shackled by coach Gautam Gambhir's 'safety first' approach which translated to packing the team with all-rounders and leaving out Kuldep Yadav, the world's finest wrist spinner today.

Washington and Jadeja toiled gamely but both lacked the deception and craft of Kuldeep which could have hustled spin-wary England. Excluding Kuldeep from every Test was both strange and tragic. The management has also displayed a lack of patience. Bowlers have been fast-forwarded into the team – Harshit Rana in Australia and Anshul Kamboj in England – with abandon, dumped with alacrity. The making of a Test cricketer is a process, neatly exemplified by Ishant Sharma, whose best came in the last five years of his Test career. You cannot bypass it.

Yet this has been a memorable tour. The feeling that India should have won this series indicates how well this young team has played. Kohli, Rohit, Ashwin were brilliant in their time but Indian cricket has plenty to look forward to. The future isn't just bright. It has arrived.

Mahadev To Shamsheer, Indian Army Names To Inspire

Unlike Pakistan which largely sticks to Islamic symbolism, our military relies on myth, morale and maps to christen operations

Syed Ata Hasnain



A recent public debate triggered by the naming of 'Operation Mahadev' – launched by Indian army special forces in coordination with Jammu & Kashmir police – has raised questions about the symbolism and perceived religiosity in the naming of military operations. The operation, executed with precision over 12 days, led to the elimination of three terrorists now confirmed to be involved in the heinous Pahalgam massacre. Yet, many chose to focus less on the operation's success and more on its naming, raising concerns about communal undertones and ideological symbolism.

As someone who has observed, lived, and led within the ethos of Indian army for over six decades, I find the controversy misplaced. It is a symptom of how little is understood about the military's traditions, its internal cohesion, and the layered symbolism it deploys – not to divide, but to inspire.

Start with Operation Mahadev. While media outlets widely referred to the location of the operation as Dachigam forest, ground reality was more nuanced. The action was undertaken in a remote, rugged area lying between Dachigam and a high ridge locally known as the Mahadev Ridge – a towering formation on the north-western flank of the 48km pilgrimage route from Chandanwari to the Amarnath cave.

To soldiers and locals alike, the name 'Mahadev' is a geographic reference, one that helps pinpoint the operational zone. The term obviously comes from the proximity of the holy shrine of Lord Shiva.

Similarly, Indian army has long designated the broad security effort for Amarnath yatra as Operation Shiva. In maps, situation reports, and operational briefings, this term anchors security deployments to a known context. It's about orientation and clarity, not theology.

Critics often overlook the fact that Indian army uses a wide spectrum of naming conventions, only occasionally referencing mythology. Operational names are just as often drawn from formation emblems,

motivational ideas, or even logistical codenames.

For example, the Bhopal-based Strike Corps consistently refers to its major training activity as Exercise Sudarshan Shakti, named after its formation emblem – Sudarshan Chakra. This name embodies speed, force, and strategic punch. It is no more religious than naming a unit after a tiger or a thunderbolt. The focus is on capability and culture, not creed.

Perhaps the most iconic example comes from the Defence Services Staff College at Wellington, where army, navy, and air force officers participate in a rigorous 15-day wargame called Exercise Kurukshetra. Despite



its mythological origins, this exercise is held up as the gold standard of joint operational planning. Officers across faiths recall it with pride – not as a religious expression, but as a symbol of strategic challenge and decision-making under stress.

Coming from Garhwal Rifles, a regiment composed solely of troops from Uttarakhand's Garhwal region, I can attest to how important faith is – not in a communal sense, but in a traditional and motivational one. Our regimental deity is Lord Badri Vishal, and our war cry is 'Badri Vishal Lal ki Jai'. This is not imposed religiosity – it is a source of cohesion and morale for the men who serve.

During my years of command, I would occasionally

name small-scale operations or training modules as Operation Badri Vishal. Troops appreciated the symbolic power of invoking their presiding deity, particularly in moments that tested courage and cohesion. As a Muslim, I fully embraced and encouraged this regimental tradition. Before launching a patrol or ambush in the lethal terrain of the Wanni jungles of Sri Lanka, I would ask my soldiers to invoke Badri Vishal silently, three times. That was our ritual – not to assert a religion, but to affirm trust in each other and in our shared legacy.

In contrast, I also participated in an operation in Sri Lanka called Operation Shamsheer. The term 'Shamsheer' is derived from Persian, denoting a curved sword, often associated with martial valour. While it has Islamic connotations, it was used purely for its association with courage, not religion. That's the subtlety and maturity with which the Indian military treats symbolism – it draws strength from everywhere, while imposing ideology nowhere.

It is instructive to contrast this with Pakistan's naming culture, which more overtly embraces religious symbolism in its military nomenclature. Prominent Pak operations and exercises include Zarb-e-Momin (Strike of the Faithful) and Zarb-e-Azb (Strike of the Prophet's Sword), both laden with explicitly Islamic references.

While such names may rally religious sentiment in Pakistan's unique politico-military context, they also underscore a fundamental difference from the Indian army's approach. India's military ethos is inclusive and layered. Even when names are drawn from mythology or cultural tradition, they do so with a universal lens. India has consistently separated faith from force projection in both doctrine and practice.

Indian army is neither dogmatic nor doctrinaire in its naming conventions. It names to inspire, not to indoctrinate. It uses symbols to motivate, not to marginalise. The strength of Indian army lies in its diversity – in the fact that all fight shoulder to shoulder with respect and faith in one another.

The writer is a retired Lt General, and former commander of the Srinagar-based Chinार Corps

Calvin & Hobbes



Healing, Uplifting Soul Gardening Busts Stress

Narayani Ganesh

A former colleague in a new job found she had to commute two plus two hours daily, a total of four hours, just to get to her workplace and back, taking three different modes of transportation, leaving home at 7:45 am and returning after 9:00 pm. Initially distressed and tired, she soon found a way to boost her spirits. In her modest home in Delhi, on the rooftop, she began to grow flowering and other plants in pots, tending them either before leaving for work or after reaching home late at night. Flowers are restless to look at. They have neither emotions nor conflicts, points out Sigmund Freud.

The transformation was revelatory. No more sagging shoulders, no more frowning. All smiles and full of information about plant species, their attributes and behaviour. Learning their botanical and popular names, she began documenting every flower,

creating folders that she would browse through when tired. She would search online for more information. She found it therapeutic, inspiring and creative. Why try to explain miracles to your kids when you can just have them plant a garden, asks Robert Brault.

The New York Times reports that in Sweden, there is a growing trend among old and young, to rent or buy a small garden patch, even if postage stamp-size, near their urban dwelling. Called kolonitradgardar, this practice of gaining access to garden allotments is said to have contributed a great deal to help them grow fresh produce, connect with nature and community. "The garden programmes were specifically designed to improve the mental and physical health of city dwellers," says Fredrick Bjork, lecturer at Malmö University who specialises in

environmental history.

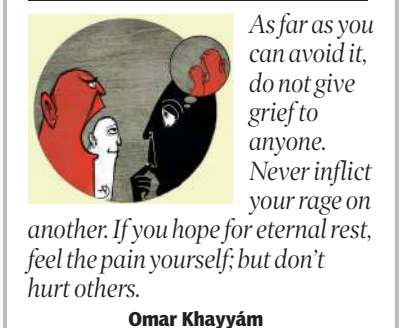
Health benefits are numerous – getting your hands dirty in the garden boosts self-esteem, increases your intake of Vitamin D, makes you feel happy and confident, boosts heart health, reduces stress and blood pressure, and you get to grow your own food, fresh and organic.

It is a fulfilling activity that is creative and beautiful.

Hi-rise apartment complexes in newly developed residential urban areas like in Gurgaon, NCR, provide opportunity for urban dwellers to grow what they like in small garden plots. A couple, I know, visit and work on their patch on weekends and get excited to potter around the beds of vegetables and flowers, harvesting what they sow and bring the produce home and share with friends.

"Gardening connects us to life's natural rhythms, the gifts of each

Sacredspace



As far as you can avoid it, do not give grief to anyone. Never inflict your rage on another. If you hope for eternal rest, feel the pain yourself; but don't hurt others.

Omar Khayyám

season, the wonder of creation and the natural world. For me, gardening and gratitude go hand-in-hand," says Gretchen Champoux, who runs a garden consultation company in Seattle. She views gardens as sacred spaces that assist her on her spiritual journey. Gardening is akin to worship. You are in close touch with Mother Earth. You are in divine partnership with the master creator, working towards nurturing and sustaining life as you engage in regenerative agriculture that is sustainable, healing and productive. The earth is a garden, the Lord its gardener, cherishing all, none neglected, says a verse in the Adi Granth. House plants are said to recognise their owners from two km away. Plants are sentient beings; they respond by perking up when the plant owner returns after going out. "The person who planted me is coming back!" they seem to say. Gardens are enchanted places, let's enjoy them.

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A crisis of trust

The ECI must be more transparent and impartial in its actions

The credibility of an electoral system, or democracy in general, is dependent solely on it being seen as fair by all, particularly so by the loser. This is comparable to a judicial dispute or a sporting event on this count. If the losers think they lost only because the process was rigged against them, a crisis of trust develops. The serious charges being raised against the Election Commission of India (ECI) by the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has to be seen in this context. He says that he has plans to disclose more information regarding discrepancies in the 2024 general election. One must wait for the details of those allegations before making any comments on their merits. The ECI has come under attack by politicians earlier too. Narendra Modi, when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, had repeatedly questioned the impartiality of the ECI. Many of these charges against the ECI are rhetorical attempts by political parties or leaders to animate supporters. In Bihar, the Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly, Tejashwi Yadav, has alleged his name did not exist on the draft electoral roll which is being revised by the ECI. As it turns out the Elector’s Photo Identity Card (EPIC) number that he thought was his is different from the one in the ECI records, raising a new controversy. Politicians should be raising questions about the electoral process only when there are strong grounds for doing so. Trust in the electoral system is foundational to representative democracy.

That said, the ECI’s recent statements and actions, far from buttressing public trust and enhancing transparency in the process, raise more questions. Its efficiency and its neutrality are on test in the preparation of rolls, scheduling of elections, enforcement of the code of conduct, counting process, and the redress of complaints. The ECI stands charged on each of these counts. Other than protesting that the electronic voting machines (EVM) are beyond tampering, and that political parties should raise objections regarding rolls at the appropriate time, the ECI has refused to come clean on multiple issues. It has not been transparent about the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machine which is one of the three parts that make an Electronic Voting Machine. Unlike the other two parts – the Ballot Unit and the Control Unit – the VVPAT has software that is centrally installed and it is connected to the control unit. The random tallying of the VVPAT with the electronically cast votes is now an extremely arbitrary process. All political parties do not have the equal capacity to monitor the various stages of the electoral process. At any rate, the election process is not a matter of negotiation between parties and the ECI. Political parties have a role to play, but the real question is to ensure that the citizenry at large is reassured of the integrity of the electoral process. The ECI needs to correct its course to ensure that.

Fascinating finale

Neither India nor England deserved to lose this hard-fought series

India’s long cricketing tour of England concluded in a gripping stalemate. A 2-2 verdict, following Shubman Gill’s men snatching a six-run triumph against the host at the Oval on Monday, was an apt reflection of a well-contested Test series that featured five matches. Australia has been conquered a few times in its backyard, but for India, England at home remains a tough opponent. Only thrice has India seized a Test series under the whimsical English skies, with the last series victory coming in 2007. The odds were stacked high too as this was a visiting unit that had lost Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and R. Ashwin to retirements. Gill’s men, however, fought hard. In an age in which there are whispers about implementing four-day Tests, this series was a reflection of all that is good with cricket’s traditional format as every contest spilled onto the fifth day. England’s Bazball style did upset India’s best laid plans at times and yet the bowlers found ways to strike back. England was led well by the rousing manner of all-rounder Ben Stokes till he skipped the last Test due to injury. And in Joe Root, England has a batter for the ages, and if he stays fit, Sachin Tendulkar’s record Test aggregate of 15,921 runs may not remain immune.

In the distant past, a tour of England featured additional warm-up games against the Counties. The length of the tour helped players rest and regain form. Modern-day players have no such luxuries as a cramped year-long schedule that packs in T20s such as the Indian Premier League, means that every overseas trip becomes a rushed affair. That Jasprit Bumrah could only play three Tests and even Stokes had to skip one at the end, is a reflection of how cricketers have no time to pause and remain injury prone. Seen in that light, Mohammed Siraj turning out for five Tests and bowling with verve and skill, is a huge testament of his fitness. India has much to cherish as Gill amassed 754 runs, and K.L. Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal excelled with the bat. Meanwhile, Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar offered depth in the batting order, even if the tail below wilted. The injury to Rishabh Pant was unfortunate but he is bound to return in a while. India missed Mohammed Shami and much hinged on the fiery Siraj, who with 23 wickets, stepped up even as his fellow seamers lost their radar at times. A team in transition is bound to have teething issues. However, through their rugged fight, these players offer hope for better days ahead.

Bangladesh today is abysmally different from the trajectory promised to the people by Professor Muhammad Yunus when he was sworn in (August 8, 2024) as Chief Adviser of the Interim Government. Many myths have been shattered.

The first myth that has unravelled is that Sheikh Hasina’s ouster was the result of a “spontaneous students’ uprising”. It is now accepted that the ‘meticulously designed’ regime change operation was the handiwork of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), the radical Islamist political party that fought against the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. In 2024, as in 1971, the JeI was strongly supported by Pakistan, backed by key external powers including the United States and China. The JeI is the power behind the Chief Adviser, controlling every decision.

The second myth concerns the legitimacy and constitutional validity of the Yunus-led regime. On August 8, 2024 they took the oath of allegiance to the Constitution of Bangladesh. However, this Constitution has no provision for an interim government. Even though the Bangladesh High Court (on December 17, 2024) restored the system of caretaker government, the Yunus-led Interim Government cannot be considered a caretaker government. The Yunus regime has violated the mandated neutrality and non-party requirements of the caretaker government. Members of the Hizb-ut Tahrir, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and Hefazat-e-Islam have been included as advisers in his regime. In a tweet (now deleted), one of the advisers expressed their desire to establish a caliphate in Bangladesh based on Sharia law, and even spoke about a civil war to achieve this goal. The strongly Islamist ideological leanings and objectives of those who hold the reins of power in Bangladesh have alienated them from the people.

An election delaying tactic

The third myth relates to the *raison d’etre* of any interim government. Its mandate can only be to ensure that free, fair and inclusive elections are organised within the specified 90-day period, with the participation of all registered political parties. An interim regime is not authorised to take any major decisions, especially those with constitutional significance or implications. Such decisions can be taken only by an elected parliament.

Instead of preparing for elections, the Yunus-led interim regime has initiated a reform process, insisting that this must be completed before the elections. It has set up reform commissions for the Constitution, for electoral reforms, and for police reforms, among others. The JeI is the key protagonist of these reforms, which it hopes will boost its vote share far above the meagre 5% to 10% it has been receiving. This so-called reform process is merely an excuse to delay the elections, a step strongly opposed by the Army and by major political parties such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party which are



Veena Sikri

is a former High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh

Public opinion appears to have turned against the Yunus interim regime — with growing economic distress, the shared refrain seems to be a yearning for the ‘earlier and better times’

insisting that elections be held by December 2025. This issue is now rapidly coming to a head, and election dates may be announced very soon.

Led by the JeI, the interim regime is unleashing unspeakable violence on the people. Prime targets are the non-Muslim minorities (Hindus, Christians, Buddhists) as well as Muslim religious minorities (Sufis and Ahmadiyyas). Equally vicious has been the violence unleashed against Awami League members and their supporters. Every statue, every building, every institution associated with the Liberation War of 1971 has been destroyed.

Over the months, as this violence has continued unabated, with varying degrees of ferocity, a huge backlash has built up among the people. Awami Leaguers have been jailed in large numbers or just brutally slaughtered. In May 2025, all Awami League activities were banned. While Sheikh Hasina is being tried on charges of ordering attacks on students (during the unrest of July-August 2024), there is deliberate amnesia about the burning and looting (by the mobs) of 400 police *thanas* across Bangladesh, followed by the killing of policemen in the hundreds, even thousands, using these looted weapons. The decision by the interim regime to indemnify itself and all “the students and people who actively took part in the mass uprising of July-August” against harassment or arrest has been sharply criticised within and outside Bangladesh.

A party, its disconnect

The ‘students’ party, the National Citizen Party (NCP), formed in February 2025, is dubbed the King’s Party, owing direct allegiance to Mr. Yunus. So far, the party has no legal status since it is not registered with the Election Commission. At first it included erstwhile members or sympathisers of the Islami Chhatra Shibir (students’ wing of the JeI) and claims ‘it was established to fight for the rights of the student community’. Yet, it has little or no following among university students. On July 16, 2025, NCP leaders held a rally in Gopalgunj, the hometown of the Father of the Nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, with the reported intention of desecrating his mausoleum in Tungipara.

The NCP was strongly resisted by the local people, staunch supporters of the Awami League. The Bangladesh Army is said to have supported the NCP by firing on unarmed civilians, resulting in the loss of several lives. The Gopalgunj incident has caused a furore, with dissatisfaction against the NCP and the Interim regime reaching new highs. A complaint has now been filed with the United Nations, describing this as a genocidal attack on the people of Bangladesh.

Important institutions of state such as the judiciary, the central bank and even the media have been compromised. In August 2024, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Governor of the Bangladesh Bank were surrounded by mobs and forced to resign. This pattern of mobocracy soon became the norm.

The missing link in India’s battery waste management

India, with its focus on decarbonisation, has witnessed rapid electrification, particularly in the realm of electric vehicle (EV) adoption. There are projections that India’s EV lithium battery demand may skyrocket to nearly 139 gigawatt-hours (GWh) by 2035 from 4 GWh in 2023. India’s expanding renewable energy sector is also catalysing demand for lithium batteries, with rapid adoption of battery energy storage systems (BESS) to meet India’s Net Zero goal by 2070. While the growth in EV adoption is desirable, it may impose environmental costs without a robust recycling framework in place. Improper disposal of lithium batteries has severe repercussions, including leakage of hazardous materials into soil and water. Added to this is the growing volume of battery waste, with lithium batteries alone accounting for 7,00,000 of the 1.6 million metric tonnes of e-waste generated in 2022. Recognising these risks, the government notified the Battery Waste Management Rules (BWMR) in 2022 to ensure sustainable management and recycling.

The first problem is the floor price

A cornerstone of the rules is the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which compels producers to fund battery collection and recycling, and aims to close the loop in the battery value chain. Producers rely on recyclers to meet their recycling targets since they do not possess the logistics and the infrastructure for the collection of battery waste. In practice, recyclers must receive a minimum price, known as the EPR floor price, in exchange for EPR certificates that attest that producers have met their recycling obligations. The EPR floor price ensures that recyclers are adequately compensated for their upfront investment in infrastructure, research and development, labour, technology and recycling methods.

Unfortunately, there are certain hurdles, the first being the EPR floor price being too low to sustain the robust recycling of battery waste generated by producers. Proper disposal of



Arun Goyal

is a retired IAS officer. He is a former Secretary to the Government of India and a former Member of the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission

As the first step, it is essential that India ensures the adoption of fair Extended Producer Responsibility floor pricing

lithium battery waste is expensive, requiring advanced processing technologies, safe transportation, and skilled labour to prevent hazardous materials from leaching into ecosystems.

Lithium-ion batteries also have valuable and rare minerals such as cobalt, lithium and nickel, whose efficient recovery can significantly reduce India’s import dependence. In case, the EPR floor price does not adequately cover proper recycling costs, it becomes economically unviable for legitimate recyclers to operate sustainably. As a result, informal and fraudulent recyclers tend to flourish, creating market distortions and perverse incentives for producers. They often issue false recycling certificates or dump hazardous waste – a failure previously witnessed in India’s plastic waste management sector. If left unchecked, such practices may undermine India’s circular economy ambitions. Without fair EPR floor pricing, India faces severe environmental degradation from improper battery recycling or dumping. The financial repercussions are equally alarming. Experts estimate that by 2030, inadequate battery recycling could cost India over \$1 billion in foreign exchange losses.

A resistance to compliance

Large consumer electronics and manufacturers have further complicated the issue by resisting compliance. Large producers’ policies are different for developed and developing countries, allowing corporations to circumvent environmental responsibilities in developing markets. This trend risks undermining the establishment of resilient and sustainable battery ecosystems across the global south.

Interestingly, adjusting the EPR floor price should not increase costs for consumers. While global metal prices have declined over the past two years, manufacturers have not passed on these savings to consumers, indicating that Original Equipment Manufacturers can absorb higher recycling costs without raising prices. A fair EPR floor price will ensure sustainable

Strict media control has been ensured by peremptorily taking over media houses. Journalists have been imprisoned since the early days of the interim regime, many on charges of murder. Many have lost their jobs, and face penury. This massive clampdown on an otherwise vibrant and comparatively free media has allowed the interim regime to peddle its own version of events to the global media.

Economic distress, a patient India

However, it is difficult to hide the overwhelming economic distress being faced by the people. Growth rates have halved from the robust 6% and more per annum, that was the norm under Sheikh Hasina. Factories have shut down due to poor supply chain management, resulting in joblessness and hyper-inflation. In July 2025, Bangladesh Bank highlighted continuing macroeconomic challenges due to “persistent inflation, uncertainties associated with the forthcoming elections, slowing economic growth and stagnant private investment”.

The economic distress is, in many ways, the direct result of the foreign policy goals set by the Yunus regime. As can be expected, the JeI is not averse to the moniker, ‘client state of Pakistan’, that is increasingly used for Bangladesh. The events of July-August 2024 were preceded and accompanied by vicious anti-India propaganda. Harsh criticism of Sheikh Hasina as a ‘fascist dictator’ was invariably followed by blaming India for the state of affairs in Bangladesh. The mutually beneficial trade and economic partnership between these two neighbouring countries was criticised as being one-sided and unfair.

One year of this unrelenting barrage has now boomeranged on the Yunus regime. Public opinion has turned against it because, except for words, it has provided no succour to the people of Bangladesh. Across the nation, the shared refrain openly describes the ‘earlier times’ as ‘being better’, including the benefits to Bangladesh of their strong economic, trade and investment links with India.

India has shown a lot of patience in dealing with the interim regime. In August 2024, India had conveyed its willingness to continue with and build upon its links with Bangladesh. In April 2025, during the bilateral meeting with Mr. Yunus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated India’s support for a democratic, stable, peaceful, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh, enunciating India’s people-centric approach to the relationship. Unfortunately, the hand of friendship was rebuffed. Now, a new grouping of China, Pakistan and Bangladesh is sought to be created. Bangladesh must have early free, fair and inclusive elections under a new caretaker government. India is confident that the new elected government, one that truly reflects the wishes of the people of Bangladesh, will work to re-establish a cordial and mutually beneficial relationship with India.

recycling without burdening end users, while fostering a circular economy that benefits industry and consumers.

To protect legitimate recyclers and encourage compliance, India must consider adopting a fair and globally comparable EPR floor price that reflects the real costs of recycling and industry building, and which can ease to market-driven prices when the ecosystem is mature and standardisation is in place. This requires immediate constructive dialogue among policymakers, industry and recyclers to establish a viable pricing structure after analysing global pricing structures and best practices. For instance, the United Kingdom requires producers to pay close to ₹600 per kilogram for EV battery recycling, whereas what is under consideration for India is less than a fourth of that. This is a significant difference even after adjusting for purchasing power between India and the U.K. The EPR floor price for recycling battery waste should cover the full spectrum of recycling expenses, from collection to material recovery, ensuring that recyclers can operate sustainably without resorting to shortcuts. A fair EPR regime will also incentivise battery producers to hold recyclers accountable through audits.

Integrate informal recyclers

Enforcement mechanisms need urgent strengthening in India. This includes implementing robust audit systems, digitising the issuance and the tracking of EPR certificates, and imposing stringent penalties for fraud and non-compliance. Additionally, integrating informal recyclers into the formal sector through training and regulatory support can help eliminate hazardous practices while expanding India’s recycling capacity. This is not just an environmental challenge. It is an economic and strategic imperative. By recalibrating the EPR floor price, strengthening enforcement, and formalising the informal sector, we can transform battery waste from a looming crisis into a catalyst for green growth and a truly circular economy.

sedulous care of the coach.
K. Chellappan,
Seattle, U.S.

Cynicism about the survival
and the future of five-day
Tests is baseless. The road
ahead for this old and

original format of cricket is
as safe and bright as its new
and modern versions.

M.V. Nagavender Rao,
Hyderabad

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

The race for the Catholic vote in Kerala

After a brief pause, physical bank branches are back

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The funds the U.K is investing to prevent illegal immigration

100 in million pounds. This funding package will go towards supporting a new pilot of the “one-in, one-out” U.K. returns agreement, which will see migrants who arrive illegally on small boats returned to France. More than 25,000 migrants made boat crossings to enter U.K. illegally. PTI

Funds disbursed by Rajasthan under investment scheme

765.78 crore. This investment falls under the Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme (RIPS) for the 2024-25 fiscal year, a statement said. RIPS 2024 targets priority sectors such as renewable energy, tourism, IT, and women-led startups. PTI

Amount H.P. transferred to farmers after procuring wheat

1.27 in ₹ crore. The Himachal Pradesh government has purchased 2,123 quintals of naturally grown wheat this year to promote natural farming in the State, a spokesperson said. In addition, a freight subsidy of ₹4.15 lakh on the transportation of wheat has also been provided. PTI

Projected drop in India’s exports to the U.S. in FY26

30 in per cent. The additional 25% import duty announced by U.S. President Donald Trump on Indian goods could lead to this decline, the Global Trade Research Initiative said. India now faces a 25% country-specific tariff and an extra penalty on its exports to the U.S. PTI

Number of fleeing civilians killed by Sudan paramilitary

14 These deaths occurred more than 27 months into Sudan’s war. The Emergency Lawyers, which documents atrocities in the war between the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese army, said that “dozens more were injured”. AFP

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IAF’s unending fighter conundrum

Why have the MiG-21 fighter jets been called ‘flying coffins’? Why has the induction of Mk-1A jets been delayed? How many jets does the Indian Air Force intend to induct in the next two decades? Are the engines for India’s fifth generation fighter aircraft going to be indigenously developed?

EXPLAINER

Dinakar Peri

The story so far:

After over six decades in service, the MiG-21 fighter jets are set to be retired from the Indian Air Force (IAF) in September this year. The formal ceremony is scheduled to be held at Chandigarh where the jets were first inducted in 1963. With this the fighter strength of the IAF will dip from 31 to 29 squadrons, against the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons. A fighter squadron typically has 16-18 jets. The IAF is awaiting deliveries of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Mk1A, which is expected to begin in the next few months after repeated delays. All this at a time when the Chinese Air Force and Navy have fielded around 1,900 fighters including more than 1,300 fourth-generation aircraft, not including trainers, as per a 2024 U.S. Department of Defence report. China has also deployed two Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA), recently unveiled two more advanced jets, and is likely to supply 40 J-35s stealth jets to Pakistan.

What has been the legacy of MiG-21s?

Contracted from the erstwhile Soviet Union after the 1962 war with China, the MiG-21s heralded the onset of supersonic aviation in the IAF and was also its first non-western fighter. A total of 872 MiG-21 aircraft have been inducted in the IAF, a bulk of them licence-manufactured by the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). The MiG-21s remained the mainstay of the IAF for several decades and a spate of accidents in the early 2000s earned them the name ‘flying coffins’. Over the six decades, there were over 450 accidents involving the jet.

The jets played a key role in the 1965, 1971 wars, the 1999 Kargil conflict, and more recently in the aerial dual with Pakistan on February 27, 2019, a day after the Balakot air strike. During the attack, Group Captain (then Wg Cdr) Abhinandan Varthaman’s MiG-21 was shot down and fell in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir after he shot down a Pakistani F-16, according to the IAF.

In fact, in the absence of an Advanced Jet Trainer (AJT), before the Hawks were inducted in 2008, the MiG-21s were used for stage III training of young pilots for a long time as it was the “most suitable” fighter even though it was considered “sub-optimal” as a trainer.

The MiG-21 is also among the most successful fighter jets globally with over 6,000 jets of 12 types flown by over three dozen countries. Currently, there are two MiG-21 Bison squadrons in service – the No. 23 ‘Panthers’ and the No. 3 ‘Cobras’. Incidentally, the No. 3 Squadron has the distinction of being the first to get the upgraded MiG-21 Bisons still in service and will now be the first to get the LCA-Mk1A. With the MiG-21s out, the MiG-29s are the last of the MiG series in service which together with the SU-30MKI remain the last of Russian-origin fighters.

What is the current status of the IAF?

Besides the MiG-21s, a majority of the current inventory, that is the early variants of the Jaguars, Mirage-2000s and Mig-29s, will start going out by the end of the decade. This leaves the SU-30MKI in service, the LCA variants planned to be inducted, and the Medium Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) while the indigenous FGFA, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) is under development. The IAF currently operates two



Long legacy: Technicians preparing a MiG-21 fighter for a test flight at the Base Repair Depot at Ozhar, Maharashtra on July 24, 1982. HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

squadrons of the LCA-Mk1, which undertook maiden flight in January 2001 and was inducted in 2016. A more capable variant, the Mk-1A, which is to be inducted in large numbers, had been delayed initially due to development issues and later due to non-delivery of engines by General Electric (GE) Aerospace citing supply chain difficulties.

How did it get delayed?

The Defence Ministry had signed a ₹48,000 crore contract with HAL for 83 Mk1A jets, and deliveries were to start in March 2024 with at least 16 planes to be delivered to the IAF every year. However, not a single Tejas Mark-1A has been delivered so far. In August 2021, the HAL placed an order for 99 F-404 engines with GE Aerospace at a cost of ₹5,375 crore for the 83 Mk1A jets. The first engine arrived in India only in April this year after a delay of one and half years and the second engine was delivered early this month. Additionally, a deal for 97 additional jets, estimated to ₹67,000

crore, is expected to be concluded in the next few months. HAL has assured to scale up production to 24 jets a year.

Amid these delays, an Empowered Committee for Capability Enhancement of the IAF headed by the Defence Secretary R. K. Singh identified key thrust areas and made recommendations for medium- and long-term measures in the report submitted to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in March.

As per the IAF, the LCA Mk2, larger and more capable than the Mk1 variants, is meant to replace the Mirage 2000, MiG-29 and Jaguars. It is expected to take first flight in 2026. In February 2025, IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal A. P. Singh said that they need to add 35-40 jets every year to make up for the shortage in numbers. Both these programmes, LCA-Mk1A and Mk2, are extremely critical to shore up fighter numbers of the IAF over the next 10-15 years. In an interview to PTI in June, HAL Chairman and Managing Director D. K. Sunil said that GE Aerospace is expected to supply 12 engines in the current fiscal and that the jets would be delivered to the IAF.

Moreover, India has procured 272 Su-30MKIs from Russia of which around 260 remain in service. Last December, the Ministry of Defence signed a ₹13,500 crore deal with HAL for 12 Sukhois to replace those lost in crashes. A major upgrade programme for the Sukhoi’s has been lined up to be undertaken by HAL. The upgrade of 84 jets in the first batch has already been approved. Meanwhile, by early 2040s, some of the earlier batch of SU-30MKIs will go out.

What is the way forward?

The IAF has drawn up an ambitious plan to induct more than 600 jets over the next two decades, a large number of them being LCA variants. This includes 180 LCA-Mk1A, over 120 LCA-Mk2, 114 MRFA and at least 120 AMCA. A Twin-Engine Deck Based Fighter for the Navy’s aircraft carriers is also on the drawing board. However, all this hinges on timely

production and deliveries.

Mr. Singh said in an interview recently that they are talking to partners for the likely import of a small number of fifth gen fighters as an interim measure while the AMCA development continues. The option is between the Russian SU-57 and American F-35. These are sensitive negotiations, Mr. Singh said adding, “When it reaches a tangible stage, whether it is an Acceptance of Necessity (AoN), a Request For Proposal or ultimately through a contract that is when the media will come to know.”

Ultimately, it is the fifth gen AMCA that is the way forward while the LCA variants and MRFA fill numbers and add strength in the medium term. The Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) that is developing the aircraft has floated an AoN inviting private sector participation for the production. Even HAL has to bid for it, unlike the nomination in the past. “I imagine it will take 3-6 months to reach the contract award stage”, Mr. Singh said. “Thereafter the project itself of development and an AMCA prototype to actually take to the skies, it would be a 10-year program, I would imagine.”

On the engine front, the F414 engine to power the LCA-Mk2 is to be licence manufactured by HAL for which commercial negotiations with GE are underway. The AMCA development is envisaged in two phases – Mk1 development and couple of squadrons with the GE414 engine, and AMCA-Mk2 with a more powerful 110KN engine that is to be co-developed with a foreign partner for which talks are underway.

All this leaves the MRFA deal, for which the Request For Information was issued to global aircraft manufacturers in April 2019, but there has been no progress since. Given the huge cost involved, the long timelines and various other programmes already in the pipeline, it has to be seen how it can be taken forward.

Dinakar Peri is Fellow, Security Studies at Carnegie India.

THE GIST

Contracted from the erstwhile Soviet Union after the 1962 war with China, the MiG-21s heralded the onset of supersonic aviation in the IAF and was also its first non-western fighter.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES



Ongoing war: Students' bags are kept in front of a school building damaged in a bombardment by Myanmar's military at the Ohe Htein Twin village, Sagaing Region, on May 12. AFP

Why a progressive Indian policy on Myanmar is more than plausible

New Delhi has long defined its 'interests' in the Southeast Asian country in narrow strategic terms. However, it is possible for India to put in place a more progressive, values-driven Myanmar policy that works in favour, and not against, its national interests

Angshuman Choudhury

Late last month, the Myanmar junta ended the country's state of emergency and called for elections in December, even as the multi-sided civil war rages on. In this article dated June 22, 2024, Angshuman Choudhury outlines how Indian foreign policy towards the Myanmar junta should change in order to establish influence with its neighbour.

Three years on, the military in Myanmar, which overthrew the elected civilian government in February 2021, continues to kill, maim and displace its own people. India has steadfastly maintained formal relations with this regime, which has so far murdered more than 5,000 people and displaced some 2.5 million people. In its second tenure, the Narendra Modi government did very little to engage with the pro-democracy resistance, which now has both political and military wings. Indian foreign policy scholars and practitioners have doggedly defended this policy by arguing that India needs to work with the junta if it has to protect its "interests" in Myanmar and not get swayed by an idealistic preoccupation with "values".

How India can step out of China's shadow

But, in foreign policy, there is no clear line between "values" and "interests" simply because neither has a standard definition. It all depends on how a country defines these terms. This is also the case with India's Myanmar policy. New Delhi has long defined its "interests" in the Southeast Asian country in narrow strategic terms. But now, it needs to leverage a unique set of "values" to better defend its interests. It is possible for India to put in place a more progressive, values-driven Myanmar policy that works in favour, and not against, its national

interests.

This new policy should have two key pivots, namely, democracy and human security. The new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, therefore, needs to take four interlocking steps immediately.

First, India needs to use its credentials as the largest federal democracy in the region to sharpen its influence in Myanmar. For long, Myanmar's pro-democracy political elites and civil society have looked up to India as a model of a federal democratic union with a well-oiled power-sharing arrangement between the centre and various subnational units. This is even more relevant today as the democratic resistance in Myanmar, which is led by the National Unity Government (NUG), dozens of ethnic revolutionary organisations, civil society organisations, and trade unions, strives to replace the military-drafted 2008 constitution with a federal constitution. By helping this vibrant opposition achieve its aim through capacity-building and knowledge exchange programmes, India can distinguish itself from China, its primary regional competitor in Myanmar. Both Beijing and New Delhi can sell military hardware to Myanmar, but only India can sell the spirit of federal cooperation. Here is a chance for the new Indian government to outmanoeuvre the Chinese in their own 'backyard'.

Weapons sales and humanitarian outreach

Second, India needs to immediately halt all weapon sales to the Myanmar military. According to the advocacy group, Justice For Myanmar (JFM), Indian state-owned military hardware manufacturers have sold a range of non-lethal and semi-lethal equipment to the junta since the 2021 coup. In its most recent report, published on March 27, the group claimed that on

January 2, the Indian Air Force transferred a package which had 52 items, including navigation and communication parts, to its Myanmar counterpart. Another recent investigation by Frontier Myanmar claims that India sold more than \$1.5 million worth of navy-grade diesel to junta-linked entities since the coup. New Delhi needs to immediately put a stop to these, as the Myanmar military continues to use all its three services – the army, air force, and navy – to attack non-combatant civilians using imprecise lethal tactics.

Third, India needs to immediately open cross-border humanitarian corridors to help civilians affected by the conflict along three border provinces – Sagaing Region, Chin State and northern Rakhine State. According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) data, Sagaing Region has seen the largest quantum of internal displacement in all of Myanmar since the coup (as of March 25, 2024). Rakhine comes next, while Chin State sits tenth in the list. Continuing air strikes by the junta and clashes between armed groups in these areas have only pushed more civilians across the borders. New Delhi needs to first revoke its plans to fence the India-Myanmar border and reinstate the Free Movement Regime, or the FMR, which the Union Home Ministry suspended in February 2024. Then, it should engage existing humanitarian aid networks along the India-Myanmar border to send emergency relief assistance including medicines, food and tarpaulin to the other side. Mizoram, where a multi-layered asylum and aid ecosystem is already operational, is a good starting point. India should also collaborate with local and international non-governmental organisations with experience in the field. Best practices from Thailand, which recently started cross-border aid deliveries into Myanmar,

should also be adopted.

New Delhi should use its clout to ensure that the aid is not distributed by the junta, which not only has a disastrous track record in this field, but is also not even in control of large areas along the India-Myanmar border. It is also possible to run cross-border aid corridors without allowing contraband to pass through, with stringent checks and pre-delivery vetting.

Detention of asylum seekers

Fourth, the Narendra Modi government should immediately halt the detention and deportation of asylum seekers from Myanmar. This is especially so in the case of Manipur, where the BJP-led government has so far deported 115 asylum seekers to Myanmar – the latest round was on June 11. These are people who entered India not because they wanted to or with mal-intent, but because they were forced to. Regardless of the fact that India has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is incumbent upon the government to treat them as refugees in need of humanitarian assistance and protection rather than as "illegal immigrants". Both the Indian Constitution and international law allow the Indian state to do so. In fact, the customary international legal principle of non-refoulement discourages India from deporting refugees back to a home country where they face a threat of persecution or death. The Centre should also urge the BJP-led Assam government to release the 27 Chin refugees detained in the State and house them in a humane refugee shelter.

India, the "Vishwabandhu", routinely claims to stand with the people of Myanmar. It should now walk the talk.

Angshuman Choudhury is a New Delhi-based researcher and writer from Assam, and formerly an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research.

THE DAILY QUIZ

August 5 marks one year since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh. Here is a quiz on the events surrounding the regime change

Vighnesh P Venkitesh

QUESTION 1

What decision by the Bangladesh high court triggered the students' protests that led to the fall of the government?

QUESTION 2

At least 97 people were killed a day before Ms. Hasina fled the country when clashes erupted during students' protests. Under what banner were the students protesting?

QUESTION 3

What was the derogatory and

controversial word, used to denote people who helped Pakistani troops during the Liberation War in 1971, that Ms. Hasina called protesters?

QUESTION 4

Name the organisation and the economic instrument it was based on that was set up by Muhammad Yunus who took over as Chief Adviser to the interim government in the country.

QUESTION 5

Name the court in Bangladesh that on Sunday began the trial of Ms. Hasina over crimes against humanity.



Visual question: What was this building, which was razed by a mob on February 6, called? Name the person who used to reside here. REUTERS

- Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. The significance of the film Muqaddar. **Ans: Kishore Kumar made his debut as an actor**
2. This song was used in a *The Simpsons*' episode. **Ans: 'Pal Bhar Ke Liye' from Johnny Mera Naam**
3. This poem that Kishore penned was made into a song. **Ans: 'Main hoon jhum jhum jhumroo' (in Jhumroo)**
4. The premise of the flick *Hum Do Daaku*. **Ans: Searching for hidden treasure in the ancient cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa**
5. For crooning this evergreen number Kishore won the first of the record eight Filmfare Awards. **Ans: 'Roop Tera Mastana' from Aradhana**
6. Kishore Kumar's spouses apart from Madhubala. **Ans: Ruma Guha Thakurta, Yogeta Bali and Leena Chandravarkar**
7. This song had Kishore singing alongside Mohd. Rafi, Mukesh, and Lata Mangeshkar. **Ans: 'Humko Tumse Ho Gaya Hai Pyaar' from Amar Akbar Anthony**
8. Kishore lend his voice for more than 200 songs to this actor. **Ans: Jeetendra**
- Visual: Name the authors of *Kishore Kumar: The Ultimate Biography*. **Ans: Anirudha Bhattacharjee and Parthiv Dhar**
- Early Birds: M. Suresh Kumar| Pranab Biswas



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"How do you pronounce l.a.c.k.a.d.a.i.s.i.c.a.l?"

"That's a big word. Let me see now. The first syllable lack rhymes with the words back, pack and sack. The 'a' in the second syllable is pronounced like the 'a' in China. Dai in the third syllable is pronounced the same way as day. The 's' in the fourth syllable is like the 'z' in words like zip, zoo and zebra."

"And I suppose the final 'a' is like the 'a' in China again?"

"That's right. And the main stress is on the third syllable dai."

"So the word is pronounced lackaDAIsical? Is that right?"

"That's right. Do you know what lackadaisical means?"

"Doesn't it mean lazy or something like that?"

"Well, sort of. If you say someone is lackadaisical, it means that he/she does not show any enthusiasm or interest in something. For example, I can say, Some of our students are very lackadaisical about doing their homework."

"You can't blame them, can you? Can I say, The Indian team has been playing lackadaisically?"

"You certainly can. Here's another example. My boss is very lackadaisical about keeping appointments."

"My sister is annoyingly lackadaisical about sports."

"Ditto!"

"Ditto? What does that mean?"

"When somebody says something and you respond by saying ditto, it means that you feel or think the same way as the other person. For example, if I say, I loved to watch Gaby play and you respond by saying ditto..."

"...it would mean that I loved to watch Gaby play too! Right?"

"That's right. By the way, the stress is on the first syllable of ditto."

"I see. Do you have any plans for the next weekend?"

"I have to get my scooter fixed. But other than that, I have no plans."

"That's great. Then you can come with me to my friend's house. He's got a beautiful house in the beach."

"He's got a beautiful house on the beach, not in the beach."

"Would you like to see this house on the beach?"

"No!"

"You're such a bore! What if this house were on the desert? Would you come then?"

"If the house were in the desert, I might have come..."

"...in the desert? Not on the desert?"

"That's right."

"It's on the beach, but in the desert! I think English is a really crazy language."

"Ditto!"

Published in *The Hindu* on July 8, 1997.

Word of the day

Clamour:

loud and persistent outcry from many people; utter or proclaim insistently and noisily; make loud demands

Synonym: hue and cry

Usage: He ignored the clamour of the crowd.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/clamourpro

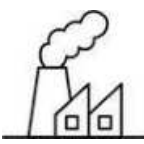
International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈklæm.ə/

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Smoke and mirrors

Relaxed sulphur emissions for thermal plants troubling

In a gazette notification issued out of the blue last month, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has nearly done away with the requirement of treating sulphur dioxide emissions in thermal power plants (TPPs). Emission reduction criteria will strictly apply only to TPPs in the vicinity of the National Capital Region or other cities with a population of a million of more, called Category A plants.



While the Centre, citing certain studies, has given its reasons for doing an about-turn on a stringent policy on sulphur dioxide emissions framed in 2015, these are not wholly convincing. For plants that are within 10 km of critically polluted areas or ‘non-attainment cities’ (Category B), sulphur emissions will be considered on a ‘case-by-case basis’. This does not seem transparent at all. The remaining TPPs, called Category C, which account for over 75 per cent of coal-fired power capacity of about 220 GW are exempt from treating such emissions. Categories A and B roughly have an equal share in the remaining 25 per cent. The Centre has broadly reasoned, on the basis of studies by IIT Delhi and the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, Nagpur, that ambient SO2 concentration in 10 cities were well below hazardous levels. It has also noted that the flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) equipment to reduce sulphur emissions is not a viable option; it consumes extra coal, and the ensuing carbon emissions are expected to negate benefits arising from lower sulphur emissions. Besides, it is now argued, Indian coal is low on sulphur anyway, so FGD is a big one-time cost.

The latest flip-flop raises questions about power pricing for TPPs which have already installed FGDs. However, the 2015 policy, based on an IIT Kanpur study, was based on the assumption that SO2 emissions are linked to hazardous PM 2.5 emissions. Now, category A plants alone need to meet certain sulphur emissions criteria — and by the end of 2027, despite the fact that these norms have been in existence for a decade with deadlines being shifted time and again. It is beyond doubt that coal-fired power is harmful to health and the environment. If India is serious about creating more TPP capacity alongside renewables, it must pursue this option with a sense of responsibility.

There are a few oddities to this decade-long history of TPP emissions regulation. The 2015 regulation did not recommend FGD as a technology, but yet it came to be regarded as the only option to the virtual exclusion of other technologies, such as dry sorbent injection. In fact, regulations on using coal with no more than 34 per cent ash content were relaxed in 2020, possibly on the presumption that FGD would take care of this aspect as well. Now, it would seem that there is neither a regulation to curb ash content nor sulphur emissions. If the idea is to only curb carbon emissions from burning coal and hopefully trade it against offsets, it amounts to a limiting, if not cynical, view on cleaning up our atmosphere.

POCKET RAVIKANTH



ASHIMA GOYAL

The first in this series examined why past choices did not deliver growth (<https://tinyurl.com/mt3ytxfh>), the second why current choices are doing so (<https://tinyurl.com/356krx4n>). Now we consider the type of monetary policy and monetary-fiscal coordination required to support growth.

An emerging market (EM) economy is not yet at a mature stable state. Since macroeconomic policy affects cyclic and volatile trend growth, it can have large, persistent effects. But Indian policy often focused on structural reform and development, neglecting stabilisation. Shocks then caused large swings in growth.

Post-pandemic experience, however, showed the feasibility of countercyclical policy. With suitable adaption to domestic structure, shocks and circumstances it proved possible to raise growth and lower inflation, despite large external shocks.

POLICY COORDINATION Short- and long-term fiscal policy action is more effective in reducing supply-side inflation. With such fiscal actions, monetary policy can keep the real interest rate low enough to support growth. The interest elasticity of demand is high, given the large share of youth setting up homes and the transition to formal from informal finance. Such support is consistent with central bank independence and credibility since it is conditional on low inflation.

India’s combined fiscal deficit is still among the highest in the world. Debt ratios are also high. As a result, interest costs absorb a large share of revenues. Moreover, a demand stimulus through higher deficits raises country risk and interest rate spreads in EMs. For all these reasons, fiscal consolidation is required.

A better composition of government expenditure, on physical and human infrastructure and targeted social welfare, increases potential non-inflationary growth. Monetary policy can then stimulate demand to the point where output is near potential. In current circumstances, therefore, it is better for fiscal policy to focus on improving supply, while monetary policy does the cyclical demand adjustment. Well-designed fiscal action does trigger other demand- sources such as income and productivity growth, expansion of different cities and sectors, exports and innovations. This provides the best kind of fiscal stimulus — supply-side policy need not imply a neglect of demand.

Cost reducing policies also differ from reforms such as liberalising factor markets. The latter is not a critical constraint, but is politically sensitive, so



REUTERS

Towards an Indian growth model — III

STABILISATION MATTERS. It is better for fiscal policy to focus on improving supply, while monetary policy does the cyclical demand adjustment

it is better left to competition among States in a federal structure.

With this combination of macroeconomic policies, higher growth reduces deficit ratios and interest burdens, releasing funds for more productive spending. Policy consistency, macroeconomic stability and smooth high growth create an enabling environment for private investment and employment.

If the forward-looking real interest rate is kept positive but low (around unity), it implies nominal policy rates rise if inflation is persistently above target. But they do not rise even with growth as long as inflation stays near the target. This allows discovery of the highest potential growth consistent with socially desirable inflation rates. It also implies a countercyclical response to shocks as growth is smoothed and equals potential. In the 2010s as well as in 2024, as real interest rates rose above 2 per cent, growth slowed.

Low positive real interest rates ensure low borrowing costs as well as positive returns to savers. If inflation is low and steady it also means the supply of investible resources matches demand. In the long-run, real interest rates have to be at levels that ensure this. But savings rise with incomes. Growth raises savings more than high real interest rates do and financial deepening improves their allocation.

A better composition of government expenditure, on physical and human infrastructure and targeted social welfare, increases potential non-inflationary growth

The level as well as volatility of inflation has fallen in the flexible inflation targeting period so the size of nominal policy rate adjustments required is less. Fine-tuning of policy rates can keep the real rate steadily near neutral levels. What does all this imply for current monetary policy?

CURRENT POLICY Since last year real rates were allowed to rise too much, growth is slowing and inflation has fallen to the RBI’s lower bound. The natural real rate is likely to be below unity now. But, despite the 100 basis point cut, the current real rate is still above 3 per cent. If inflation had been correctly forecasted and adjusted to last year, real rates would not have risen so much.

Should monetary policy take small or big steps? Quick front-loaded adjustment is required if large shocks or inadequate past adjustment have allowed real rates to deviate too far from equilibrium. Since monetary policy has long lags, waiting to first see effects cannot be correct. Small steps and forward guidance are the better option if the adjustment is to changes expected in the future and guiding market actions will help reach the objective.

So the 50 bps cut was correct, but are further steps required now? One argument is that since RBI’s expected Q4FY26 inflation is 4.4 per cent, real rates are already near unity with respect to that. But the expectation that inflation will rise next year is largely due to base effects.

Core inflation is the long-term trend towards which the more volatile headline inflation reverts. And core inflation ex-gold has been less than 3.5 per cent for more than a year.

It is better to assume that inflation is anchoring at the 4 per cent target and

work with that as expected inflation. Then another upfront cut in the policy repo rate is warranted. Cutting 25 bps will bring the expected future real rate closer to unity. If inflation is 4.5 per cent the real rate will be 0.75 per cent. After many months of being over 2 per cent mild over-correction on the other side is acceptable.

Forecasters are too habituated to thinking in terms of base effects and past behaviour. But falling Indian trend inflation has to be factored in.

Although a better mix between bank and market-based lending implies pass through of policy rates is faster and perhaps more stable, it is still not instant. So time must be given for outcomes, without over-reacting now.

A neutral stance indicates response will be based on incoming data. Transient volatility in food prices can be looked through. But response is needed to many high frequency pointers of slowing growth and negative global shocks in order to keep Indian growth at potential. Conditions, including external, are benign for a protracted period of low but positive real policy rates.

Over-reaction must also be avoided in liquidity infusions. While durable liquidity is better kept in mild surplus to counter frequent exogenous liquidity shocks, there are tools to adjust short-term liquidity to keep the weighted average call money rate near the repo. It is good these are being used more actively, since the mandated anchoring of short-rates at the repo reduces uncertainty in markets.

For a smooth landing, the movements a pilot makes, as the plane nears the ground, have to be gentle and carefully calibrated.

The writer is Emeritus Professor, IIGDR

Data exchanges can boost digital public infrastructure

With right governance, data exchanges can unlock innovation, inclusion, and economic growth

Rama Devi Lanka

India has already demonstrated how Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) can transform a nation — Aadhaar brought identity, UPI enabled seamless payments, and platforms like DigiLocker and CoWIN delivered public services at scale. The next frontier is clear: data must become the next layer of public infrastructure.

Data exchanges are platforms that enable secure, policy-driven, and consent-based sharing of data across government, private, and research sectors. If built right, they can form the backbone of India’s data economy, unlocking innovation, inclusion, and economic growth.

State-led data exchanges — ADeX (Agriculture Data Exchange) and TGDeX (Telangana Data Exchange) — showed how digital governance can move from siloed data systems to scalable, interoperable platforms.

Despite India’s digital progress, most government data remain locked in departmental silos. Citizens are asked to repeatedly submit the same information. Start-ups and researchers face hurdles accessing datasets that

could fuel innovation — especially in agriculture, health, and education.

Data exchanges bring structure and trust to data flows. Consent, traceability, and role-based access are embedded in every transaction. Other national-level efforts like NDAP, IUDX, and AI Kosh are promising. But Telangana’s model stands out.

ADEX: UNIFYING AGRI DATA ADeX is a sector specific data exchange created to address the fragmentation of agriculture data. ADeX, developed in collaboration with the Centre for Data in the Public Good, IISc Bengaluru and the World Economic Forum, adopted a unique approach:

Use case-driven: Data sets for critical use cases such as farmer credit, electronic farm records, soil health advisory and pest prediction are made accessible.

Strong governance: ADeX implemented a data management framework with built-in consent and classification of data (public, private, and personal) to enable secure, trusted sharing of data.

Multi-stakeholder participation: Banks like SBI and HDFC and start-ups, came on board. Outcomes — easier



DIGITAL PROGRESS. Hinges largely on trusted data flows ISTOCK

credit access, better crop insurance models, and targeted farmer advisory services.

TGDEX — SCALING UP TGDeX expanded this model across sectors — health, education, mobility — under Telangana’s AI Implementation Roadmap, launched at the 2024 Global AI Summit. The objective was to democratise access to AI-ready datasets, compute infrastructure, open-source tools, and reusable models — especially for entrepreneurs from Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns. The State organised the Grand Challenge with six problem statements with datasets. Over 400 start-ups

applied, the winners received ₹15 lakh each and the opportunity to develop pilots with State departments. The argument for data exchanges is not just technological — but also economic. The World Bank estimates that data ecosystems can contribute 1-2 per cent of GDP in developed economies.

India’s DPI stack alone is projected to add \$200-250 billion to GDP by 2030, with data exchanges as a key enabler.

By enabling structured, trusted data flows, these platforms: empower start-ups; reduce duplication and fraud; accelerate growth across sectors; and attract private investment through transparent rules.

One of the most important takeaways from ADeX and TGDeX is this: technology is not the biggest challenge — governance is. Success depends on: clear access and usage policies; stakeholder buy-in; data classification and consent frameworks; and robust monitoring and audit mechanisms.

Data exchanges are India’s next great leap — and it has already begun.

The writer is former Director, Emerging Technologies, Government of Telangana, Architect and Strategic Lead for India’s first-state-led data exchanges: ADeX and TGDeX

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Transformative tool

Apropos, ‘India’s impressive financial inclusion journey’ (August 4). The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has emerged as a transformative instrument in fortifying financial inclusivity by assimilating vast segments of the unbanked populace into the formal economic framework. Through zero-balance accounts, direct benefit transfers, and insurance coverages, it has democratised access to institutional finance, particularly in underserved rural and semi-urban regions.

Nonetheless, residual exclusion persists due to digital illiteracy, infrastructural inadequacies, and socio-economic inertia. To achieve holistic penetration, the state must augment digital outreach, deploy vernacular fintech interfaces, and leverage decentralised governance mechanisms.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

Fixing policy rate

This refers to ‘MPC members could be on the horns of a dilemma on repo rate decision at their upcoming

meeting’ (August 4). It’s intriguing to observe divergence of views amongst various economists about the likely stance of the MPC when it next meets early this month.

However, persistence with a straitjacketed approach, of a rate cut of 25 bps, may not be apt amidst the various challenges, both at domestic and global levels.

SK Gupta
New Delhi

Calculating GDP

This refers to ‘Govt mulls using GST, UPI data for GDP calculation’

(August 4). If the NSO meticulously finds out the productive activities and factor payments across the country, it can get to know the net domestic product at factor cost, which is a better indicator of the nation’s performance than GDP at market prices.

Since there are innumerable productive activities going on, income method is the best way of calculating GDP. But it is imperative that no productive activity is left out.

S Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

On businessline.in

Monetary policy for a low inflation scenario

With ample provision of liquidity to the banking sector, a pause in rate cuts with a dovish futuristic signal appears to be the right way

forward, say **Smita Roy Trivedi and Abhiman Das**

<https://tinyurl.com/mpjccx4>

RBI likely to hold rates

Tariff uncertainty will weigh on central bank’s move

Rajani Sinha

The upcoming RBI’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting will be held under the backdrop of sharply falling inflation, while the economic growth trajectory has been clouded by US trade policy. Does that mean RBI’s MPC should cut rates further in the upcoming meeting? We don’t think so.

The RBI had already front loaded the rate cut by 50 bps in the June policy, factoring in a moderation in inflation. Even while the fall in inflation has turned out sharper than anticipated, we feel that the central bank will adopt a wait and watch policy. Given that the RBI had changed the stance to neutral from accommodative, the bar for further rate cut has been raised higher.

CPI inflation fell to around 2 per cent in June and is estimated to remain benign in the next two quarters averaging around 2.5 per cent. The fall in headline inflation has been mainly because of fall in food prices compared to last year. Vegetable inflation that was very high in 2024 averaging 27 per cent, has recorded sharp deflation, averaging -15 per cent in last three months.

Many other components of food basket are also seeing low inflation or deflation supported by good monsoon and high base of last year. The point to note is that a large part of the fall in inflation is because of statistical base effect. Good monsoon will further support food prices in the coming months and overall commodity prices are expected to remain comfortable. However, next year, we will see inflation again rising as the base effect reverses. We expect CPI inflation to breach 4 per cent level in Q4 FY26 and average around 4.5 per cent, with an upward bias in FY27.

TARIFF UNCERTAINTY
India’s growth outlook has been clouded by the US trade policy uncertainties. The recent reciprocal tariff of 25 per cent (with penalty for trade with Russia) imposed by the US is higher than that imposed on some of the competing countries like Vietnam (20 per cent tariff) and Indonesia (19 per cent), putting India in a disadvantageous position. However, India is a domestic demand driven economy, with trade exposure at a much lower level compared to some of the Asian peers. India’s merchandise exports to US



MPC. Status quo may prevail
ISTOCKPHOTO

accounts for only around 2 per cent of GDP. We estimate the adverse impact of tariff at 0.3-0.4 per cent of GDP, through the export channel.

However, there is still lack of clarity and it is quite possible that India manages to negotiate a trade deal with the US leading to lower tariff barriers. The RBI may decide to wait and get further clarity on this front to assess the impact on growth. Moreover, there are supportive factors for growth like good monsoon, falling inflation, lower interest rates and lower income tax burden this year.

In this uncertain environment, the central bank may decide to maintain status quo. Additionally, transmission of the cumulative rate cut of 100 bps in this cycle is still underway and could take some more time to show its effect on the economy. The RBI has been maintaining ample liquidity in the system to facilitate transmission of policy rate cuts. Moreover, a hawkish stance from the US Federal Reserve and recent appreciation of the US dollar index could provide further reasons for adopting a wait-and-watch approach, to avoid additional weakening pressure on the rupee.

The RBI had already frontloaded the rate cuts, anticipating moderation in inflation. Hence, we do not expect further rate cuts unless growth concerns aggravate. With a forward-looking outlook, the RBI would be focusing on inflation in the quarters ahead. With CPI inflation estimated to breach 4 per cent in Q4 FY26 and average around 4.5 per cent in FY27, we are looking at real rate of interest of 1-1.5 per cent or even lower next year. With a real rate likely to be at such low levels in 2026, there is no need for further rate cuts.

The writer is Chief Economist, CARE Edge Ratings

thehindubusinessline. TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 5, 2005

Keen to enter nuclear power, if allowed: Tata

In the event of the Indo-US cooperation takes the form where the possibility of nuclear power production by the private sector becomes a reality in India, then, “should that happen then this company would like to be involved in that also,” said Mr Ratan Tata, Chairman of the Tata Group, at the Tata Power AGM.

SEBI panel suggests changes in broker fee

The Securities and Exchange Board of India is seeking to modify the calculation of brokerage fee in order to modernise it and make it relevant to current market conditions. According to the recommendations of a SEBI committee headed by Mr D.C. Anjaria, broker’s fee roughly constitutes one per cent of prevalent average brokerage rates. However, there need not be any direct relationship between the level of fees and the brokerage income.

Kumar Mangalam, B.K Birla raise stake in Pilani Invest

The B.K. Birla-Kumar Mangalam Birla Group has increased its stake in Pilani Investments to more than 50 per cent. Mr G.P. Birla and Mr S.K. Birla have disinvested their stakes in Pilani in favour of the B.K. Birla-Kumar Mangalam Group. An agreement to this effect was signed here on Thursday.

External flows’ shifting paths

The rise of external financing by emerging market economies using local currency bonds may not be all good news

MACROSCAN.



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

In late 2024, the Institute of International Finance (IIF), the advocacy arm of global finance, put out a pessimistic projection that capital flows to emerging market economies (EMEs) are likely to fall to \$716 billion in 2025 from an estimated \$944 billion in 2024. The latter figure was a significant improvement as compared with the estimate of \$682 billion in 2023.

These figures include both foreign direct investment flows (\$426 billion) and portfolio flows to bond and equity markets. The volatility in the latter is normally much higher. Thus, the IIF estimates that portfolio flows amounted to \$273.5 billion in 2024, well above the \$177.4 billion in 2023, but significantly below the \$375 billion average recorded between 2019-2021.

Using the IIF’s data and combining it with its own datasets and calculations, the Bank of International Settlements (BIS) has recently released a study on shifts in the composition of portfolio capital flows to emerging markets (covering 16 EMEs for bond flows and 17 for equity flows). The BIS data shows that foreign portfolio flows to EMEs, after a sharp fall in post-pandemic year 2022 (by \$272 billion), had recovered in 2023 to just \$176 billion, which was far below the flow of \$638 billion recorded in 2021 (Chart 1).

MARKED VOLATILITY

The figures point to the volatility characteristic of portfolio flows. They fell sharply from a 2007 high during financial crisis years 2008-09, then bounced back in 2010, only to fall steeply again in 2012 following the sovereign debt crisis in the European periphery. They peaked again in 2017, encouraged by low interest rates in the developed economies, and then collapsed again after the pandemic and as interest rates rose in the advanced economies.

As Chart 2 shows, this volatility was characteristic of EMEs in all regions — China, emerging Asia excluding China, Latin America, and emerging markets in Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA).

But besides this volatility, the evidence points to two other major shifts in the years since the 2007 global financial crisis (Charts 3 and 4). One is a shift away from equity and forex loans to bonds in the holdings of foreign portfolio investors in emerging markets. Local and foreign currency bonds held by these non-resident investors increased in share from 33 per cent in 2006 to 51 per cent in 2024.

The other is the increasing importance of external financing using local currency bonds in emerging markets. The share of local currency bonds in total portfolio capital inflows doubled from 13 per cent in 2006 to 26 per cent in 2024.

The shift to bond financing is possibly explained by the growing role of non-bank financial firms and the preferences of investment banks and hedge funds managing investments for a diverse range of investors. That shift was associated with the huge accumulation of liquidity in financial markets triggered by the easy money policies followed by central banks in the developed countries ever since the global financial crisis.

A corollary of the shift has been a boom in sovereign bond issues in less developed economies, including in those identified as EMEs. In some of these EMEs, private corporations have also been issuing bonds to mop up foreign financing at interest rates that were more attractive than in domestic markets.

The riskiness of such bond issues for

borrowers is higher when they are denominated in foreign currencies, since in that case the borrower bears the foreign exchange risk. If the local currency depreciates relative to the currency in which debt is denominated, then the burden of interest and amortization payments rises in terms of the local currency in which revenues predominantly accrue, for both public and private sectors.

CURRENCY PRESSURES

Moreover, to the extent that revenues are earned in local currency, there is need to transform domestic resources into foreign currency to service external liabilities. It is the difficulty faced in such transformation that accounts for the external debt repayment difficulties that many of these countries face. This was the fallout of the ‘original sin’ that characterised the situation faced by less developed countries unable to borrow abroad in their own currency and having to borrow to cover deficits in the current account of their balance of payments.

Seen in that light, the evidence of a rise in the share of local currency bond issues in total external financing appears promising, even if such borrowing accounts for only a quarter of total external portfolio financing. What is surprising is the willingness of foreign bond investors to carry the exchange rate risk associated with such borrowing.

If the currency of the country in which the borrower issues debt depreciates, it would affect the foreign currency returns associated with such lending, since less foreign currency (or currency of the lender’s country) can be purchased with the repayments made by the borrower.

There are three factors which could account for this intriguing shift in lender behaviour. First, the huge volumes of cheap liquidity available to financial investors from the developed countries in the years since the global financial crisis, when the response of central banks was a shift to a regime of quantitative easing and low interest rates. That increased the risk appetite of financial investors, who want to use the opportunity to borrow cheap and lend dear. To exploit that opportunity, they currently seem to be willing to discount the foreign exchange risk involved.

The second factor is the provision of enhanced risk premia in the interest rates associated with bond financing to cover expected foreign exchange risk. That would mean that external borrowing, even if in domestic currency, can be expensive and increase the domestic currency burden associate with servicing the debt. The greater the perceived exchange rate risk, the higher the interest rate.

Finally, with the flow of foreign finance associated with excess liquidity in international markets to the EMEs, the currencies of these countries have in the short term been less prone to depreciation, and in some periods and cases they have even appreciated. This provides the basis to discount foreign exchange risk, though that assessment often proves misplaced.

In sum, the increase in domestic currency borrowing from foreign creditors is not all good news and can also prove to be as volatile as the flow of foreign finance to the EMEs.

The shift to bond financing was associated with the huge accumulation of liquidity in financial markets triggered by the developed nations’ easy money policies followed since the 2008 global financial crisis



CHART 1

Financial flows to EMs

Total portfolio and banking flows (\$ bn)

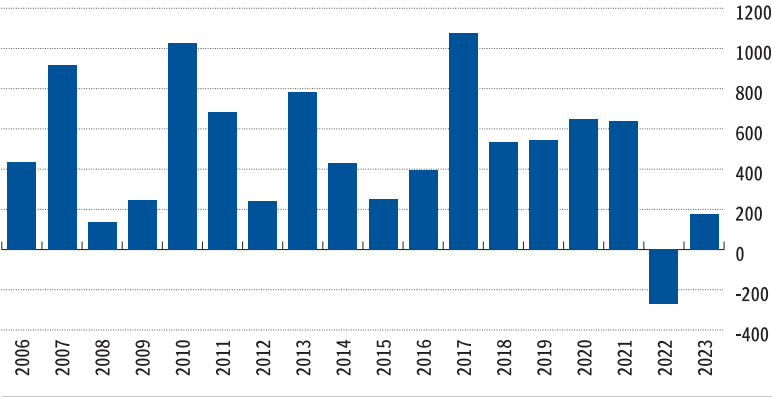


CHART 2

Volatile trend

Total portfolio and banking flows by region (\$ bn)

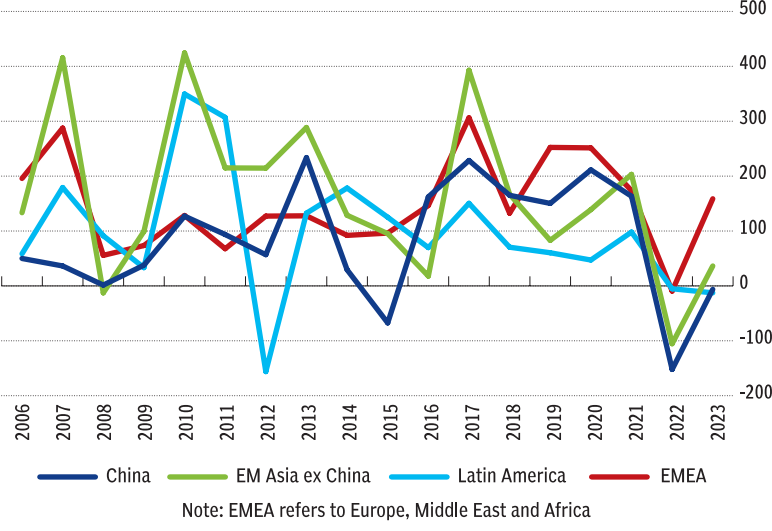


CHART 3

Changing pattern

Changing composition of external financing by EMEs (\$ bn)

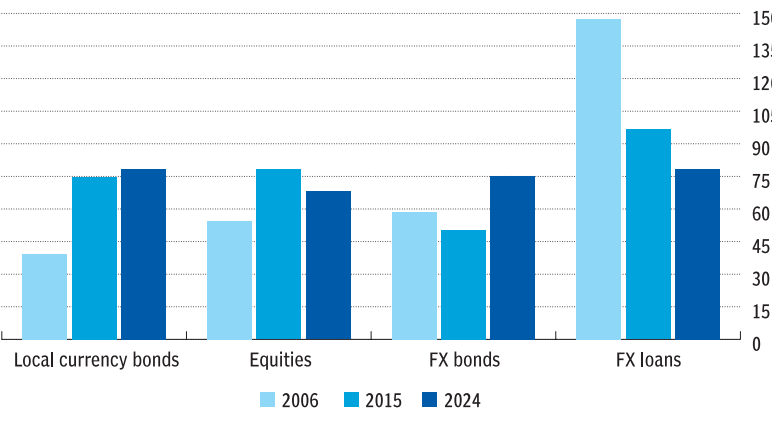
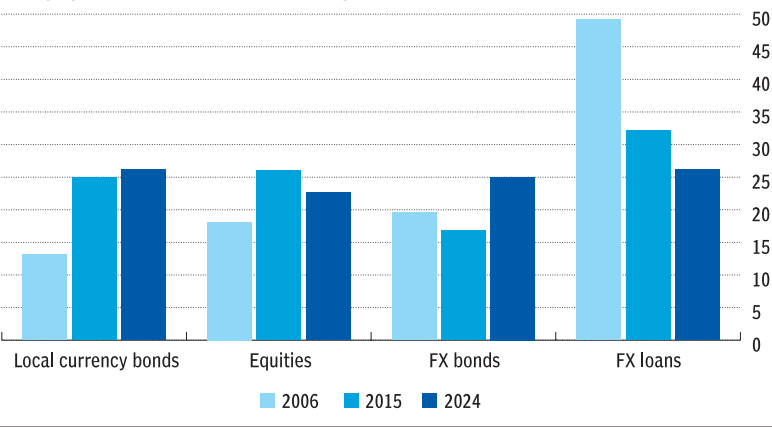


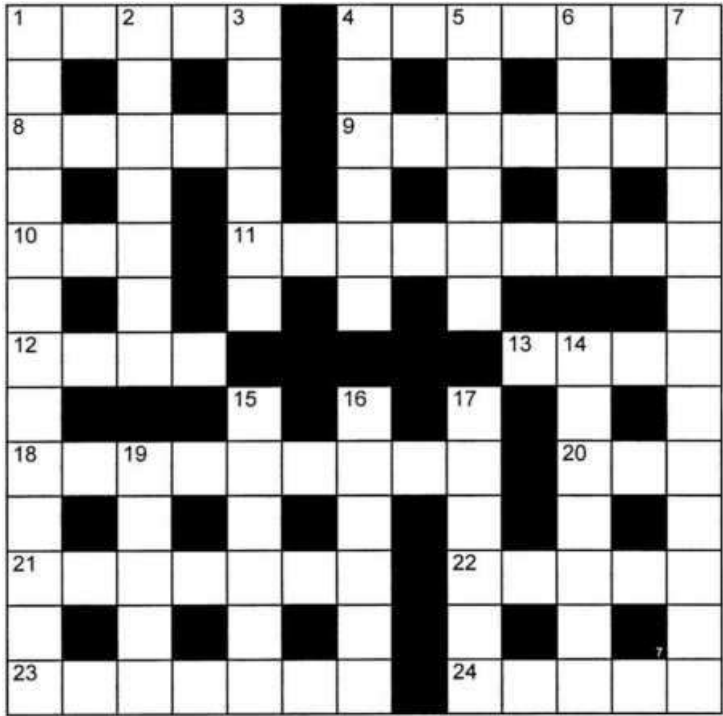
CHART 4

Bond boom

Changing composition of external financing by EMEs (%)



BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2754



EASY

ACROSS

- Unadorned (5)
- Long continued (disease) (7)
- Mechanical man (5)
- One violating another's territory (7)
- Destiny (3)
- Orange-flavoured liqueur (9)
- Unbleached linen (4)
- Horny part of animal foot (4)
- Big band (9)
- Distant (3)
- Drive off, beat back (7)
- Underclothes (5)
- Least amount (7)
- Portion (5)

DOWN

- Plane four-sided figure (13)
- Judge, umpire (7)
- Announcement, information (6)
- Reviewer (6)
- Metal bolts (6)
- Prod with elbow (5)
- Compass, distance round circle (13)
- A transgression (7)
- Fine parchment (6)
- Brook (6)
- Move very fast (6)
- Castrated cockerel (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Is not decorated if one is involved in plot (5)
- NCO has rich potential, going on for a long time (7)
- Man, computer-controlled, to steal from the Old Testament (5)
- He overruns one with van – dire results (7)
- Decision by chance to have it put up for auction (3)
- Drink that can turn into a cure (9)
- In the crucible it is the colour of unbleached 22 (4)
- Footing on which live animals are sold (4)
- A lot of players to search right out (9)
- It's a long way for flying service to make it back (3)
- How to repel us or beat us off (7)
- Underclothing was derived from flax (5)
- Smallest quantity needed: if I'm in confusion, keep quiet (7)
- It's a bit of a chessman (5)

DOWN

- Geometric shape of grape, all molar can deal with (13)
- Judge taking part in rare manoeuvre (7)
- Happen to see what 4 Down writes (6)
- He reviews credit it gives one City leader (6)
- Joins metal plates to rest, perhaps: about four (6)
- A prod from group leader in the altogether (5)
- How far round it is to make recce : crime, fun to commit (13)
- The crime of the man who handles stolen property (7)
- Fine parchment will give half to mull over (6)
- Running water on the street is upsetting to mare (6)
- Fast pace in Georgia upsets the ballot (6)
- Bird for the table is not uncovered (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2753

ACROSS 1. Gross profit 8. Arson 9. Purlain 10. Counsel 11. Union 12. Speech 14. Versus 18. Donor 19. Archaic 21. Replica 23. Deter 24. Recommended

DOWN 1. Glances 2. Obscure 3. Sings 4. Repels 5. Fortune 6. Two 7. Canon 13. Cardiac 15. Slanted 16. Secured 17. Salaam 18. Derby 20. Cadre 22. Par