



## Migration debate

There is nothing inherently undesirable about outward migration

Migration has been a central theme in the Bihar Assembly election campaign, the first phase of which ended on Tuesday. Parties have sought to frame the migration debate in different ways, but it is important for the sake of the State and the country to get this correct. The Opposition, led by the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), has blamed the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for the heavy out-migration from the State to other parts of the country for opportunities; the Bharatiya Janata Party-Janata Dal (United) [BJP-JD(U)] axis, which has been in power for 20 years, is partly in denial of the issue while disingenuously raising the bogey of illegal immigrants in the State. The scaremongering around illegal migrants in the State by the ruling combine would have been laughable but for the cynicism and xenophobia associated with it. For one, the Special Intensive Revision, which was touted by the Election Commission of India as an exercise to purify the electoral rolls, demonstrated that there was no large-scale presence of immigrants in the State.

The Opposition ran its campaign on the slogan: ‘Generate employment, stop migration’. As per the 2011 Census, 74.54 lakh migrants from Bihar are spread across the rest of India. It is sad that the BJP, at the highest level, conjured up a phantom of anti-Bihari sentiment in other parts of the country, purely for short-term political gains in an election. Migration of people is integral to human development, and there is nothing inherently undesirable about it. The Opposition has argued that the BJP-JD(U) government has turned Bihar into a supplier of migrant labour and has promised to create local employment opportunities. Creating infrastructure and opportunities should be part of any robust election conversation, but that can be achieved while maintaining a more sanguine view about migration. Bihar has high fertility and a younger population relative to other parts of the country. Regional variations in economic opportunities and demographic trends make the movement of people inevitable. Bihar should focus on its education and health standards and build a highly productive and skilled workforce that adds momentum to its own growth by being part of India’s economic growth.

## Compound effect

Southeast Asian scam factories demand a coordinated response

The Supreme Court’s call for a comprehensive inquiry into the proliferating menace of digital scams reflects the alarming scale at which Indian citizens are being defrauded. The Bench’s particular focus on ‘digital arrest’ scams – where fraudsters impersonate law enforcement officials to extort money – underscores the sophistication and brazenness of these operations. What distinguishes the current wave of digital fraud from conventional cybercrime is its industrial scale and cross-border architecture. A sprawling network of “scam compounds” operates from conflict-torn regions and special economic zones across Southeast Asia, particularly in Myanmar, where state control is minimal and where, disturbingly, regime complicity appears evident. The mechanics of this modern-day slavery racket are chilling. Victims are lured through fraudulent job advertisements promising attractive salaries and perks, often via Bangkok, in exploitation of visa-free regimes. From there, they are trafficked across borders, primarily into Myanmar’s regions controlled by Border Guard Forces allied with the military junta. These compounds function as digital sweatshops where trafficked individuals are coerced through violence, torture, and sexual harassment to perpetrate elaborate scams, including “pig butchering”, a sophisticated combination of romance and cryptocurrency investment fraud. Myanmar’s civil war has created ideal conditions for these operations to flourish. The junta’s 2021 coup and subsequent conflict emboldened the ethnic militias, rebranded as Border Guard Forces, who found lucrative revenue streams in hosting scam centres that could be “taxed” to fund military operations.

Proceeds are laundered through “mules” and dubious financial institutions such as Cambodia’s Huione Pay before being converted into cryptocurrency, making tracing and recovery nearly impossible. Global monitors have identified Chinese-organised crime syndicates as the kingpins orchestrating these transnational networks. India faces a dual crisis: thousands of its citizens are trafficked into forced scam labour under brutal conditions, while thousands more at home fall victim to the very frauds these captives are forced to perpetrate. This demands a multi-pronged response. The Reserve Bank of India, along with Union and State governments, must launch extensive public awareness campaigns about these scams while strengthening cybercrime infrastructure and policing capabilities. India must leverage diplomatic channels to forge a coordinated regional response. Working with China, Thailand, Vietnam, and other affected nations, India should exert maximum pressure on the Myanmar junta and Cambodia’s regime to dismantle these operations. The United Nations must also be mobilised to recognise this for what it truly is: a modern manifestation of slavery that demands urgent international intervention.

Pick up any newspaper, scroll through social media, or attend a rally in Bihar ahead of the elections, and you will see a familiar political playbook in action.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) continues to field candidates from its core base – Yadavs and Muslims. But recognising the limits of this strategy, it now promises government jobs to a population desperate for steady income. Years of poor economic growth have forced millions to migrate out of Bihar in search of work. The RJD hopes to raise a fevered pitch on this subject and win support from an electorate for whom migration has become a major issue.

The Congress, having lost its erstwhile support bases among ‘forward castes’ to the BJP, has brought its national narrative to Bihar: inclusivity, constitutional values, and secularism. It is pitting these against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)’s divisive communalism. This message resonates in parts of semi-urban Bihar. But it is clear that the party’s heydays are behind it.

The Left parties speak the language of rights and redistribution – land reforms, labour rights, dignity for workers. But except in some pockets, they have not built a mass base. Smaller players such as the Vikassheel Insaan Party have been brought in to peel away support from marginalised communities that have traditionally backed the ruling Janata Dal (United) or JD(U).

### The other side

On the other side stands the JD(U) and its leader Nitish Kumar. The party is the inheritor of the Karpoori Thakur formula – mobilising Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) and ‘Mahadalits’ alongside smaller but powerful non-Yadav Other Backward Classes (OBCs) such as Kurmis and Koeris. To expand beyond this base, Mr. Kumar has spent years cultivating women voters through welfare schemes. Now he is betting heavily on the popularity of a one-time cash transfer to women to carry him through this election.

The BJP seeks to retain the support of ‘forward’ castes – those who view OBC political dominance with resentment. But it is also trying to build a broader coalition through Central government welfare schemes and a strident appeal to Hindutva, aiming to consolidate Hindu voters across caste lines. To keep the middle class and urban voters on board, it emphasises “development”, which in Bihar largely means building roads and bridges across the riverine landscape. In a State with some of India’s worst human development indicators, this limited definition of development speaks volumes.

Beyond the BJP and JD(U), the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) includes smaller caste-based parties – the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), Hindustani Awam Morcha, and Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM), each representing specific non-Yadav OBC and Dalit constituencies.

And then there is the newcomer: the Jan Suraa Party (JSP), which claims to offer something different – less focus on caste patronage, more emphasis on good governance and welfare through better administration.

In short, Bihar’s 2025 election reflects the three forces that have shaped Indian politics since the 1990s: Mandal (caste-based reservations and identity politics), Mandir (Hindutva consolidation), and Market (developmentalism). Each party emphasises these in different combinations, but Mandal politics remains the most salient factor.



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Decades of ‘social justice’ politics have brought backward castes to power. But the wealth remains with a tiny forward caste elite. Why won’t anyone talk about redistribution?

This contest – with its promises of jobs, welfare, women’s empowerment, and development – obscures a fundamental reality. Except for the Left parties, which lack electoral strength, no major player is talking about Bihar’s core problem, which has two interconnected parts.

The first is land. Despite decades of fragmentation, land ownership in Bihar remains skewed towards forward caste elites. This concentration of agricultural land is not just an economic issue; it is the foundation of social and political power that has persisted for generations. The second is the missing industry. Bihar has one natural strength: fertile agricultural land. This should have spawned a thriving agro-processing industry – food processing units, packaging facilities, supply chain infrastructure that creates jobs and adds value to farm produce. Instead, Bihar exports its raw agricultural output and its people. The concentration of land in the hands of an elite that has historically favoured rent-seeking over capital investment has stifled the emergence of a dynamic agro-industrial sector.

These two issues – land concentration and the absence of agro-processing – are keys to understanding why Bihar remains poor despite decades of “social justice” politics and years of “development” governance. They are also the issues that every major party is carefully avoiding because addressing them would mean challenging entrenched interests: big landowners (including wealthy farmers from OBC communities), forward caste economic dominance, and the entire political economy that keeps the current system running.

Bihar’s backward caste leaders – Lalu Prasad Yadav, Nitish Kumar, and others – rose to power in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most people credit this to the socialist movements of the mid-20th century. But the roots go back further, to the Triveni Sangh movement of the 1920s-30s. Back then, backward caste leaders challenged the dominance of forward castes (Rajput, Bhumihar, Brahmin, Kayastha) who controlled land, wealth, and power. They wanted literacy, education, and a fairer distribution of resources.

Nearly a century later, Bihar’s core problem remains the same: a tiny minority still controls most of the wealth. The Bihar caste survey reveals a stark reality. Forward castes make up just 15.5% of the population, yet they hold 31% of all government jobs. While 10% of forward caste households earn over ₹50,000 per month, this figure drops to only 4% among OBCs, 2% among EBCs and Scheduled Castes, and less than 1% among Scheduled Tribes. Over 80% of large landholdings (those exceeding 20 acres) belong to forward castes according to India Human Development Survey (2011) and the National Sample Survey Organisation (2019). This concentration of resources has not just persisted; it has reproduced itself through networks, influence, and access to power.

**Political power without economic change** Bihar has achieved political democracy. Backward castes have held power for decades. But this has not translated into economic democracy. The wealth is still in the same hands.

To understand why Bihar’s political leaders – even those from backward castes who fought for social justice – have avoided these fundamental issues, we need to look at what battles they chose to fight. Mr. Prasad championed social justice

aggressively. But he focused on challenging forward castes while ignoring, or even suppressing, other backward and extremely backward castes. He did not address land redistribution or economic inequality. He only fought “neighbourhood battles” – challenging the castes directly above Yadavs in the hierarchy rather than the entire system of inequality. This approach sharpened tensions between Yadavs and other OBC/EBC groups.

Mr. Kumar took a different path. He built roads, schools, and provided electricity – infrastructure that benefits everyone. This looked like progress without threatening anyone’s wealth. He even formed a Land Reforms Commission early on, but quickly abandoned anything that would challenge big landowners. The result? Infrastructure improved, but wealth distribution didn’t change.

Neither Mr. Prasad nor Mr. Kumar was willing to challenge big landowners within their own castes (Yadavs and Kurmis), even though these are relatively few in number. Mr. Kumar, who has been in power for two decades, would have been voted out by now if the state of the Bihar economy was an indication of governance. But the opposition Mahagatbandhan (MGB) has not presented itself as a clear alternative, despite successful rallies and mobilisations.

Bihar now faces two possible paths. The first is development for the few – a continuation of the current model of growth that benefits big business and landowners, with some welfare schemes to pacify the masses. The second is inclusive growth – addressing the wealth gap, redistributing land, ensuring jobs and income reach all castes, and building agro-processing industries that create broad-based employment.

The newer political entrants exemplify the first path. The LJP’s Chirag Paswan promises food processing industries, while the JSP’s Prashant Kishor emphasises service sector growth and better governance. Both talk of development, but neither addresses wealth redistribution or land reform. Their models accept the concentration of resources in the hands of big landowners, businesses, and bureaucrats, promising only to make the system work more efficiently.

Both the NDA and MGB are multi-caste alliances, which prevents either from moving decisively in any direction. The MGB’s recent policy papers – ‘Parivartan Patra’, ‘Mai-Bahin Maan scheme’, and ‘Ati-Pichada Nyay Patra’ – do show some understanding of inclusive development, with plans to empower women, EBCs, and Dalits. But given past broken promises, voters remain sceptical.

The Left parties have economic plans to redistribute wealth, but they have failed to connect these to social justice issues. Their politics is yet to reckon with facts such as a forward caste landless labourer faces very different barriers from a Dalit or EBC woman even if both are poor. Many Dalits who have been officially allotted land titles are unable to take physical possession due to social barriers.

To be seen as a credible alternative to the NDA, the MGB needed to send a clear, credible message that they are serious about inclusive growth, not just winning elections. They should have taken a message of redistribution and opportunity to voters, rather than making wishful welfare promises. They should have drawn a sharper ideological contrast with the NDA. Now their hopes are pinned on anti-incumbency alone.

# Trump seems more in control of Israel than Hamas

The Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal is facing a tough test as Hamas is yet to return the bodies of Israelis taken captive on October 7, 2023, as agreed in the deal. Teams from Egypt and the International Committee of the Red Cross are working with the Israeli military and Hamas to locate the bodies in Gaza. The BBC reported that there are still 13 bodies in Gaza. Hamas is either unable to locate the bodies or is pretending not to know where they are, to prolong this phase. Once all the bodies are returned, Hamas would have to surrender arms in the following phase. And that is where the real test of the ceasefire lies.

Meanwhile, in the past week, Hamas killed an Israeli soldier in northern Gaza. In return, the Israeli army attacked Gaza, killing more than 100 people in a day. Qatar, an ally of U.S. President Donald Trump, defended Israel and accused Hamas of violating the ceasefire deal.

### The pressure on Israel

Mr. Trump has deployed about 200 U.S. military personnel in Israel to support monitoring and coordination efforts. This is to show that he is serious about the ceasefire and to also demonstrate his distrust of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli army. American drones are monitoring Gaza. This kind of direct U.S. surveillance is unprecedented in the last two years of the war. The political and military pressure on Israel was visible last week when the top men of the Trump administration – Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Middle East



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The Israeli government, though militarily superior, is forced to follow Washington’s script to retain its strategic cover. Hamas, though militarily weaker, is ideologically freer and less dependent

envoy Steve Witkoff, Mr. Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, and Vice President J.D. Vance – were all in Jerusalem. “We (the American establishment) are calling the shots here” was the message, which created domestic troubles for Mr. Netanyahu. He had to appear not pressured by Mr. Trump and reassure Israelis that Israel remains a sovereign state and not a ‘client state’ of America. The hardliners in the Israeli government dislike Mr. Trump’s 20-Point Gaza Plan, but they could not reject it under threat of losing American support. Mr. Trump’s statement that “Israel will lose all the support from the U.S. if it annexes the West Bank” was another blow to the right-wing settler movement’s ambitions.

### Less leverage on Hamas

Whether they like them or hate them, Israeli leaders, including Mr. Netanyahu, are not in a position to oppose Mr. Trump’s ideas about how to conclude the remaining war in Gaza. An International Stabilization Force for Gaza is being planned, which will further take over control from the Israeli army. Yet Mr. Trump will have far less leverage on Hamas to keep it bound to the ceasefire. Hamas has stood up to his threats since January 2025 and has not released the hostages without a major concession from Israel. Now that it has extracted political advantage, it will act more assertively and resist disarmament. Qatar and Turkey coerced Hamas into the deal because both wish to please Mr. Trump while seeking influence in Gaza’s reconstruction. How long Hamas will remain obliged to them is a critical

question in the coming weeks.

### A curious paradox

What is emerging, therefore, is a curious paradox: Mr. Trump seems in control of Israel, but far less so of Hamas. The Israeli government, though militarily superior, is politically cornered – forced to follow Washington’s script to retain its strategic cover. Hamas, though militarily weaker, is ideologically freer and less dependent. Mr. Trump’s style of muscular diplomacy, rooted in threats and transactionalism, may bring temporary calm, but it risks breeding long-term resentment in the region.

For Mr. Netanyahu, this moment is both humiliating and useful. It allows him to outsource the burden of peace to Mr. Trump while deflecting domestic anger over the war’s failures. Yet it also exposes how Israel’s sovereignty is tethered to American politics – a vulnerability that will deepen as U.S. elections draw nearer. In contrast, Hamas and its backers will exploit the optics of Israeli submission to foreign dictates.

Ultimately, Mr. Trump’s deal diplomacy may succeed in imposing a pause, but not peace. The asymmetry of power between Israel and Hamas cannot be resolved by American command alone. Stability in Gaza will demand something that Mr. Trump’s world view rarely accommodates – restraint, reconciliation, and regional ownership. And while Mr. Trump enjoys the image of a dealmaker, he might soon discover that in West Asia, even the best “deals” unravel once the cameras are gone.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Preventing accidents

It was painful to read about the road accidents in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan (Nov. 4). These accidents should open the eyes of our public

representatives. Highways, once considered as a mark of development, are often death traps. Speeding must be taken seriously and fined and CCTVs must be deployed to monitor

highways. Safety must take precedence over toll gate collections.  
**Kshirasagara Balaji Rao**  
Hyderabad

The train collision near

Bilaspur railway station in Chhattisgarh exposes the lack of poor safety measures. The Railway Ministry and the authorities should take the blame, since the focus is only on

modernisation and on introducing new trains. The priority should be on safety, but it sadly never seems to get due attention, despite these glaring accidents.  
**Balasubramaniam Pavani**

Secunderabad

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



## Lives saved, livelihoods lost

# Will the spoiler return?



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

**The rise in eye problems as smog grips national capital**

**60** In per cent. Delhi's toxic post-Deepavali smog has led to a 60% rise in eye-related ailments such as allergies, dryness, redness, and burning sensation. Ophthalmologists attributed the spike to prolonged exposure to particulate matter and chemical residues from fireworks. PTI

**Amount released to operate two iron ore mining blocks in Goa**

**400** In ₹ crore. Mine owners in Goa have welcomed the Union government's release of ₹400 crore as special assistance to operationalise two iron ore mining blocks, saying the funds will help boost infrastructure and promote sustainable mining. PTI

**Employees using artificial intelligence at work in India**

**92** In per cent. India has the highest artificial intelligence adoption rate in the Asia Pacific region, with 92% of employees using the technology at work, according to a report by the Boston Consulting Group. The regional average stands at 78%, ahead of the global average of 72%. PTI

**The increase in Spotify's paying subscribers**

**12** In per cent. Spotify reported 713 million active users by the end of the third quarter of 2025, with paying subscribers rising 12% to 281 million, the company said. Revenue grew 7% driven by strong subscriber growth despite a decline in advertising. Operating income rose 28% to 582 million euros. AFP

**Value of undeclared assets owned by an Uttar Pradesh DSP**

**100** In ₹ crore. Uttar Pradesh Police officer Rishikant Shukla, a Deputy Superintendent of Police, has been suspended following an inquiry triggered by an SIT probe that uncovered undeclared assets worth around ₹100 crore. PTI

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## How BRICS is challenging SWIFT

The BRICS grouping's motivation to challenge Western financial dominance is driven by a desire for greater financial sovereignty and reduced exposure to U.S. sanctions. However, navigating the maze of individual countries' ambitions with respect to their own payment systems could dent early progress towards this goal

ECONOMIC NOTES

Biswajit Dhar

For over a decade, the BRICS have taken a series of steps showing their increasing determination to reduce dependence on the dollar-dominated international financial system. The Fortaleza Summit in 2014 marked the beginning of this process with the grouping taking the initiative of setting up financial institutions to meet not only their needs but also of other developing countries. The New Development Bank, the BRICS' development bank, and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, their lender of last resort, was the first time developing countries had established financial institutions, until then, the exclusive preserve of advanced countries.

The following year, after the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia for deployment of its troops in Crimea, the BRICS grouping decided to explore the potential of expanding the use of their national currencies in inter se transactions. In 2017, the grouping agreed to communicate closely to enhance currency cooperation, including through currency swap, local currency settlement, and local currency direct investment. At the turn of the decade, the grouping agreed to set up the BRICS Payments Task Force to develop systems to facilitate transactions between member countries. This step seemed to come together at the Kazan Summit in 2024 wherein BRICS leaders underscored the importance of "strengthening of correspondent banking networks within BRICS and enabling settlements in local currencies in line with BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative".

Challenging status quo

The BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative, or BRICS Pay is the most concrete step that the grouping has taken to explore the possibility of reducing their dependence on the "SWIFT network", the messaging system used by over 11,000



New currency: The plenary session of the 16th BRICS summit, in Kazan, Russia on October 23, 2024. ANI

banks and financial institutions worldwide for international money transfers, and which is controlled by the G-10 central banks. BRICS' motivation to challenge Western financial dominance is driven by a desire for greater financial sovereignty and reduced exposure to U.S. sanctions. The decision to include Iran in the grouping in 2024, a country that has long faced similar sanctions, lent further relevance to this objective. However, the development that attracted most attention was the symbolic step taken by the BRICS during the Kazan summit to unveil a BRICS banknote. This symbolic move ignited discussions about the intent of emerging economies to move away from the dominance of the dollar. This was especially so since it raised the hackles of the then President-elect Donald Trump who threatened to impose

100% tariffs on members of the grouping if they were to "create a new BRICS currency, [or] back any other currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar".

Building BRICS Pay

Amid these developments, the possibility that holds out maximum promise is BRICS Pay. This sentiment was reflected in the grouping's Rio Summit Declaration earlier in the year wherein they "agreed to continue the discussion on the BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative, and [acknowledged] the progress made by the BRICS Payment Task Force (BPTF) in identifying possible pathways to support the continuation of discussions on the potential for greater interoperability of BRICS payment systems".

Clearly, BRICS is in a good position to develop a new financial network. Besides

the strong motivation to bypass the dollar-dominated system and avoid Western sanctions, these countries have the necessary infrastructure to put in place BRICS Pay. The Russian System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS), the Chinese Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Brazil's Pix system are well-equipped to support the proposed network. Of course, the interoperability of these systems is essential for creating a cohesive BRICS-led payment infrastructure that can rival SWIFT in scope and reliability, albeit within a more limited geographic and political bloc.

A prototype demonstration of BRICS Pay was unveiled in Moscow in October 2024, marking an important landmark in the project's progress. Expectedly, Russia is most enthusiastic about this project, but the remaining original BRICS nations seem to be more circumspect because of interests in promoting their own platforms globally. India's UPI is accepted in nine countries, but is yet to find acceptance within BRICS. China's increasing clout in the international financial system and the prominence its currency (the RMB) has received after it was included in the basket of currencies making up the Special Drawing Right has increased the acceptance of CIPS, which currently has participants in more than 120 countries, including all BRICS members with the exception of India. Brazil's Pix system, introduced in 2020 and operated by the country's central bank, is used across several Latin American countries. While navigating through the maze of ambitions of individual countries to promote their own payment systems could dent the progress towards an early realisation of BRICS Pay, Mr. Trump's aggressive intent, particularly against members of the grouping, could force them into a political understanding towards launching their payment system, sooner than expected.

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THE GIST

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The BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative, or BRICS Pay is the most concrete step that the grouping has taken to explore the possibility of reducing their dependence on the "SWIFT network", the messaging system used by over 11,000 banks and financial institutions worldwide for international money transfers.

A prototype demonstration of BRICS Pay was unveiled in Moscow in October 2024, marking an important landmark in the project's progress.

## What is the TLP challenge for the Pakistan government?

How did the Tehreek-i-Labbaik emerge? Why has the Pakistan government banned the party?

Brighty Ann Sarah  
Preetha. R

The story so far:

In October 23, for the second time in five years, Pakistan has proscribed the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a political party, supported by the Barelvīs in the Punjab province.

Who are the TLP?

The TLP is a far-right Islamist party founded in 2017 by Bareli cleric Khadim Hussain Rizvi, drawing support from Pakistan's Sunni Bareli community. The party started by organising around the conviction of Mumtaz Qadri. Qadri had assassinated Punjab governor Salman Taseer over opposing blasphemy laws. Qadri's supporters, mostly Barelvīs, hailed him as a martyr for defending Islam. The TLP gained prominence demanding his release and leading

protests after his execution. The party rose with its hardline defence of blasphemy laws, demand for Sharia-based governance, and opposition to Western influence and minority rights.

In the 2018 elections, the TLP won 2.2 million votes, becoming the fifth-largest party. Later that year, it led nationwide protests against Asia Bibi's (who was arrested on blasphemy charges) acquittal, challenging the verdict and reinforcing its image as a staunch defender of religious causes. In 2020, the TLP led large-scale protests against France over blasphemous caricatures and secured a government deal to expel the French ambassador and boycott French products.

How did the TLP rise to fame?

The TLP's rhetoric on populist issues has centred on blasphemy. Following Mumtaz Qadri's execution, the party mobilised around widespread outrage caused by the execution. Leveraging mosque networks,

social media outreach, and street mobilisation, it rapidly consolidated support among Punjab's Bareli populace, and urban, middle and lower-middle classes in Sindh. Financial backing from Bareli businessmen and clerics strengthened its organisational capacity. Even though there were efforts earlier as well to politically mobilise Bareli support, the TLP focussed its mobilisation on emotionally charged issues like blasphemy. This approach resonated strongly among lower- and middle-income Bareli mosque-goers especially in Punjab, enabling the group to achieve wider grassroots appeal and durable mass mobilisation. Thus, TLP transformed into a dominant politico-religious force capable of pressuring governments.

One of the TLP's greatest strengths lies in grassroot organisation and the ability to sustain large, disruptive protests that paralyse urban centres, pressure state

institutions, and amplify its religious agenda. The party's ability to sustain protests for prolonged periods stems from its dedicated cadre, financial support from followers, and exploitation of public sentiment on sensitive religious issues. TLP's street power thus remains a persistent challenge to curbing their impact, compelling state negotiations while amplifying religious extremism.

Moreover, the government's position on the TLP has never been consistent; it has swung between coercion, including arrests and bans, and compromise through policy concessions and lifting restrictions. Neither approach has sustainably weakened the TLP – coercion often escalates violence, while compromise signals state vulnerability.

What next?

For Pakistan, a ban may provide immediate containment but is unlikely to yield long-term results. Sustained enforcement and political commitment are critical to prevent cycles of unrest. Given the TLP's popular and electoral support, an outright ban risks alienating constituents and complicating monitoring. A calibrated, law-based approach rather than reactive suppression is thus necessary.

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THE GIST

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## Freebies unplugged

*Bihar poll promises smack of fiscal irresponsibility*

**As elections draw near, parties in the fray outdo each other in making crazy promises — of jobs, cash transfers or free power. Bihar is no different; and the two formations locked in combat — the Mahagathbandan led by the Rasthtriya Janata Dal and Congress and the National Democratic Alliance led by the BJP and Janata Dal (United) — have promised to turn what is perhaps India’s poorest State into an El Dorado in double quick time.**



The questions that arise are: where is the money; and is it being spent to address basic issues of the State? Their promises are similar, with their focus on women and ‘extremely backward classes’; the latter accounts for 30 per cent of the population. The NDA has promised to create one crore jobs, one crore lakhpati didis (women in self help groups), financial assistance of up to ₹10 lakh for EBCs; three cash transfers to farmers in a year totalling ₹9,000; two cash transfers to fishermen annually of ₹4,500 each; free power up to 125 units; free medical treatment up to ₹5 lakh; life insurance of up to ₹4 lakh for auto and taxi drivers; monthly stipend of ₹2,000 to SC students, among others. It has also promised development of highways and airports. The Mahagathbandan, not to be outdone, has promised one government job per family; implementation of old pension scheme; turning SHG workers (Jeevika didis) into government employees with a salary of ₹30,000 a month; a monthly stipend of ₹2,500 to all women; free electricity up to 200 units; free life insurance up to ₹25 lakh; and more. It has promised to set up district hospitals, industry clusters, expressways, a 2,000- acre education city and women’s colleges in every district.

Unconditional cash transfer schemes have exploded across the country. These cash transfers, researchers have shown, accounted for over ₹2.8 lakh crore in FY25, with States alone doling out ₹2.11 lakh crore. About a decade ago, in FY16, States spent just above ₹3,600 crore in this way. The best yardstick of judging welfare schemes is whether they build long term human capital. Transfers to women perhaps do work here, while free power, or free distribution of consumer goods do not. Likewise, free education and health are important, for which higher outlays are desirable. To make such investments possible, the rash of cash transfer schemes needs to be reviewed.

But in the fever of competitive populism, the fiscal constraint is forgotten. As of now, Bihar’s fiscal deficit and debt-to-GSDP ratio are barely in line with the national average; but its revenue-to-capex spending ratio as well as its R&D expenditure leave much to be desired. The former, at 7.7, is above the national average of 6, while the latter at ₹7 crore in FY25 is unspeakably poor. Investment in education is critical to curtail early migration. But promises to create jobs out of thin air create false expectations, especially in the absence of an economic plan. Finally, in the din and dust of poll promises, the real needs of the people are often left unaddressed.

## POCKET



# Building India’s semiconductor equipment ecosystem

**TECH SECURITY.** A three-stage roadmap to achieve self sufficiency in this critical sector within 15 years



VIPIN SONDHI  
THULASI RAMAN KH

**I**ndia’s semiconductor ambition has gained momentum; from foundry announcements to packaging facilities and design-linked incentives. Yet, the strategic backbone of any chip ecosystem remains underdeveloped; which is equipment manufacturing. The machines that etch, deposit, polish and test semiconductors are where true technological sovereignty lies. If India can develop even a focused segment of these tools, it will move from being a consumer of global technology to a credible co-creator in the trillion-dollar semiconductor race. For a nation aspiring for Atmanirbharta in technology, this is a critical gap that must be bridged.

The US-China chip rivalry has redrawn global supply chains. “Friendshoring”, i.e. relocating production to trusted democracies, offers India a unique opening to emerge as a trusted equipment partner. China’s experience shows the scale of the challenge, even after two decades of investment, remains ‘below 10 per cent self-sufficient’ in advanced machine tool making. Mastering semiconductor equipment is a long game that demands deep R&D in plasma physics, optics, vacuum systems, robotics and mechatronics.

### THE MISSING LINK

Our semiconductor journey has begun well. The India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) and Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme, along with anchor projects such as Tata-PSMC’s announced logic fab and Micron’s ATMP facility in Gujarat, will create the country’s first large-scale demand for domestically made machine tools. At the same time, our solar PV industry is scaling rapidly, driven by domestic manufacturing mandates. PV and semiconductors share several process steps — crystal growth, wafering, deposition and inspection — enabling us to build common manufacturing platforms that serve

both industries. This twin pathway can catalyse machine tool making faster than either sector alone.

### A THREE-STAGE ROADMAP

We could aspire to achieve 70 per cent self-reliance in packaging equipment, 60 per cent in PV and power-semiconductor tools and 30 per cent in mature-logic machine tools (28 nm and above) within 15 years, for which target policy continuity and significant private sector investment are pre-requisites.

**Stage One: Foundation for Equipment Capability (0-3 years):** Our journey must begin with Stage One tools — deposition, etching, cleaning and inspection equipment used in assembly, test, marking and packaging (ATMP) and photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing. These are technologically accessible domains where India’s precision-engineering base can deliver results in three years.

Existing capabilities in vacuum systems, motion control, plasma power and process chambers can be unified under a national platform approach, supported by common standards and test protocols. Our CSIR labs, SAMEER (Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering and Research, under MeitY) and SSPL (Solid State Physics Laboratory, under DRDO) already possess critical know-how in these areas but need translational partners from industry to turn prototypes into production grade tools.

**Stage Two: Engineering the ecosystem (3-7 years):** A successful toolmaking sector depends not just on design brilliance but on an integrated supply-chain ecosystem. Precision machining firms, vacuum component suppliers, robotics integrators and control-system designers must work in tandem through structured consortia. A proposed National Semiconductor Equipment Mission (NSEM) could

**Machine-tool making for the semiconductor industry is not merely import substitution; it is an entry ticket to the world’s most knowledge-intensive value chain**

coordinate this effort; bringing together academic research clusters, MSMEs and OEMs. The mission should co-fund joint pilot lines where academia leads innovation while industry leads manufacturability. Japan’s TEL-University partnerships and Korea’s SEMES-Samsung collaborations demonstrate that shared testbeds and co-development roadmaps can sharply reduce time-to-market and improve reliability metrics.

**Stage Three: Strategic depth and defence synergy (7-12+ years):** In parallel, we must deepen materials and process research for the next generation of semiconductor tools, particularly in wide-bandgap semiconductors (SiC, GaN) and compound materials. Institutions like IIT Madras, IISc Bengaluru and IIT Bombay can be paired with SAMEER and SSPL to create technology bridges between defence and civilian applications.

Such potential dual-use R&D is not new. The US defence semiconductor base catalysed entire commercial ecosystems around MEMS, lasers and sensors. DRDO and other strategic R&D programmes can play a catalytic role in translating defence research into civilian manufacturing opportunity.

### A CALL TO PRIVATE SECTOR

While the government has taken decisive steps through the ISM and DLI schemes, private sector participation remains limited, barring a few leaders like the Tatas. It is time for large Indian conglomerates — in engineering, capital goods and process automation — to seize this moment.

Machine-tool making for the semiconductor industry is not merely import substitution; it is an entry ticket to the world’s most knowledge-intensive value chain, where precision, reliability and innovation intersect. With our strengths in software, design and manufacturing, our firms are uniquely placed to create AI-assisted, digitally monitored, energy-efficient tool platforms that can leapfrog legacy architectures.

Sectors like automotive, heavy engineering and electronics already use high-precision CNC, robotics and control systems. By redirecting their R&D talent toward semiconductor toolmaking, these companies can carve a niche in plasma etch tools, metrology

systems and wafer-handling robotics, even before the fabs come online.

### THE EXPORT EDGE

Once validated domestically, Indian-made tools can serve the Global South — South-East Asia, the Middle East and Africa — where electronics and solar manufacturing are expanding rapidly but affordable equipment is scarce. Export-credit guarantees and technology diplomacy can position India as a trusted toolmaking ally for emerging economies seeking technology sovereignty.

To build credibility in global markets, we should focus on AI-assisted tool design, predictive maintenance and remote monitoring, areas where its digital strength outshines traditional hardware leaders. Start-ups and design houses can partner with public R&D centres to create ‘digital twins’ of equipment, enabling faster optimisation and virtual testing before fabrication.

Additionally, standards and certification will be key. We must align its tool design and control software with SEMI/GEM standards so that its products are globally interoperable.

### WAY FORWARD

The next steps are immediate and actionable. About 10 capable Indian OEMs could be convened around three Stage-One tool families to establish common SEMI/GEM conformance requirements and RAM (reliability, availability, maintainability) metrics while aligning on shared subsystems. Pilot slots must be secured with Micron-ATMP, Tata-PSMC and two major PV giga-fabs for 2026–27 installations, supported by milestone-based payments that de-risk early adoption.

If we follow this roadmap with discipline and persistence, the dream of building an indigenous semiconductor equipment ecosystem will no longer be distant. It will become a story of resilience, innovation and strategic autonomy; one that allows us not just to participate in the trillion dollar semiconductor revolution, but to shape its direction.

Sondhi is former MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland & JCB India; Raman is Principal Research Scientist, Society for Innovation and Development, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Views are personal

# A deep dive into new MF norms’ impact

SEBI’s objective is to boost transparency and cut costs for investors. Brokerages could be hit more than AMCs

## bl.explainer

Suresh P Iyengar

**What are the proposed changes in TER structure proposed by SEBI?** Prior to 2012, mutual funds (MFs) were allowed to charge an exit load to the scheme. The charges collected were used by asset management companies (AMCs) for payment of distributors’ commission and other marketing/selling expenses.

Later, MFs were mandated to credit exit load to the scheme and AMCs were allowed to charge 20 basis points (bps) as additional expense to the scheme. The additional charge, was reduced from 20 bps to 5 bps in 2018.

The provision for additional expense of 5 bps was transitory in nature and now SEBI plans to remove it. However, to reduce the impact of the proposed change on AMCs, the Total Expense Ratio (TER) has been increased by 5 bps for first two slabs of open-ended equity schemes.

For assets under management (AUM) up to ₹500 crore, MFs can charge 2.5 per cent for active funds and 2 per cent for passive funds, and between ₹500 crore and ₹700 crore of AUM the TER is fixed

at 2 per cent and 1.75 per cent for passive funds.

However, the TER reduces across three other slabs as AUM grows. The move will hit fund houses with large AUM than smaller ones.

### What are the changes in brokerage fees?

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed to tighten the limits on Brokerage and Transaction charges. AMCs are allowed to charge brokerage and transaction up to 0.12 per cent of trade value in cash market transactions and 0.05 per cent on derivatives transactions.

SEBI said the brokerage paid by AMCs for arbitrage funds is generally lower than that of other schemes. The high brokerage charges on non-arbitrage funds can be attributed to services other than trade execution, which may include research. Due to such bundled service arrangements, investors may often end up paying twice for the research under TER, and management and advisory fees.

So, to protect investors’ interests, SEBI plans to reduce the brokerage charges from 12 bps to 2 bps for cash market transactions and 5 bps to 1 bps for derivative transactions. All other



SEBI. Transparent move ISTOCK.COM

costs for execution of transaction and statutory may be charged on actual basis.

### How will these changes impact AMCs and brokers?

A reduction in TER will hit profit margin of AMCs and force them to reduce expenses. The move is expected to reduce TER by 15-20 bps across schemes and this will straight away add to investors’ returns. Brokerages will be more impacted by this than the fund houses. However, the sharp growth in AUM may lead to more trading and higher income for brokerages. They can also minimise the impact on margins by adding research as a separate service and charge for it separately.

**From an investors’ perspective, what will be the impact of lower TER on ₹1 lakh investment in equity schemes?**

The SEBI has proposed a direct cut of 15 bps across the existing slabs for equity schemes. For instance, the current TER for equity schemes with an AUM above ₹50,000 crore is 1.05 per cent, which under the new proposal would be reduced to 0.90 per cent, marking a 15-bps drop.

In addition, SEBI has proposed to remove the extra 5 bps that AMCs were previously allowed to charge investors on exit loads.

Overall, we can expect an effective TER reduction of 15-20 bps, plus 10 bps from lower transaction costs. For example, a ₹1,00,000 investment with a 1 per cent TER (₹1,000) could now cost around ₹800-₹850. AMCs are still currently evaluating the overall impact, said Vinayak Magotra, Product Head & Founding Team at Centricity WealthTech.

**Why has SEBI made the changes ?** The SEBI’s move aims to simplify rules, boost transparency and lower overall costs for unit holders. The proposals target to promote ease of compliance and to bring regulatory clarity.

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

### They came, toiled and won

This refers to the Editorial “Real gamechanger” (November 4). Both the history and victory of the women’s cricket team in the World Cup will motivate more girls to make it part of their career aspirations. Unlike men’s cricket in India where players are worshipped, Indian women cricketers were the object of neglect and even ridicule. Former players like Diana Edulji, Mithali Raj and Jhulan Goswami had to combat male bias before they succeeded in winning a modicum of respect for the

women’s team. Harmanpreet Kaur and her team have cemented this respect and adulation. They deserve to be recompensed commensurate with their purpose, persistence and perseverance.

**YG Chouksey**  
Pune

### Crucial amendments

With reference to the article “Banking law amendment streamlines succession” (November 4), the amendment in banking laws, covering more simultaneous and successive

nominees in respect of bank fixed deposits, and lockers, would ease the burden of clients, and avoid succession related disputes among the family members. The new regulation also provides for making changes of nominees at his wish during his lifetime and inform the bank to make necessary recordings and amend the nominee registration with substitutes. To strengthen the relief further, bank clients are to be educated, to incorporate the nominee clauses by the executant of wills, that would fast track dispute resolution.

Nominee has the utmost fiduciary responsibility, to realise, hold and distribute the assets to the legal heirs of the depositor, unbiased and in case of any dispute between the legal heirs and the nominee, the dispute resolution would be subject to civil jurisdiction.

**Sitaram Popuri**  
Bengaluru

### Cardamom scarcity

With reference to the news report with reference to Idukki (November 4), cardamom is a sensitive crop

vulnerable to pest attacks and grows only under favourable weather conditions, which has become unpredictable. Irrigation is a major prerequisite. Farmers, once leaders in cardamom cultivation in Sakaleshpur region, have switched over to other crops in view of high harvest cost. Spice board must promote its cultivation by production-linked incentives failing which India may have to import cardamom.

**Rajiv Magal**  
Halekere Village (Karnataka)



# What Bihar’s voters need

Policies that aid long-term growth, and not freebies

Subhash Misra

As Bihar heads towards its Assembly election, a chorus of promises fills the air. The ruling coalition has promised 125 units of free electricity to every household from August 2025. The opposition, led by Tejashwi Yadav, went a step further, pledging 200 free units and a government job for one person in every family.

To many, these offers sound irresistible as they touch everyday realities. But as the race to outdo each other gathers pace, it’s worth asking what these giveaways mean for Bihar’s future.

India’s culture of election-time freebies is not a new phenomenon. It began with subsidised rice and television sets in southern States and has since become a nationwide strategy. The logic is simple: give immediate relief, win trust, and perhaps, votes. Yet, the economic cost of this competition is rising. States like Bihar, which rely heavily on Central transfers and have limited tax capacity, face even tighter constraints. Every free unit of electricity and every cash dole eventually come from the same public purse that must also fund schools, hospitals, and roads.

## SERIOUS TRADE-OFF

Critics warn of a trap. When governments spend heavily on subsidies, they often postpone investments that could generate jobs and income in the long run. For Bihar, a State still struggling with industrialisation and persistent migration, this trade-off is serious.

There is also the question of efficiency. In the past, welfare delivery was plagued by leakages — nearly 40 per cent of food subsidies failed to reach the poor, according to earlier studies. Recent improvements through Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) have reduced waste and saved the government an estimated ₹3.5 lakh crore nationally. However, Bihar still has ground to cover in ensuring that support reaches the truly needy rather than being distributed as a political equaliser.

This doesn’t mean welfare is bad, far from it. Schemes like MGNREGS, pensions for the elderly, and scholarships for students have offered real protection. But there’s a difference between essential welfare and populist giveaways. Welfare builds security; freebies buy time. The challenge for Bihar is to design policies that protect



SUPPORT. Must reach the needy

without creating dependence — to move from handouts to handhods.

That shift begins with investing in people. Bihar’s youth — one of India’s youngest populations — need skills, access to credit, and confidence more than anything else. The State’s vocational programmes and microenterprise initiatives remain too small to meet the scale of demand. Expanding these could yield better results than one-time gifts. Similarly, targeted subsidies for health and education have a greater impact on long-term growth than free electricity, which benefits everyone, including the rich and the poor alike.

Fiscal prudence, too, must return to the conversation. When budgets are stretched thin by subsidies, the State borrows more, leaving less money for capital spending. That, in turn, slows job creation — the very issue politicians claim to address with giveaways. The promise of government jobs for all, made in many campaigns, may please audiences, but it’s neither fiscally possible nor economically productive without private-sector expansion.

Voters, too, have a role. They can ask sharper questions: Will this promise last beyond the election? Who will pay for it? Does it create opportunity or just relief? In recent years, Bihar’s electorate has shown a growing appetite for accountability. “We want jobs, not just electricity,” said a young graduate in Gaya. “If we earn, we’ll pay our own bills.”

Ultimately, the debate is not about whether welfare should exist — it must. It is about what kind of welfare creates dignity and growth. Bihar’s next government, whichever party leads it, faces a defining but straightforward choice: to keep voters dependent on short-term gifts, or to empower them to stand on their own feet.

The writer is Social Protection Advisor and former UN Policy Lead

## THE WIDER ANGLE.



PARAN BALAKRISHNAN

President Donald Trump has just handed China a huge prize on a platter — one that they should have had to fight for much harder.

At last week’s summit in South Korea, Trump met Chinese President Xi Jinping for what both sides described as a “meeting of equals”, a dramatic reversal from the trade-war hostility of recent months.

“Fundamentally, the most important progress for both sides is for the US to recognise China as an equal partner to talk about things,” David Daokui Li, a policy advisor to Beijing, told Bloomberg. For China, that statement is a diplomatic jackpot. For the US, it could be a historic strategic blunder.

Where does that leave everyone else? That’s the ringing question doing the rounds, particularly in New Delhi, Tokyo and Canberra. It was already crystal clear there wasn’t going to be a Quad summit in Delhi. Even if one had taken place, Trump wasn’t going to turn up. And the Quad was aimed squarely at countering China’s growing assertiveness.

Does Trump’s handshake with Xi signal something profound — that the world’s two largest economies may now be preparing to divide global influence, just as the US and the Soviet Union did during the Cold War, except this time, China will be the dominant force in Asia?

And where will that leave us if China flexes its muscles in Ladakh and other parts of the High Himalayas?

Alternatively, will the Quad be reborn with the Philippines taking India’s place if we’re seriously out of favour in Washington? After all, the Philippines may have fewer and smaller ships. But sitting astride key sea lanes in the South China Sea, it may be better placed as a frontline partner to block China’s navy and give Washington tactical leverage. The message to allies is blunt: under Trump, American commitments are negotiable or even forgettable.

Trump and Xi have even agreed to “work together” to end the Russia-Ukraine war, a move that again puts Beijing on the same diplomatic pedestal as Washington and is a task only superpowers can credibly undertake.



REUTERS

# The day Trump made Xi his equal

From trade foes to power partners, China gets everything it wanted from Washington without a fight

After steadily playing catch-up with the US for the last two decades, China’s rise isn’t just diplomatic. It’s industrial, technological and strategic. Now it’s overtaking the US in one industry after another. Take biotechnology, one of the 21st-century’s most crucial industries. Beijing’s fast, flexible regulatory system and laxer clinical trial norms make it cheaper and quicker to bring drugs to market than in the US or Europe.

American firms have taken notice. China now runs more clinical drug trials than the US, and Western firms are pouring in money. A once-yearly asthma drug developed in China was bought by US firms Bain Capital Life Sciences and

Atlas Venture for \$245 million, only for GSK to acquire it a few months later for \$400 million. The numbers are increasing in other impressive ways. Between 2017 and 2024, Chinese biopharma companies increased their global market share from 5 per cent to 16 per cent, while their share of global biotech venture capital climbed from 4 per cent to 19 per cent in just a decade.

That’s not just growth, it’s a power shift.

## DANGEROUSLY EXPOSED

What about Taiwan? The small self-governing island can have little doubt Trump would drop them in a heartbeat if it suited his purposes. He doesn’t worry overly about treaties and dumping allies, which could leave Taiwan dangerously exposed.

China is clearly poised to overhaul all its global competitors in biopharmaceuticals. China is already racing along the highway with its electric vehicle industry, which is the world’s largest. The US and other European

countries are gaining ground but have a long way to go. China’s solar manufacturers dominate global production, supplying panels at a scale unmatched by any Western competitor.

Many believe wealth and power will shift in the 21st century from Europe to Asia. And China is the giant sitting above everyone else in Asia. Only India has the demographic size and scientific know-how to possibly challenge that narrative, but it will have to navigate a landscape where Washington’s reliability is seriously in question..

Trump’s outreach to Xi strategically hands Beijing exactly what it wants: parity with Washington, legitimacy as a global power broker and freedom to consolidate its influence across Asia. China is no longer just the world’s factory, it’s becoming the world’s laboratory, engine and diplomatic nerve centre. By treating Xi as an equal, Trump has done more to accelerate that transformation than any Chinese leader could have hoped for. It may turn out to be his most consequential mistake.

## STATISTALK.

Compiled by Dhurairvel Gunasekaran | Graphic Visveswaran V

### Exit load, TER reforms could recast AMC margins

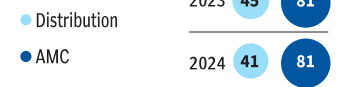
The key proposals from SEBI’s latest consultation paper include the removal of the 5-bps exit load, revised expense ratio slabs excluding statutory levies, and tighter caps on brokerage fees. A Kotak Institutional Equities report analyses a few pertinent aspects related to AMC financials. As per the report, if AMCs were to absorb the entire impact of the 5-bps exit load removal, revenues could decline by around 5% and core PBT by around 9-12%. The creation of new TER slabs below 15 bps could also result in lower distribution commissions for select large funds. Key findings:

#### Draft TER proposal is around 15 bps lower than current TER

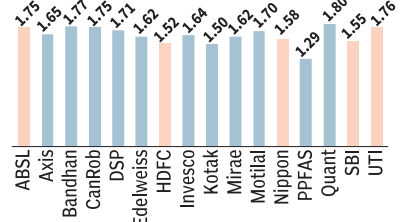
History of expense ratio regulations and current proposal

Old TER regime (pre 2018)				Current TER regime (post 2018)				Proposed reduction			
Fund AUM (₹ billion)	TER (%)	Effective TER (%)		Fund AUM (₹ billion)	TER (%)	Effective TER (%)		Fund AUM (₹ billion)	TER (%)	Effective TER (%)	Difference in Eff. TER (%)
1	2.50	2.50		5	2.25	2.25		5	2.10	2.10	(0.15)
4	2.25	2.31		7.5	2.00	2.17		7.5	1.90	2.03	(0.14)
5	2.00	2.25		20	1.75	1.91		20	1.60	1.76	(0.15)
7	2.00	2.18		50	1.60	1.72		50	1.45	1.58	(0.15)
7.5	1.75	2.15		100	1.50	1.61		100	1.35	1.46	(0.15)
10	1.50	1.90		150	1.45	1.56		150	1.30	1.41	(0.15)
20	1.75	1.81		200	1.40	1.52		200	1.25	1.37	(0.15)
50	1.75	1.81		250	1.35	1.48		250	1.20	1.34	(0.15)
100	1.75	1.78		300	1.30	1.45		300	1.15	1.30	(0.15)
150	1.75	1.78		350	1.25	1.42		350	1.10	1.28	(0.14)
200	1.75	1.77		400	1.20	1.40		400	1.05	1.25	(0.15)
250	1.75	1.76		450	1.15	1.37		450	1.00	1.22	(0.15)
300	1.75	1.76		500	1.10	1.34		500	0.95	1.19	(0.15)
350	1.75	1.76		550	1.05	1.32		550	0.90	1.17	(0.15)

Top 10 AMCs dominate revenue share, indicating industry consolidation



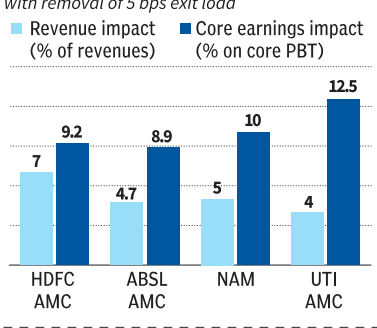
#### Direct TERs vary significantly across AMCs



Source: Kotak Institutional Equities TER refers to Total Expense Ratio

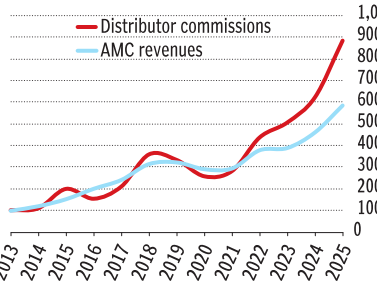
#### 9-12% impact on core PBT, if fully absorbed by AMCs

Impact on core revenue and core PBT with removal of 5 bps exit load



#### Distributors’ income outpaces AMC revenues

Imbalance in MF value chain: SEBI targets fix via TER and cost reforms



## thehindubusinessline.

### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

November 5, 2005

#### FDI in retail sector may take more time

The proposed opening up of the retail trade sector to foreign direct investment (FDI) is likely to be delayed till at least early next year. Senior Ministers in the Manmohan Singh Government said that the concerns of the Left parties on this issue would be addressed once the exact formulation is worked out and the final policy would be announced after that.

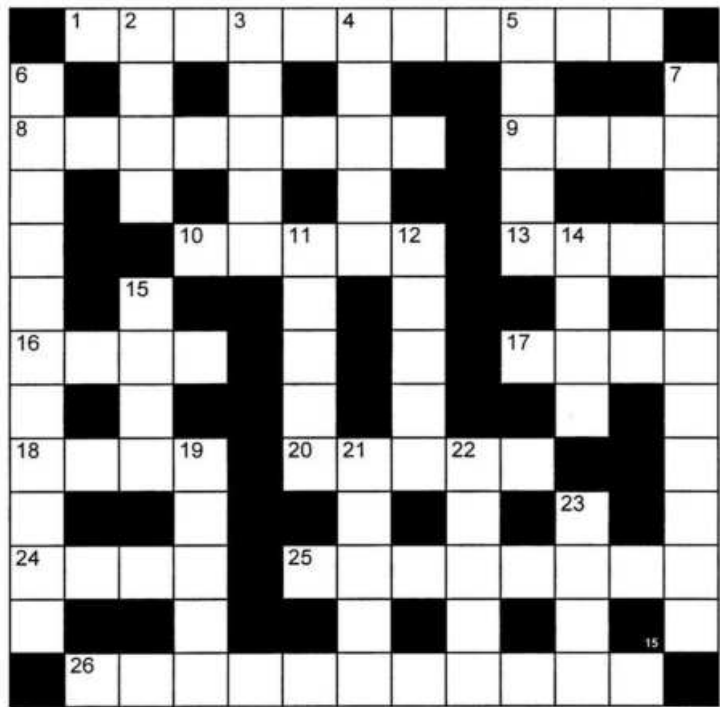
#### US Senate clears proposal to hike H-1B visa limit

A proposal to increase the allotment of H-1B visas has crossed another hurdle, with the US Senate clearing a provision approved by Senate Judiciary Committee for hiking the visa limit by 30,000. However, the US House of Representatives does not have a similar provision before it, and therefore the two sides will need to meet to arrive at a consensus.

#### Cos with Indian accounting norms can list on LSE

Indian companies can now get listed on London Stock Exchange by reporting their financial results based on Indian accounting standards. Until now, these companies had to report in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standards. The move aims at attracting more Indian listing on LSE.

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2817



## EASY

### ACROSS

- 16th century church revolution (11)
- Has regard for (8)
- Look sullen, scowl (4)
- A muffler (5)
- Disable, mutilate (4)
- A donkey (4)
- Destroy by fire (4)
- Knocks gently (4)
- Stanchion for mountaineering (5)
- Republic of Ireland (4)
- Orchestral work with soloist (8)
- Exhibit by practical means (11)

### DOWN

- Not difficult (4)
- Acid used in soap (5)
- An engine (5)
- Mohammedan world (5)
- It sends radio signals (11)
- Feeling that something will happen (11)
- Fable teller (5)
- Number of ships, vehicles (5)
- Compound with a trivalent metal (4)
- Jump with a rope (4)
- Water vapour (5)
- Presses; metal clubs (5)
- To happen (5)
- Raw, unsweetened (champagne) (4)

## NOT SO EASY

### ACROSS

- Religious upheaval made in a Rome fort (11)
- Particular details one shows consideration for (8)
- Look threatening to do fifty or make a u-turn (4)
- A joint that may get worn around the neck (5)
- Cripple one from Miami after one leaves (4)
- In me, the go-ahead is given to a donkey (4)
- Brooke, by the sound of it, a singular Scottish poet (4)
- Knocks signal lights out (4)
- Absence of gratuity on return may help a climber (5)
- Country that is backed by Rome first and last (4)
- Prom has nothing more to offer than solo work with orchestra (8)
- A devil treats it differently, as it will show (11)

### DOWN

- Otherwise get a yes on the street of affluence (4)
- Company upset about the French having one sort of acid (5)
- Use car for its test to get the gold (5)
- The Muslim world is maladjusted to it (5)
- It sends a signal that will start term in disorder (11)
- Presentment that will get the Mini prone to development (11)
- Teller of fables gave up the main work to follow it (5)
- The ships that run away as tyranny begins (5)
- A chemical compound produced in a chimney in Scotland (4)
- Captain of the rink will not read it all the way through (4)
- Energy one needed to get up, training (5)
- Clubs in which wrongdoers may have been clapped (5)
- How it will happen to come into one’s mind (5)
- Champagne, when very dry, can be no end of a beast (4)

### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2816

ACROSS 1. Sandwich 4. Over 8. Lob 9. Drake 10. Rim 11. Creased 12. Crown 13. Malapropism 17. Fight 18. Written 20. Owe 21. Eagle 22. Aim 23. Duty 24. Interpol

DOWN 1. Solace 2. Noble 3. Chard 5. Various 6. Remand 7. Perceptive 9. Dismantled 14. Augment 15. Afford 16. Animal 18. Wagon 19. Tramp





OPINION

The  
Hindustan Times  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Rethinking  
nuclear tests

Trump’s remarks raise questions about the global regulatory regime. India must be ready for all options

US President Donald Trump’s remark expressing intent to resume testing of nuclear weapons after a gap of at least three decades has reopened a debate on such tests and the effectiveness of the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and has been perceived in some quarters as bordering on the irresponsible. During an interview, Trump claimed that secret testing by China, Russia, North Korea and Pakistan is reason enough for the US to resume the detonation of nuclear devices to test their efficacy. CIA director John Ratcliffe has reiterated US assessments that Russia and China were carrying out low-yield nuclear tests. As the leader of the most powerful country in the world, what Trump says will be taken seriously, though China’s foreign ministry has denied his claim that the country has secretly tested nuclear weapons.

Since CTBT came into force, only India, Pakistan and North Korea — which have not signed on to the treaty — have conducted tests. The US last tested nuclear weapons in 1992, China and France in 1996, and the Soviet Union in 1990, though Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke in 2023 about the possibility of resuming nuclear tests. The US has never ratified CTBT, while Russia revoked its ratification in 2023, leaving the treaty ineffectual at a time when Cold War-era arms control mechanisms have been repeatedly diluted by Moscow and Washington. If Trump’s move provokes the start of testing by China and Pakistan, India will need to rethink its own self-imposed moratorium put in place after the nuclear tests of 1998. China and Pakistan have expanded their nuclear arsenals, forcing India to keep pace with the rapidly growing number of warheads in its neighbourhood. The main purpose of testing is validating design of weapons and calibrating them, especially given the transition to a new generation of tactical devices and miniaturised warheads. These were developed amid the worldwide moratorium, leading to discussions even within India about the need to keep the door open for tests to validate their reliability.

The international framework that controlled testing was a deeply discriminatory framework imposed by the West after it had acquired a substantial stockpile, to prevent countries such as India from becoming nuclear powers, but any new round of nuclear tests will lead to its collapse. Trump’s policy pivot may help give the push for a new regime to replace the CTBT but it could also kickstart a new nuclear arms race. India must be prepared for all options.

A cricket success, also a  
story of empowerment

Cricket ceased to be a gentleman’s game long ago. It’s played by men, but, it is as much a woman’s sport today. India’s Class of 2025 announced that loud and clear Sunday midnight, as their infectious joy on winning the World Cup was beamed into homes across the country. It has been compared to the 1983 moment for men’s cricket in India, when Kapil’s Devils stormed Lord’s and defeated an all-time great West Indian side. The euphoria of the ‘83 win, in a country where the only previous world champion was Ajit Pal Singh’s hockey team of 1975, kick-started cricket’s transformation into a mass sport. The 1987 World Cup, played at home, telecast nationwide and packaged as entertainment, was truly the moment cricket transcended its elite, metro origins and began to find fans outside the big cities. The IPL was the culmination of that journey when cricket turned into an aspiration sport, a ticket out of rural misery and urban poverty, for many starty-eyed young people.

Harmanpreet Kaur’s Class of 2025 illustrates this story even better. Kaur is from Moga, Punjab, and her deputy, Smriti Mandhana, hails from Sangli, a small town in western Maharashtra’s sugar belt. There’s Kranti Gaud from Ghuwara, Uma Chetry from Golaghat, Shree Charani from Kadapa, and Richa Ghosh from Siliguri. Mumbai and Delhi, and state capitals such as Dehradun, Chandigarh, Shimla and Hyderabad are represented, but the team is more a microcosm of India’s geographical spread and economic diversity. The players represent the hopes of single mothers and rural families that scraped out resources to ensure that their wards got to live out their dreams. This transformation of cricket as a pan-Indian, class-agnostic sport is an empowering story that calls for celebration. It has enormous social and economic implications for a nation where many still see the girl child as a burden. The Class of 2025 are role models, and evidence of the potential of India’s girls and women.

Influencing G2 truce  
to Delhi’s advantage

For India, the US–China détente is both a pause and a test — a pause in global trade tensions, and a test of whether New Delhi can convert that calm into advantage

At their summit in Korea last week, Donald Trump and Xi Jinping declared a one-year truce in their trade war. Markets rallied, commodity prices steadied, and business lobbies exhaled.

But the truce also set off quiet unease, especially in New Delhi. India had been hoping that the hostility between the US and China would create space for a deeper trade partnership with Washington. Now, with the G2 choosing détente over confrontation, at least temporarily, the strategic and economic calculus has shifted.

China could afford to fight back. When Washington raised tariffs, Beijing retaliated. When the US restricted semiconductor exports, China struck back by curbing rare-earth exports critical for American manufacturing and defence industries. America discovered that it was hostage to Chinese supply chains more than it thought.

India doesn’t have that kind of leverage. America’s trade deficit with India accounts for just 3.2% of its total deficit; China’s share is nearly 30%. That gap in economic heft translates into negotiat-

ing power. China could escalate to negotiate; India cannot. The asymmetry is unavoidable — and it shapes any realistic assessment of how the Trump–Xi truce will affect India’s trade prospects. For India, the implications are mixed.

The truce could be an opportunity if the US uses this breathing space to consolidate its trade regime and strengthen its security architecture, especially in the Indo-Pacific. A calmer US-China relationship gives Washington the bandwidth to pursue economic diversification without the constant distraction of battling China for economic and geopolitical supremacy. In that scenario, India could still feature prominently — both as a strategic partner and as an alternative node in global supply chains.

But the truce could equally turn into a challenge if America interprets it as the foundation for a more stable and less confrontational relationship with Beijing. If Washington sees China less as an adversary and more as a manageable rival, the urgency to conclude an early FTA with India will erode. India will then be pushed down the line in the trade queue.

India’s economic diplomacy over recent years has revolved around the “China+1” idea, becoming the preferred alternative for global companies seeking to diversify supply chains away from China. That hope was premised on sustained US-China tensions.

If the truce leads to even a modest easing of friction, the pressure on mul-

tinational to relocate manufacturing will weaken. Some of the investment that might have flowed to India could remain in China. India could then find itself missing out twice — losing potential investment and being denied the momentum for an early FTA with the US.

The US-India trade relationship is structurally asymmetrical. America is India’s largest trading partner, but India accounts for a small fraction of America’s global trade. That imbalance inevitably constrains New Delhi’s bargaining space.

Even so, India is not without leverage. Its middle class — 800 million and growing — is one of the world’s largest consumer markets. For American firms in technology, health care, and consumer goods, India represents a growth frontier they cannot ignore.

Equally, the US cannot easily replace India’s service exports. From IT and software development to back-office and professional services, Indian firms are deeply embedded in American corporate ecosystems. This integration gives India quiet leverage, provided it uses it strategically and not defensively.

India’s approach to the FTA must, therefore, be pragmatic. Conceding too much too quickly risks domestic backlash; holding out indefinitely risks irrelevance. The art lies in finding the overlap between economic logic and political feasibility.

Complicating all this is Trump him-



Duvvuri Subbarao



Even if Washington and Beijing find temporary economic peace, structural distrust between them will likely persist.

REUTERS

self. Trade policy under his administration has been anything but predictable. Tariffs appear and disappear overnight. Long-standing allies are threatened one day and courted the next. This volatility makes strategising difficult. The “truce” with Xi may last a year, or it may collapse next month. Trump could pivot from conciliation to confrontation overnight if it suits his domestic politics. That uncertainty cuts both ways for India; it heightens risk but also creates space for tactical flexibility if New Delhi can act decisively when opportunity knocks. What, then, should India’s negotiating strategy be?

First, anchor trade diplomacy in realism. America’s economy is more than five times larger, and its bargaining power proportionately greater. Recognising that asymmetry is prudence, not defeatism.

Second, focus on incremental gains rather than an all-encompassing FTA. A limited trade package that covers digital trade, critical minerals, pharmaceuticals and renewable technology could serve as a trust-building step. Demonstrating progress on such a deal will make a broader FTA more achievable.

Third, strengthen domestic credibility. Negotiating power abroad rests on performance at home — stable regula-

tion, efficient logistics and a tax regime that rewards investment.

Finally, leverage India’s strategic value. Even if Washington and Beijing find temporary economic peace, structural distrust between them will likely persist. America still needs reliable partners in the Indo-Pacific. India’s value lies not just in trade but in its role as a stabilising regional actor and as a bridge between advanced and emerging economies.

The Trump–Xi truce has calmed tempers but scrambled assumptions. For India, it’s both a pause and a test — a pause in global trade confrontation, and a test of whether we can convert that calm into advantage.

If Washington uses the truce to reset its trade and security strategy, India must ensure it stays at the centre of that recalibration. If the truce evolves into a sustained US-China thaw, India should recalibrate to avoid being pushed to the sidelines.

The task is clear: Stay nimble, negotiate smart, and act before the window closes. In geopolitics, as in markets, hesitation is rarely rewarded.

Duvvuri Subbarao is a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India. The views expressed are personal

Why sports need to be  
a national priority sector

The Executive Board of Commonwealth Sport has recommended Ahmedabad, India, to be the host city for the Commonwealth Games in 2030, which also happens to be the centenary games. While the final decision will be announced this month, the indicators for sports to become a key national priority sector for India are already in place.

Hosting a multi-national, multi-sport event brings with it not only a focus on high-performance sport and infrastructure development, but also a societal shift in using legacy planning towards inculcating sport in the population over the long term.

A healthy, skilled, resilient and confident population is the engine of any advanced economy. Sport delivers on each of these outcomes simultaneously. It improves health indicators, drives employment and entrepreneurship, fosters social cohesion, and inspires excellence.

Until recently, sport in India had not been treated as a national priority sector. That is changing rapidly now. With high performance and hosting international events remaining a focus area, there are also several additional aspects to sport being a major contributor to the economy and to society.

With over 65% of India’s population under the age of 35, sport can become a vehicle for skilling, employment, and health security. Our challenge is to move beyond episodic excellence and make sport integral to how we live, learn, work, and grow. This requires a structural shift in how we frame sport; not as a discretionary expenditure, but as a transformative investment.

The recently approved National Sports Policy 2025 (NSP 2025) offers a timely and comprehensive roadmap. It marks a break from earlier policies that focused narrowly on medals and elite talent. Instead, NSP 2025 is rooted in a whole-of-ecosystem vision, built on five interconnected pillars — excellence, education, mass participation, economic growth, and social development.

It integrates sport and physical activity (SAPA) into education, urban planning, health care, and economic policymaking. The policy urges a shift from top-down schemes to systemic collaboration between central and state governments, private sector players, and citizens. Crucially, NSP 2025 is not just about podium finishes, although these are important. It views sport as a public good, a force multiplier for development outcomes and an enabler of Viksit Bharat’s goals across health, employment, education, gender equity, and innovation.

Sport in India is still viewed through a somewhat limited lens, but a close look at comparable economies across the world highlights just how much of a driver of jobs and industry sports can be. A growing sports economy would encompass infrastructure development, sports tech, equipment and apparel manufacturing, data analytics, fitness and rehabilitation services and sports media and content production. With the right incentives and regulatory support, India can become a global hub for sports innovation, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship, especially aligned with Make

in India and other missions.

Currently, SAPA contributes about 0.1% to India’s GDP, and approximately 0.5% of India’s jobs. It actually can and should be providing millions of jobs in sports and sports-aligned sectors, and contribute up to 4% of India’s jobs and 2% to India’s GDP by 2047, which is in line with high-growth nations globally.

India’s non-communicable disease burden now accounts for over 60% of deaths, and lifestyle-related health risks are rising sharply among children and youth. Promoting daily SAPA through schools, workplaces, and communities can significantly improve preventive health care, mental health, and overall productivity.

Integrating sport into school curriculums and ensuring access to play spaces across rural and urban India will yield long-term dividends in cognitive growth, school retention, and employability. An active India is a productive India, and health savings from an active population will reduce future fiscal pressure on public health systems and, by 2047, could contribute ₹15 lakh crore to India’s GDP.

States are responsible for building out and implementing sports, and there have been several success stories in states such as Odisha, with a recent spurt in innovative sports policies and plans across Indian states. The central government should continue to encourage and incentivise such leadership through co-financing models, capacity-building partnerships, and long-term collaborations. A national index of SAPA, tracking participation, infrastructure, and governance at the state level, can

spur competitive federalism in sport, much like we’ve seen in health, education, and ease of doing business.

The scale of ambition that NSP 2025 outlines cannot be achieved without robust private sector participation — from foundational to elite. Private academies, sports tech startups, CSR initiatives, and performance centres all have a vital role in expanding access and deepening the talent pool. The private sector should soon view sports as a strategic investment in India’s future, whether through employee wellness, infrastructure partnerships, athlete sponsorship, or research and innovation.

Sports can play a key role in India becoming Viksit Bharat by 2047 by actively contributing to national well-being, productivity, and cohesion. The intent shown thus far by the Centre and several state governments suggests that sport should be recognised as a core pillar of India’s developmental trajectory.

We now have a national policy, intent to put India on the global sports map, a strong demographic dividend, and a rising middle class eager to engage. The next step is to move from policy to practice, and from aspiration to action. Sport is a direct enabler of development priorities. It’s time to play for Viksit Bharat.

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Amitabh Kant



Desh Gaurav Sekhri

{ MAO NING } FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON, CHINA

As a permanent member of the UNSC and a nuclear-weapon State, China adheres to a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons

On Trump's allegations of China conducting nuclear weapons tests

Bihar’s frozen transition  
and the signs of a churn

In a remarkably short time, political strategist Prashant Kishor has managed to reshape Bihar’s political conversation and capture public imagination. Some now ask whether this is Bihar’s “Kejriwal moment” — the stirrings of a new, assertive middle-class looking for an alternative politics. Yet Bihar’s politics resists quick conclusions. Beneath the excitement on the surface lies a dense web of caste loyalties, regional identities, class inequalities, and historical continuities. What appears to be a wave may actually be a symptom of deeper social unrest. Bihar remains a classic case of what scholars call a “frozen transition” — a prolonged and incomplete shift from feudalism to capitalism. The transition began decades ago but never reached maturity. The result is a strange coexistence of old hierarchies and modern aspirations that defines both the economy and politics of the state.

Politically, primordial loyalties continue to dominate. In the absence of a robust capitalist class, community elites act as brokers between the State and the people. Access to welfare, employment, and basic services depends less on citizenship and more on personal networks.

Many of these intermediaries emerged from modest backgrounds, propelled into politics through community mobilisation rather than institutional competence. Once in power, however, they often succumbed to corruption and patronage, blurring the line between public service and private gain. Over time, the trust between leaders and their constituents has weakened, replaced by manipulation through money, muscle, and symbolism. The economy reflects this paralysis. Investment remains scarce, industries stay away, and Bihar has become a development black hole — resources flow in, but growth rarely follows.

In the social sphere, Bihar is witnessing waves of neo-conservatism. Every difference — caste, religion, gender, or region — can become a flashpoint for political mobilisation. Issues like unemployment, underdevelopment, and domestic violence remain central to daily life but are continually overshadowed by identity politics.

Political narratives deepen old divisions. Hierarchies reinvent themselves under new slogans, blocking the rise of a truly transformative social imagination. Bihar’s society, much like its economy, remains trapped between old worlds and unrealised futures.

In the past two decades, the state government has channelled enormous funds into welfare schemes and subsidies — partly to meet development goals, partly as populist giveaways. In theory, these investments should have sparked a structural transformation. On the ground, however, 60-70% of the funds are

believed to have been siphoned off by a nexus of politicians, bureaucrats, and contractors. The expectation that some of this capital would circulate locally to stimulate enterprise hasn’t been realised. Those who accumulated wealth often parked it in real estate in metros rather than in productive ventures within Bihar.

This drain of resources has further eroded the economy. Instead of breaking the cycle of underdevelopment, the inflow of money has ironically reinforced it. Still, one notable change is visible. The money that did reach the ground — combined with remittances from migrants — has given the poor a little breathing space. Out of this has emerged a new aspirational class: not yet middle class, but eager to join it. They represent a generation that values education, mobility, and dignity, even if the pathways to these remain uncertain. This restlessness signals a society in motion, still searching for its political voice. Kishor’s effort to organise this energy under the banner of his Jan Suraj Party is part of this larger flux. Whether he can turn it into a coherent political movement is an open question.

His limitations are evident. Though he has moved from being a professional election strategist to presenting himself as a political leader, his earlier image — of someone skilled in managing voter behaviour rather than nurturing democratic participation — lingers on. His blunt style, often bordering on arrogance in public interactions, alienates potential allies. Despite invoking Gandhi’s moral vocabulary, his organisational structure lacks the participatory spirit of a genuine movement. Yet his strengths are undeniable: stamina, strategic clarity, and the ability to place governance back at the centre of Bihar’s public debate.

Still, it would be mistaken to treat this churn as Kishor’s creation alone. He is merely the visible face of a deeper structural transformation — a phenomenon driven by economic shifts, migration, education, and digital exposure. Many others, less visible, are shaping this moment from below.

Bihar’s story cannot be captured through statistics or campaign slogans. It demands a long historical lens. The state stands at a critical juncture: If the ongoing churn translates into a collective demand for ethical and developmental politics, the frozen transition could finally begin to thaw. But if this moment of possibility slips away, Bihar risks another descent into despair — another chapter in its long, unfinished journey between a feudal past and a modern future.

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Manindra Nath Thakur



## Outdated restrictions

Govt should reconsider its position on FDI in ecommerce

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has reportedly circulated a proposal among different departments on allowing foreign direct investment (FDI) in inventory-based ecommerce, albeit limited to export operations. In a way, this recognises that ecommerce is not just a marketplace. Rather, it is an integrated supply chain linking manufacturing, logistics, and exports. Yet, by confining this liberalisation to exports alone, the government risks maintaining an artificial divide between domestic and global retail. Under the current framework, India allows 100 per cent FDI in the marketplace model, where ecommerce firms merely act as intermediaries connecting buyers and sellers. FDI remains barred in the inventory-based model, where platforms own and sell products directly to consumers. This distinction is said to be aimed at preventing foreign-funded platforms from engaging in deep discounting and predatory pricing, which could hurt small traders. While this rationale perhaps made sense in the early days of India's digital-commerce boom, the market landscape has since matured.

Ecommerce in India is becoming large, diverse, and competitive. In this context, continuing to block FDI in inventory-based ecommerce for the domestic market looks increasingly outdated. Instead, the focus should shift from who owns the inventory to how the market operates. Rules ensuring fair competition, transparent pricing, and non-discriminatory access for sellers can prevent concentration of power while attracting much-needed capital and technology. Allowing FDI in inventory-led ecommerce could bring significant benefits. It would channel investment into warehousing, cold storage, logistics, packaging, and quality control — the weak links in India's retail chain. It would help farmers, artisans, and other small and medium businesses connect efficiently to both Indian and global consumers. It could improve product quality, create jobs, and accelerate the shift to formalised, tax-paying retail activity. For consumers, it would mean better choices, reliability, and service. Such reforms also directly complement the objectives of the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023, which targets the country's ecommerce export potential to be in the range of \$200 billion-300 billion by 2030 and envisions ecommerce export hubs (ECEHs) as engines of non-traditional exports.

To be sure, the concerns of small traders should not be dismissed. But protecting them need not mean stifling progress permanently. The experience with marketplace models shows that strong oversight, requiring fair treatment of sellers, audit certification of compliance, and restrictions on price manipulation, can ensure a level playing field. Extending similar discipline to inventory-based operations would be far more constructive than maintaining investment restrictions as is the case today. India has reached a stage where it must trust its own regulatory capacity and entrepreneurial dynamism. By opening up inventory-based commerce to FDI, the government can modernise the retail sector. In this context, the government should also revisit its position on FDI in multibrand retail. Opening up both physical and electronic retail to FDI can bring large amounts of investment, enhance overall efficiency in the sector, create jobs, and benefit consumers.

## Setting sail again

Reviving India's shipbuilding ambitions

India Maritime Week 2025 and new policy measures aimed at reviving shipbuilding have brought the sector into focus. The recent approval by the Union Cabinet of a ₹69,725 crore package for the shipbuilding and maritime sector — including a ₹25,000 crore corpus in the Maritime Development Fund — combined with the corpus of ₹24,736 crore under the Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Scheme, underscores the push to revive the country's shipbuilding industry. Despite its over 11,000-km coastline, India accounted for only 0.06 per cent of gross tonnage in global shipbuilding output in 2024, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad). An ageing fleet and high financing costs have left the country overly dependent on foreign-flagged vessels for trade and energy security.

The government's plan, as recently articulated by Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal, is to expand India's own fleet and flagged ships, reduce foreign dependence, and aim to be self-reliant. India's shipbuilding tradition is not new. From the dockyards of Lothal in the Indus Valley to the 19th century Bombay Dockyard, the country has a proud maritime legacy. But after Independence, the sector lost momentum. Reviving the sector now requires focus on commercial shipbuilding, where its global footprint remains negligible. Countries like China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan have 95.15 per cent of the global market. With these nations facing heavy order backlogs, India can emerge as an alternative destination.

The creation of a Maritime Development Fund can provide the much-needed long-term, low-cost capital, which shipyards and shipping companies require. But translating this financial outlay into shipbuilding capacity will demand more than money. Execution speed, coordination among multiple agencies, and streamlining regulatory approvals will be critical. Currently, shipbuilders face complex clearances that deter investment and delay delivery schedules. A single-window mechanism for shipbuilding projects could make a tangible difference. Equally vital is building partnerships for maritime decarbonisation and technology transfer. As global shipping transitions towards green propulsion, India cannot afford to lag. The recent collaboration of Cochin Shipyard Ltd with HD Korea Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering, for example, can accelerate the process by combining domestic legacy, infrastructure, and expertise with advanced technology, and global experience.

The sector's revival can also become a major employment generator. Developing local supply chains for marine equipment, ranging from propulsion systems to digital navigation tools, would not only create jobs that require skill but also reduce import dependence. India's Vision 2047, which aspires to place the country among the world's top five shipbuilding nations, is ambitious but achievable. From the ancient dockyards to the modern shipyards, India's shipbuilding story has come full circle. The challenge now is to ensure it sails forward, not just with history behind it, but with purpose and momentum ahead.

# G2 or not G2? Why 2025 isn't 1945

Today's G2 is fundamentally unstable and lacks the power to truly influence the whole world



ILLUSTRATION: AJAYA KUMAR MOHANTY

In his recent summit with President Xi Jinping of China, Donald Trump raised the possibility of a new world order headed by the two superpowers — a new "G2." By implication, he meant that they could, together, rule the world and decide what is good for everyone.

However, the 2025 G2 may partly be an illusion, not least because of the diametrically opposite positions the United States and China have on issues like trade, climate change, and Taiwan, or anything involving global security. What is clear is that both G1 and G2 know that their field of geographical dominance cannot increase any more than it already has. The US threat to Venezuela suggests that it is more concerned about dominance in the Americas, and China knows that beyond a point it cannot bully India or Japan, the other Asian powers. And who knows how much leverage it will have with Russia after the Ukraine war ends?

This is quite unlike the G2 situation that emerged in the post-war era. Even then, it was effectively G1 (with the US being the sole military and economic superpower) for nearly a decade. It was only after the Soviet Union itself became a nuclear power in 1949 that it could claim the second G spot, as it rapidly built its military and economic power based on socialist ideology and numerical support from the newly decolonised and poorer countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Even so, the Soviet Union was never a full economic superpower, and we can call that situation at best G1.5, not G2, though for all practical purposes the Soviet Union was the US' primary rival till the early 1990s. It was the weakness of the rest of the world, more than the reality of economic power that made the Soviet Union the other node to the US. But the G2 of today, comprising the US and China,

is more evenly matched in terms of comprehensive national power, and, in theory, it could be a real G2 if only their goals converged in some places (they do, but we will deal with that later). In terms of military and economic power, the US is ahead of China, but this is partly illusory. Reason: It works only if you count economic power in dollar terms, when the reality is that the dollar will decline as trust in Uncle Sam declines. In terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), China is already ahead of the US, and even in terms of technology, it is catching up in most areas.

The US-China combo is at best a G1.75 because neither side now has the power to truly influence the whole world, unless they unite, and that does not seem like a possibility right now. The one idea they are quietly in agreement on is about slowing India's rise, but they were doing this well before Mr Trump glibly talked about G2. Separately or together, they will seek to trim India's sails, indirectly or directly.

The important differential between the G2 of the pre-1990s era and now is that, earlier, both poles had only vassal states around them. Post-war Europe lay in ruins, and the rest of the world was just casting off the shackles of colonialism, housing the world's largest repository of poor and hungry people. Today, if you leave out very small or very poor countries in Africa, there are major economic and military powers rising in Asia, and (in due course) European powers and Japan could also rediscover their voice after nearly a century of playing second fiddle to America. They too know that America cannot be trusted, but they won't say that right now when their dependency is so high.

While the US is unchallenged in the Americas and western Europe, China is still an Asian power, and



BEYOND IDEOLOGY  
R JAGANNATHAN

## States' populism trap

Bihar goes to the polls on November 6 and 11, marking the beginning of a crucial electoral cycle. Eleven more states will hold elections over the next two years. The spectacle of pre-election giveaways and populist promises will capture the headlines, as it always does. What will matter more, yet draw less attention, is the steady erosion of states' fiscal discipline.

The deepening fault line of sub-national fiscal drift beneath India's political economy is now hard to ignore. Evidence of competitive populism is mounting. Press reports put pre-election doles across eight states over the past two years at ₹67,928 crore. Significantly, women-centric schemes have become the new normal, often enabling the ruling party to defy anti-incumbency. In Madhya Pradesh, the *Ladli Behna Yojana* helped the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) overcome four-term anti-incumbency, with vote shares rising by 7.53 percentage points. In Jharkhand, the *Maiya Samman Yojana* proved equally decisive for the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM). A PRS report estimates that nine states cumulatively budgeted over ₹1 trillion in 2024–25 largely for unconditional cash transfers to women — an unprecedented scale of fiscal outlay tied directly to electoral cycles.

Arguably, these commitments have blurred the line between welfare and political patronage, embedding populism in state finances. Development economics supports well-designed conditional transfers, especially to women. The issue is not cash transfers per se. It is their current architecture — being largely unconditional, universal, and effectively permanent — that creates enduring fiscal claims without efficiency gains, shifting states' spending from productive investment to recurrent giveaways. The spiral of competitive populism, between incumbents and the Opposition, and among states, also raises the floor of fiscal profligacy.

The NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2025, which assessed 18 major states on fiscal parameters,

offers a sobering snapshot. The combined debt-to-GSDP (gross state domestic product) ratio has increased to about 30 per cent, up from 22 per cent a decade ago; while the interest-payment burden has risen to almost 21 per cent of revenue receipts. In fiscally-profligate states such as Punjab, West Bengal, Kerala, and Rajasthan, debt ratios have increased to 38–46 per cent, with more than half of revenues absorbed by debt service in several states, leaving little room for investment in physical and human capital.

Yet these headlines tell only part of the story. Shadow liabilities — off-budget borrowings and guarantees — have quietly expanded. Maharashtra's off-budget guarantees alone stand at ₹1.44 trillion. Many states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Kerala routinely borrow through power utilities, irrigation corporations, and transport agencies, keeping liabilities off-balance sheet. The Reserve Bank of India has repeatedly red-flagged these practices, estimating that such hidden debt could easily add 0.5 to 1 percentage points to states' actual fiscal deficits. This silent accumulation, often fuelled by electoral populism, corrodes fiscal credibility of states and weakens the foundations of sustainable, inter-generational development.

Financial markets are beginning to register these strains. Banks, the main investors in state bonds, have reported limited appetite, and several auctions have seen undersubscription. With states planning to borrow ₹2.82 trillion in the October-December quarter, the supply pipeline remains heavy, while demand is thin and sentiment cautious. Market pricing remains blunt, transmitting general stress without differentiating state-specific fiscal risk.

In early September, the spread between 10-year state development loans (SDLs) and central government securities widened to around 80–100 basis points, the sharpest in five years. Even as overall yields have climbed, the market still struggles to tell good



AMARENDU NANDY

additionally hemmed in by midi powers like India and Japan. In short, today's G2 is powerful only in a limited sense of the term.

While military and economic alliances remain, no major country can afford to be intimidated by either of the G2 powers. In fact, they may pit one against the other to get good deals from both.

Economic reality explains why. Today the US and China are more interdependent, with America depending on Chinese products and China on America for a large market. Both are trying to decouple to prevent the other from gaining undue advantage from this dependency. This means the rest of the world does not have to choose between China and the US, and can deal with both independently (at least in the case of reasonably large economies).

Economic power is also more distributed in 2025 than in 1945. In dollar terms, the US economy is \$30.5 trillion and China \$19.23 trillion, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But if you take the next five or six powers (Germany, Japan, India, France, the UK and Russia), they become as large as China.

But seen through the lens of PPP, the economic power map looks quite different, with China on top at \$40.72 trillion in GDP (dollar equivalent), followed by the United States at \$30.6 trillion and India at \$17.71 trillion. The next five countries — Russia, Japan, Germany, Indonesia, and Brazil — have a collective PPP GDP roughly equal to that of the US. Russia, often labelled an economic failure, ranks fourth after India with a PPP GDP of \$7.14 trillion. In terms of its own internal prices, Russia is hardly an economic weakling.

The point one is getting at is simple. Today's G2 looks powerful on paper, but unlike 1945, the next five powers — both economically and militarily — will be no pushover. In dollar terms, the US and China account for 42 per cent of global GDP. In PPP terms, their share falls to 34 per cent, according to IMF data for 2025.

Whittling down the power of the G2 — whom everyone will need anyway for their market size and investment clout — means the midi powers of today must find a way to bargain collectively (or in smaller groups) with the G2 to find growth, good trade, and military deals.

Today's G2 situation is fundamentally unstable for there are many actors with reasonably strong bargaining powers — either on their own or in groups. In other words, there is no real G2 to work solely in its own interest. This is one reason why India can play a larger role on the world stage. If it can get Europe and Russia to work together in Eurasia after the Ukrainian war ends, and if Japan, India and Asean can work together to counterbalance Chinese economic power in Asia, we can create a better world and a new multipolar order. If China is held in check in Asia and the US restricted to its *dadagiri* (muscle-flexing) in North and South America, the world will find a better balance of economic and military interests.

The author is a senior journalist

## The nature of knowledge



SHYAM SARAN

In his latest book, *When Everyone Knows That Everyone Knows*, Harvard cognitive scientist and psychologist, Steven Pinker, takes us on another profound journey into the human mind, a subject that he has explored in other celebrated books, including *How the Mind Works*, *The Language Instinct* and *Rationality*. The present work puts forward a framework for dissecting the nature of knowledge, from how its diffusion determines the choice a couple makes of a rendezvous location to how it may trigger an overwhelming popular revolution. Dr Pinker makes a

crucial distinction between private knowledge, say, X, which resides only in an individual's mind and common knowledge, where everyone knows X, and everyone knows that everyone knows X, and so on ad infinitum. What is significant here is that it is common knowledge that enables individuals to coordinate their actions and collaborate for mutual gains. Communities, from a tribe to a nation and on to a multilateral institution, collaborate on the basis of common knowledge, which provides a consensual basis for collective action.

Dr Pinker introduces another important concept, conventions, in elaborating how common knowledge works. Conventions are arbitrary rules of behaviour that become widely accepted because they are common knowledge. They enable coordinated activity. For example, driving on the left side of the road is the convention in several countries including our own, but it is entirely arbitrary and could well have been the opposite. But since everyone in

India knows that everyone knows that everyone knows which side to drive on, it serves as common knowledge and enables safe driving.

Though Dr Pinker mentions this in passing, an example from recent Indian history explains clearly the distinction between private knowledge and common knowledge. During the British colonial period every Indian knew that just a few hundred Britons, no matter how powerful, could not subdue the collective strength of 350 million Indians. But this was a private, first-order truth, though known to millions. The transformation or the "trigger" came when Mahatma Gandhi publicly articulated this reality and made it common knowledge. This enabled the mass movement for Indian independence in defiance of British colonialism. Before this, few were ready to risk defiance for fear of retaliation and unaware of whether their private knowledge of British vulnerability was shared by others. Gandhi made this common

knowledge and the basis for coordinated non-compliance. While common knowledge becomes the basis for coordination and collaboration, it is language that is the medium through which it is enabled. This includes not only the spoken or written language but also what is popularly known as "body language". Facial expressions, gestures and rituals all form part of the repertoire of human communication. This brings us to the more fascinating and illuminating exploration of how prevention of common knowledge often enables benign relations to continue between individuals as between nations. Too much honesty may not necessarily be a good thing. Pretence is sometimes the price of peace, for example, in a marriage. Dr Pinker cites the example of colleagues who collaborate well at work going out for a congenial dinner. On the way home, the man asks whether his colleague would like to stop by his apartment for a drink or



When Everyone Knows That Everyone Knows  
by Steven Pinker  
Published by Penguin  
384 pages ₹1,099

a late-night coffee. His intentions are ambiguous, her reactions equally so. If she believes he has something more than a drink in mind, she may politely decline, giving the false excuse that she has an early morning appointment the next day. Neither side has been "outed". The benign relationship may continue as before. But it cannot if he suggests something more explicitly intimate and she declines. The cover of ambiguity is lost.

Ambiguity and plausible deniability are also well known diplomatic stratagems. Israel has nuclear weapons but Israel and the world maintain the fiction that it is a non-nuclear weapon state. This enables its rivals in the Gulf and West Asia not to confront a disturbing reality and existential threat with anything more than expressions of suspicion and innuendos. If the private knowledge of Israel's nuclear weapons became public knowledge then its rivals would have no escape route. They would have to react

by pursuing their own nuclear weapons to restore some semblance of balance of power. Or they would have to acquiesce in Israeli hegemonism, which would be an anathema. So preventing private knowledge of Israeli nuclear weapons from becoming common knowledge suits everyone.

What for me is the most important learning from Dr Pinker's extraordinary book is that while common knowledge enables coordination and collaboration in our species, equally, in some circumstances, common knowledge has to be prevented or even denied "hypocritically" to enable the collaboration to continue. This is why evolution has made our species a bundle of feelings, inhibitions and emotions and their expression in facial clues and gestures that play an important part in maintaining the social compact. "The evolutionary niche of Homo Sapiens is one of massive interdependence," he writes.

Awareness of this existential reality or it becoming common knowledge is what is needed to heal our fractured world.

The reviewer is a former foreign secretary



## IPO market is booming, but don't ignore red flags

THE IPO (initial public offering) market in India continues to see a flurry of activity. Firms across a range of sectors, from LG Electronics to Tata Capital, are increasingly tapping the primary markets. And it's not just the larger firms. In recent years, smaller and mid-sized companies, and even start-ups, like eyewear firm Lenskart, stockbroker Groww and fintech firm Pine Labs, are flocking to the markets. There are expectations of public offerings this year surpassing those of last year. Globally, India, along with the US and China, accounted for the bulk of IPO activity during the third quarter of the year as per EY. All this indicates the capacity of the Indian markets to absorb large issues.

There is a strong appetite from both institutional and retail investors; the latter are seeing participation beyond the Tier 1 cities. The sharp increase in the number of demat accounts over the past few years and the continuing surge in SIP flows are indicative of the growing share of household savings flowing into the markets. The stock market regulator had also recently made changes to the IPO framework that would help increase the participation of institutional investors. But this surge in liquidity sits uncomfortably with concerns over stretched market valuations. Questions have been raised over the steep valuations being sought by some of the companies. In the recent past, some of the IPOs have underperformed due to aggressive pricing — shares of many companies are trading around or lower than their offer price, as per some analysts. But, even IPO investors have invested for listing-day gains — as per an earlier SEBI study, individual investors sold 50 per cent of their shares within a week of their listing.

The public offerings can be used for various purposes — for financing firms' expansion plans or by existing investors such as venture capital or private equity firms to exit. Of the Rs 1.17 lakh crore raised this year, around a third represents investor or promoter exits as per a Kotak study. This suggests that promoters and early investors, who hold significant stakes, are using this opportunity to cash out, with the returns generated being either repatriated or deployed across asset classes. Recent reports indicate that the IPO pipeline remains healthy. The sentiment among retail investors also seems to be strong, even as the steep valuations, in some cases, are hard to ignore.

## Regime change bogey is undemocratic

FOR OVER five years, Umar Khalid, along with Sharjeel Imam, Gulfisha Fatima and others, has been incarcerated without facing trial or being granted bail. The fact that they have been charged with terror offences under the UAPA, with stringent bail conditions, should have been reason to expedite their trial. In the last three years and more, instead, their bail pleas were heard by the Delhi High Court, the verdicts reserved, only for the judges in question to retire or be transferred. Last week, before the Supreme Court of India, the Delhi Police opposed bail once again, claiming in their affidavit that the accused orchestrated the anti-CAA protests and the Delhi riots of 2020 in a "criminal conspiracy hatched for.... achieving the final 'regime change' goal". The "regime change" accusation, evidently an exercise in spectre-mongering, is a worrying escalation in how the ruling establishment frames protest and dissent — in order to delegitimise and criminalise it.

India has seen several "regime changes" at the Centre and in the states, through election, the backbone of a democracy. Even after the Emergency, an authoritarian regime was ousted through the ballot. Unlike some of its neighbours, citizens in this country have the right to dissent and express their grievances in elections that are regarded as free and fair. In recent years, however, those who protest against the government have been demonised — as "anti-national" now, as "urban Naxals" then. The Delhi Police seek to add "regime change" to this list of loose labels that seek to shrink the spaces for dialogue and debate, and imbue democratic disagreement with sinister intent.

Since Independence, students, farmers and other civil society groups have taken to the streets to protest a variety of issues. Protesters have also been arrested in the past. But what makes the case against Khalid, Imam and others more disturbing was articulated by the Delhi HC bench that granted bail to Khalid's co-accused, Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Tanha in 2021: "... it seems that in its anxiety to suppress dissent, in the mind of the state, the line between the constitutionally guaranteed right to protest and terrorist activity seems to be getting somewhat blurred. If this mindset gains traction, it would be a sad day for democracy."

## At 100, Ritwik Ghatak is so contemporary

ON FEBRUARY 7, 1976, the day Ritwik Ghatak died, Calcutta saw a spontaneous outpouring of grief. Thousands of people thronged the streets and accompanied the funeral procession, paying homage to the director who had died at 51 of tuberculosis. "It was a unique funeral of a unique man," wrote Safdar Hashmi in his 1981 essay, "The Genius That Was Ritwik Ghatak". Yet, the profound public mourning stood in sharp contrast to the neglect Ghatak endured in his lifetime. Despite being one of the pioneers of India's New Wave cinema, he had not received the kind of recognition his contemporaries Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen enjoyed. His first film, *Nagarik*, would release only after his death. Several others, including *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam*, would run into difficulties.

If Ghatak's lifetime was marked by failure, the failure was heroic. He was perpetually at odds with the system — political, cinematic, commercial — that demanded compliance. His films often misunderstood, his politics unfashionable — he was expelled from the Communist Party in 1955 — his temperament uncompromising, he continued nonetheless to produce devastatingly beautiful films, such as his Partition trilogy, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961), and *Subarnarekha* (1962), and nurtured a generation of filmmakers such as Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani and Ajoy Ghopalakrishnan during his stint as a teacher at Pune's FTII. Ghatak saw cinema as a social act that was both deeply local and radically universal, a form of collective memory-making, as ritual and protest, as the world seemed to crumble all around him.

A century later, in a fractured world, his voice feels startlingly contemporary. It's a reminder that failure can be fertile, and that art, when it refuses to compromise, can be counted upon to bear witness.

# A tale of two populisms: MAGA mines resentment, Mamdani hope



RAJA MANDALA  
BY C RAJA MOHAN

JUST WHEN there is growing anxiety about "America First" nationalism and hostility to Indian immigration in the US, a very different story has unfolded in New York, America's most important city. It is about the meteoric political rise of Zohran Mamdani in New York's mayoral race this week. By the time you chance upon this column, Mamdani, who is enjoying a comfortable lead in Tuesday's election, could be declared the winner.

Only 34 years old, Mamdani was born in Uganda to Indian parents, who are well known in the Subcontinent. Meera Nair, his mother, is a successful filmmaker, and his father, Mahmood Mamdani, is a reputed academic. Zohran is now all set to become New York's first Muslim, Indian and South Asian mayor.

His rise is less about India than about the unfolding transformations in American politics. To be sure, his populist agenda — free bus rides, rent freeze, government-run grocery stores, and free childcare facilities — would vindicate the growing welfarism of our own political class. That he is a Muslim, has criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies in the past, and is a radical political figure has also divided the Indian American voters in the US. All that, how-

ever, is a sideshow compared to Mamdani's potential impact on contemporary American politics.

In a deeply polarised political landscape dominated by the noise of MAGA populism and a widespread fatigue with liberal extremism, Mamdani's campaign has tapped into a different current — one that puts the economic concerns of ordinary Americans at the top of the political agenda. That someone calling himself a "Democratic Socialist" is winning a major race in the US would surprise many who see socialism and America as antithetical.

Although left-wing politics has had a difficult time at the heart of modern capitalism, socialist and progressive forces have had a long tradition in America. Mamdani belongs to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which was founded in 1982 through a merger of several progressive movements and has now become the largest socialist organisation in the US. The DSA traces its roots to earlier socialist movements of the early 20th century and the anti-Vietnam War activism of the 1960s. Its founding coalition combined the old left's focus on labour issues and the new left's interest in a range of social justice questions.

The DSA has experienced a significant rise in influence since the 2010s amid growing economic inequality. This is the sentiment that Donald Trump on the Republican side and Bernie Sanders on the Democratic side sought to mobilise in the 2016 presidential election. Trump was successful.

Although he lost the Democratic party's presidential nomination to Hillary Clinton, Sanders brought democratic so-

Whether he succeeds as mayor of New York or not, Mamdani shines a light on the current churn in US domestic politics and the unfolding contest for the political soul of America

cialism into the national conversation, lending the organisation a new political vigour, and expanding its reach among younger and progressive voters. For many young Americans, socialism is no longer an American taboo. These are voters who grew up in the shadow of 9/11, the 2008 financial crash, and the pandemic — each eroding the faith in the American Dream.

Mamdani's rise as a leading voice of the American left defies convention. He began as a hip-hop musician and tenant organiser before entering the New York State Assembly. Mamdani's coalition includes working-class Black, Latino, Asian, and Arab voters, along with young White professionals. His success in putting together this diverse coalition is said to lie in organisational skills — focused on campaigning at the neighbourhood level, multilingual outreach, direct voter contact. His skills at political communication have been compared to those of Trump.

Like Trump, Mamdani has successfully fended off sharp criticisms that he is a communist, Islamist *jihadi*, an anti-semitic, inexperienced and has never held down a serious job. His relentless focus on "affordability" in New York has kept him in a consistent lead over his rival, the former Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo, who is running as an independent after losing to Mamdani in the primary. Many professional political consultants in the US are analysing Mamdani's strategies of mobilisation. Many activists on the European left, on the back foot from the attacks by a rising right, have descended on New York to pick up a trick or two from Mamdani.

Is Mamdani a flash in the

● WORDLY WISE  
It is the spirit and not the form of law that keeps justice alive.  
— Earl Warren

political pan? Many are convinced that Mamdani's agenda of "tax the rich and feed the poor" is unimplementable in New York or elsewhere in America. But it has struck real resonance in urban America, where the Democrats get most of their votes.

Mamdani's rise has posed a problem for the Democratic Party. The centrists fear that his religious identity, socialist economics, and political radicalism will be deployed with great effect by Trump and the Republicans to mobilise middle America against the Democrats in the midterm elections due in November 2026. But many on the left see Mamdani as the saviour of the party — with a clear message, sharp focus on economic hardship and the zest to take on the Republicans, Mamdani is what the Democrats need to break the political dominance of Trump.

Whether he succeeds as mayor of New York or not, Mamdani shines a light on the current churn in US domestic politics and the unfolding contest for the political soul of America. The MAGA populism is rooted in resentment — in part against immigrants and minorities. Mamdani's populism in contrast channels hope for an inclusive future for an increasingly diverse America — in ethnic and religious terms. Together, they remind us that to know where America is headed in the world, it is important to have a better sense of its changing domestic politics.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express and a distinguished professor of American Studies at the Motwani Jadeja Institute of American Studies, Jindal Global University, Delhi

## There's no place for Usha Vance in her husband's America



JONAH BLANK

Vance's version of Christianity is very far from the one practised in my church — a liberal Presbyterian congregation which focuses far less on what theological doctrine you believe in, and far more on how you put your beliefs into action on behalf of your fellow humans

USHA'S PERFECT REPLY: "I hope my husband receives the gift of reincarnation as a Hindu." She didn't say that, of course. She said nothing.

Last week, US Vice President JD Vance told the world that he rejected his wife's faith (and that of millions of Americans, and more than a billion people around the globe). When asked whether he wished Usha would convert to Christianity, he responded: "I honestly wish that." He could have said that he respected Usha's beliefs, or even deflected the question without publicly denigrating his spouse, children and in-laws. Set aside, also, the fact that he was speaking as the second-highest official of the US government — one that isn't a Christian theocracy, but one whose Constitution enshrines freedom of religion right in the opening words of its First Amendment. Consider, instead, the implications of Vance's position for the very hope of a secular society. Consider the implications for a family like — well, mine.

My marriage was a combined Christian-Hindu ceremony — conducted in a church, officiated by a pastor and a pandit. Each of my sons received his baptism on the same day as his *parsi*. They grew up celebrating Christmas about two months after Diwali, Easter a few weeks after Holi. I took them to church every week throughout their childhoods: Occasionally, their mother joined, but I never suggested (or desired) that she convert. Sometimes we participated in family pujas. Nobody pressured me to convert. If members of my family can respect each other's deepest spiritual beliefs, why can't Vance?

The first possibility is that Vance believes non-Christians will spend eternity in Hell. This was the position of almost all Christian denominations for most of the past two millennia — but it is not the belief of many Christians in America, Eu-

rope and elsewhere today. The second is even more misguided: Perhaps Vance believes that Christianity is the only foundation for morality. The number of people leading good, honest, even saintly lives around the world is beyond counting — and surely includes at least as many non-Christians as Christians (statistically, probably far more).

If Vance weren't the VP, this would merely be a case of an overbearing husband publicly humiliating his wife, an issue for a marriage counsellor. But he does speak as VP — the VP of an administration increasingly dominated by a version of so-called "Christian nationalism" which has effectively excommunicated many Americans. In this vision of public morality, followers of other religions, or of no religion at all, are automatically outside the community. Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians and (as Vance makes clear) Hindus. You're permitted to live here, but this nation isn't really yours. Even those who consider themselves Christian are anathematised unless they subscribe to a particularly harsh and intolerant vision of the faith.

Vance's version of Christianity is very far from the one practised in my church — a liberal Presbyterian congregation which focuses far less on what theological doctrine you believe in, and far more on how you put your beliefs into action on behalf of your fellow humans. The "Christian nationalist" version of the faith excludes everyone who doesn't fit its America First identity — it might well have excluded Jesus himself. There's no place for Usha Vance in this version of America. And no place for me and my family either.

Blank is the author of Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God: Retracing the Ramayana Through India and Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity Among the Daudi Bohras



KAUSHIK DAS GUPTA

Scents and smells mean very little in a world in which masks and air purifiers are basic life support. But they can only do so much. As a coughing fit draws to a close, I cast a glance at the air purifier struggling to keep PM levels under control

## Once there was a Delhi winter, now we have a mask

IN 1983, I saw a Test Match for the first time at a stadium. The day was made even more special by Sunil Gavaskar slamming the feared West Indian pace quartet to all parts of the ground. Just as many of us were thinking that the picnic had ended too soon, the teachers in charge of the school outing decided to extend the trip and celebrate the Little Master's record-breaking century by treating us to goodies at Wenger's. We sang loudly, mostly out of tune, during the short ride from the Ferozeshah Kotla, as Delhi's main cricket venue was then called, to Connaught Place, not yet Rajiv Chowk. Diwali was barely two days away, and winter was around the corner. Little did we realise then that in times to come, the excursion would turn out to be precious for something much more than Gavaskar's feat or the festivities that lay ahead. The songs we sang at the picnic came back to me while reading a prominent doctor's advice to stay away from Delhi for the next six to eight weeks.

The memory of that school trip was triggered by a friend's invite: "Come, stay with me in Chandigarh for a few days; the AQI is not too bad here." I couldn't help but smile wistfully at the irony of how things have turned out in the last four decades. Winters were the time to invite friends and relatives from outside the city. Delhi's air was gauged by the citrusy fragrance of the blooming saptaparni flowers — who had heard of AQIs then? It was time for families and friends to come together, spread out *chatais* at the Buddha Jayanti Garden, Nehru Park, India Gate lawns, or Lodhi Gardens, and lay out simple home-made fare — paranthas, puris or sandwiches stuffed with spicy potato fillings, sometimes lavished with mayonnaise. Or, spend time at the city's monuments and take in the calming effect of the incense at the Sufi dargahs. Or play gully cricket.

Today, the acrid air has cast a haze over memories of Delhi's smellscape — the buttery flavours of the nankhatai at the street-side peddler's stall, next to the school bus stop, that seemed to signal there's more to life than end-term exams. The fragrance of the bhaturas being fried at the neighbourhood *halwai*, which would make the wait for a Sunday treat a tad too long. In any case, scents and smells mean very little in a world in which masks and air purifiers are basic life support. But then, they too can only do so much.

As a coughing fit draws to a close, I cast a glance at the air purifier struggling to keep PM levels under control. There was a time when people in Delhi would wake up to the smell of the morning dew.

Das Gupta is Senior Associate Editor, The Indian Express

40 YEARS AGO  
November 5, 1985



### Sino-Indian talks

THE SIXTH round of official talks between India and China on the border and other bilateral issues began in New Delhi on a promising note with the leaders of the two delegations adopting a "forward looking" approach towards improvement in mutual relations. After a preliminary review of the bilateral relations, the two sides broke up into four subgroups for detailed consideration of various aspects.

### A city for the rich

THE ORISSA government is building a new city for its elite. Though an extension of Cuttack, the development plan of the new township promises its rich would-be residents complete insulation from the chaos, filth and eyesores of the old town. Named Bidanasi Cuttack, the new town will be about half the size of Cuttack and has been planned to accommodate 2 lakh residents.

The new township will be built on 2000 acres, much of which was obtained by building the ring embankment on the Mahanadi and Kathjori rivers that sandwich Bidanasi. The Cuttack Development Authority has tagged the price of plots at a level that is beyond the reach of the poor.

### Benazir freed

PAKISTANI OPPOSITION leader Benazir Bhutto challenged President Zia-ul-Haq to an election showdown as she left two months of house arrest in Karachi to testify at an inquiry in France. The leader of the banned Pakistan People's Party (PPP), who was transferred by the armed police from her Karachi home straight onto a Swissair flight for Zurich, made the challenge in a written statement to Reuters.

### Reagan on nukes

THE US President, Ronald Reagan, said in

an interview with Soviet journalists that the United States will not deploy the star wars system to defend against nuclear weapons "until we do away with our nuclear missiles, our offensive missiles". However, Reagan, in a text of the interview released by the White House, appeared to indicate that the United States would also require the Soviets to eliminate their missiles before America dismantles its nuclear arsenal.

### Ex-judge killed

A FORMER district and sessions judge of Tees Hazari Court, Harkishan Singh Malik, was murdered in his house, at C-4. Chief Commissioner's colony, Rana Pratap Bagh, under mysterious circumstances. His body was discovered by his *munshi* in an unused kitchen on the upper portion of the building. Malik was around 62. He was a bachelor and had retired from judicial service about four years ago.





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● **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**  
Beijing's decision to wield access to rare earths as a weapon has increased concerns about China outside the US too. — *The Guardian*

## US sanctions on Russian oil are not about Ukraine, but its own shale industry



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

ON OCTOBER 22, Washington cut off one of the world's biggest oil flows by sanctioning Rosneft and Lukoil, which produce 57 per cent of Russia's crude.

Global oil prices reacted instantly. Within a week of the announcement, crude rose 7.5 per cent — from \$61 to \$65.6 a barrel — and may climb further as supplies tighten. Officially framed as a step toward peace in Ukraine, the US action was really about rescuing its struggling shale industry, regardless of the hit to global oil supplies.

Unlike UN sanctions that target specific entities, US sanctions are far broader. They punish not only the sanctioned firms but also anyone dealing with them. Non-compliance can land countries or companies on the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons (SDN) List, enforced by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), and cut them off from SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) — the global network that enables cross-border payments. Losing access can freeze a nation's trade overnight. The same risks extend to insurance, shipping, and technology systems, forcing refineries, shipping lines, and software vendors to quickly fall in line. Once Washington blacklists a company, few dare to engage with it.

India learned this the hard way in July 2025, when Microsoft's suspension of services to the Gujarat-based Nayara Energy — a refinery with Russian shareholding — froze digital operations for weeks. The episode showed how quickly sanctions can leap from oil barrels to software systems and shut all operations. It also proved that America doesn't need warships to choke an economy — it can do so through software, servers and payment codes.

Almost every major buyer, except China, is backing away from Russian oil.

The US says the goal of sanctions is to starve Moscow of money and bring peace



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

to Ukraine. But if peace were truly the aim, Washington could achieve it without blocking a single barrel of Russian oil. It would only need to stop the flow of weapons and Starlink internet support sustaining Kyiv's war effort. American arms sales to Ukraine have already topped \$150 billion since the start of the war.

The uncomfortable truth is that war has become good business for US defence contracts; their logistics and energy exports are all booming. As economist Jeffrey Sachs has noted, the roots of the Russia-Ukraine conflict lie not in 2022 but in years of NATO's eastward expansion — a policy driven mainly by Washington and long opposed by Moscow. The sanctions are less about moral principle and more about power and price.

Strip away the rhetoric and Washington's real goal comes into focus — keeping global oil prices high enough to save America's fragile shale oil industry. Most US crude comes from light, sweet shale oil, produced through fracking — blasting rock with high-pressure water, sand, and chemi-

**The uncomfortable truth is that war has become good business for US defence contracts; their logistics and energy exports are all booming**

cals — and horizontal drilling, illustration: C R SASIKUMAR rather than traditional wells. Unlike traditional wells, shale oil fields decline fast, losing up to 70 per cent of output in the first year. They need prices above \$55 a barrel to survive.

The maths is simple. Russian Urals crude sells for about \$55 a barrel, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) hovers near \$60. Washington has removed a significant share of global output by targeting Rosneft and Lukoil, which pump roughly 60 per cent of Russia's oil. Sanctioning Russian firms that supply a tenth of the world's crude tightens global supply and lifts prices by \$15–\$20 a barrel — just enough to keep US shale profitable.

So the strategy is straightforward: Make Russian oil untouchable, tighten supply, and let scarcity prop up prices. But there's a significant weakness in this plan. America wants the world to buy its oil and petroleum products instead of Russia's — yet it doesn't have enough to sell.

In 2024, the US exported \$298 billion in petroleum and imported

\$246 billion, but the numbers hide a \$60 billion crude oil deficit. The US still imports far more crude oil — about \$174 billion worth — than it exports, around \$115 billion. The mismatch can't be wished away.

There's another problem. The US mainly produces light, sweet shale oil, while many refineries — at home and abroad — are configured for heavier grades. America thus exports its lighter crude to Europe and Asia even as it imports heavier feedstock to keep domestic refineries running.

And with no spare refining capacity, America can't easily turn more of its oil into finished products. Even if every rig in Texas worked overtime, America couldn't replace the 7 million barrels per day of Russian oil being pushed off world markets. The lack of refining and production capacity hasn't stopped Washington from selling a dream. The US has secured commitments from allies to replace Russian oil with American supply and LNG under the threat of high tariffs.

The EU has pledged \$750 billion in US oil, gas, and nuclear imports over three years. Japan will buy about \$7 billion in LNG annually. The UK has locked in a 10-year LNG deal starting in 2028. Vietnam and Thailand have contracts through 2040.

All these promises exceed America's actual export capacity. Inventories are at decade lows, OPEC+ is capping output, and Red Sea disruptions add weeks to shipping times. The irony is apparent — in trying to revive its shale oil industry by punishing Moscow, Washington may end up enriching other producers, from Saudi Arabia to Venezuela, and plunging the world into a US-made energy crisis.

Most Indian refiners have begun cutting Russian crude purchases, fearing US sanctions. India could resist US tariffs, but sanctions are harder to ignore for two reasons. First, its refineries and banks now rely on American software, leaving it vulnerable to pressure — as the Nayara Energy case showed — unlike the 1990s when open-source systems like Linux were common. Second, in 1985 India produced 85 per cent of the oil it consumed; today it imports 85 per cent, after years of neglecting exploration. The path forward lies in reviving domestic oil exploration and building sovereign digital infrastructure independent of US control.

*The writer is founder, Global Trade Research Initiative*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Cricket triumph

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A field of her own' (*IE*, November 4). Undoubtedly, Sunday's victory took women's cricket in India to unparalleled heights. Having entered the semifinals fourth on the table, India beat Australia and South Africa in style to lift the World Cup. What the men failed to fetch last year in the ODI World Cup, the women have brought for India in some style. Harmanpreet and Co, along with the coaches, deserve all the praise for keeping their nerve. It was hard work and perseverance that won the World Cup for India.

*Jiji Panicker K, Chengannur*

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'A field of her own' (*IE*, November 4). The recent World Cup victory by India's women's cricket team is not merely a sporting triumph, it's a socio-cultural reckoning. For decades, women's cricket was dismissed as an afterthought, receiving token recognition and negligible investment. What makes this victory remarkable is not just the trophy, but the quiet defiance it represents against years of institutional neglect and patriarchal gatekeeping within the BCCI. Today's victory is their rebuttal — not a plea for equality, but a declaration of competence.

*Palak Verma, Gobindgarh*

### Nature and balance

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'The colour green' (*IE*, November 4). It's time we rethought what progress really means. Development cannot come at the cost of disconnecting from nature. The study rightly reminds us that being "smart" doesn't mean being concrete and mechanical — it means coexisting with the environment that sustains us. India may rank low in nature-connectedness, but our cultural roots teach balance. Listening to nature before designing cities might just make us not only greener, but wiser.

*Rachita, Chandigarh*



SHUBHRA GUPTA

SHAH RUKH KHAN has turned 60, and like all the birthdays that come attached with a zero, six oh comes with its own weight, and reckoning. The celebratory aspect, as with all things that occupy a sizeable chunk of our time and imagination, is bittersweet. Once upon a time, that shining star was young, and now both he and those of us who basked in that light, are getting on.

When he entered Hindi cinema, it was a much tighter clique than today, filled with studios run like mom-and-pop stores. But being in the right place and right time got him a break in Raj Kanwar's 1992 *Deewana*, playing third wheel to Rishi Kapoor and Divya Bharti: A fully filmi entry, riding a motorcycle on Marine Drive, singing "*koi na koi chahiye, pyaar karne wala*".

It was song as manifestation. He asked for love, and that's what he got. In spades.

Yes, Aamir Khan and Salman Khan were already in place but this dimpled Khan hit different. His brash modernity, and can-do confidence, all worked to set him apart: Those who had enjoyed his antics in Doordarshan's *Fauji* rolled over into his burgeoning filmi fanbase.

Cinema, in the early '90s, was the most powerful and popular

**It wasn't just leading lady Kajol whose heart he stole, it was also ours. Subsequently, his hold has loosened and tightened on and off, but it has never let us go**

medium of entertainment, which entire families would flock to, and if you managed to connect with different age groups, like SRK did, then you were set. No one cared if the film was good, bad or middling; all that mattered that your favourite star was in it.

Which is exactly what happened. After a few early forays into movies which painted him in shades of blackest villainy — flinging his lady-love from the terrace in *Baazigar* (1993) — and turning remorseless stalker in *Darr* (1993) and *Anjaam* (1994), he found his home with Aditya Chopra's romantic musical *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), which has just turned 30.

It wasn't just leading lady Kajol whose heart he stole, it was also ours. Subsequently, his hold has loosened and tightened on and off, but it has never let us go. And now it is 30 years — more if you count his early stint in TV and near-forgotten films — that he has been the star to whom we have remained in thrall.

Like others whose stardom often hides the contours of the characters they play, SRK's sharply-edged roles have continued to conflict his fans. One of my favourite films of his, *Fan* (2016), caused much consterna-

## At 60, SRK needs a new role: Playing the actor within

tion amongst the faithful: the double-role has SRK playing a star-struck fan who can't deal with the fact that his idol — also played by SRK — has feet of clay. The film is a beaut, one of the few in which he gives an actual performance, more flint than fluff, rather than yet another costumed version of himself.

To cast aside the layers of starry latex is the hardest thing to do, because that requires being vulnerable in front of an all-seeing camera. But having walked past bigoted backlash, troll armies, personal setbacks, and professional wins, even as son Aryan has entered the entertainment space with a bang, with *Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood*, this could well be the best time for SRK to re-explore his actorly roots — this thought comes from a critic who has seen him do his thing all these years.

At 60, as one of the biggest stars in India, with a massive global footprint, all SRK has left to do is to embrace the actor within himself. Now that would be the biggest present the birthday boy can give to himself, and to those who believe that he can do more than just send himself up. *Ghante ka baadshah*, haha, sure. But also *dil se re*. That too.

*The writer is film critic, The Indian Express*

## Kerala teaches me to ask, 'Aapko kya chahiye?'



PAYAL ANAND

MY FIRST WEEK in Kerala, I walked into a local shop, my Malayalam non-existent. I fumbled, trying to buy groceries, feeling the anxiety of being an "outsider". The shopkeeper, seeing me struggle, smiled and replied in broken Hindi, "*Aapko kya chahiye* (What do you want)?" I felt instantly comforted. In an era of divisive debates, that small gesture — of his willingness to speak my language, instead of questioning my inability to speak his — was my first glimpse into Kerala's way of life.

While Kerala's economic growth has at times lagged behind more industrialised states, its unique focus on human development has set a powerful example, demonstrating that progress isn't just about GDP figures. Kerala is being declared the first state in the country to be free of extreme poverty. Such successes are a result of a long history of social reform movements, high political engagement, and a public demand for rights. This has translated into a culture of collective public consciousness that proves a core idea — when you prioritise human dignity, you build a better state for everyone.

For example, in Kerala, there exists a deep-rooted social understanding that a job is a job, regardless of whether it is high- or low-skilled. I see it every day, with my domestic help, my *chachi*, or the garbage collector *chettas*. For the locals here, it is just another profession, unlike in many other parts of the country, where the profession dictates social status. Labour wages here are significantly higher. The employer-employee relationship is seen as a mutual agreement rather than one of subservience.

I've noticed this notion of a flattened hierarchy play out deeply in everyday public life, such as when my well-to-do, highly educated friends confidently state that their children will attend government schools. This perspective was my key to understanding a fundamental difference — in many states, government schools or hospitals are seen as a last resort for the poor, creating a deep class divide in basic services. Here, however, public systems are viewed as shared community assets. Because people from all economic backgrounds use them, there is collective pressure to maintain high standards. And thus, everyone continues to use them. It's a virtuous cycle born from a culture that demands quality for all, not just for those who can afford it.

Besides, there is a foundation of awareness and civic

sense. It's visible in the small, everyday moments, like watching people quietly wait for their number at the Calicut railway station auto-stand. There are no arguments, just an orderly, unspoken respect for the community norm, born from a shared understanding. This awareness also fosters an inclusive and secular mindset. Recently, Rashid, the carpenter who helped me with my furniture, in a very casual conversation, stated, "We don't believe in differentiating people by their faith. Religion doesn't matter to us." I was impressed by the statement he made with such clarity. In Kerala, accepting humans as humans is a lived practice. This ability to prioritise humanity over rigid prejudices can be linked to the state's educational foundation, which plays a pivotal role in shaping political choices and fostering a more liberal and rational society. The state's literacy rate has been consistently over 95 per cent and this goes beyond reading and writing; Kerala also topped NITI Aayog's School Education Quality Index. An educated population translates into heightened civic awareness and a strong sense of collective responsibility.

As an outsider who has lived in many states and spent a significant number of years in Kerala, I've come to realise that while every part of India has its own unique spirit, Kerala's culture offers a powerful story, one where people care for one another, value character over status, and stay open in thought and spirit. Humanity thrives, and therefore, society thrives.

*The writer is an associate professor of Organisational Behaviour at the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode, Kerala. Views expressed are personal*



ILLUSTRATION: KOMAL

**As an outsider who has lived in many states, I've come to realise that while every part of India has its own unique spirit, Kerala's culture offers a powerful story**

## Don't call J&K UT inefficient, it's federalism

did ('State of delay', October 18), is to disregard its intent and its place within India's federal design.

India's constitutional architecture explicitly provides for such hybrid models through Articles 239A and 239AA, which govern Puducherry and the National Capital Territory of Delhi, respectively. These examples demonstrate that the coexistence of an elected Assembly and Union oversight is a recognised method of reconciling local autonomy with national responsibility. In the case of J&K, this framework was conceived as a transitional phase, ensuring continuity of governance while preparing institutions for eventual statehood.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019 made this clear. It stated that "it is necessary to reorganise the State of Jammu and Kashmir into the Union Terri-

### DEAR EDITOR I disagree

*A column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of The Indian Express*

**The strength of India's federal structure lies in the capacity to adjust without fracturing. The UT with an Assembly is a constitutional instrument that embodies this adaptability**

tory of Jammu and Kashmir and the Union Territory of Ladakh in order to ensure better governance, transparency and administrative efficiency". One may debate the political wisdom of this reasoning, but constitutionally, it is an expression of the flexibility that the framers entrusted to Parliament under Article 3.

To view this framework as inefficient is to misread its constitutional purpose. Its value lies in maintaining balance between representation and control at a time of transition. The real test of democracy is not how swiftly power is transferred but how sustainably it is exercised. A return to full statehood must therefore be approached with institutional readiness, not political urgency.

The Centre has reaffirmed its commitment to restoring full statehood, and recent elections are a step in that direction. How-

ever, this transition must be grounded in a realistic assessment of administrative and security preparedness. Handing over the full apparatus of governance before the system is ready would risk undermining both accountability and continuity.

The strength of India's federal structure lies in the capacity to adjust without fracturing. The UT with an Assembly is a constitutional instrument that embodies this adaptability. It ensures that representation and responsibility evolve together. The restoration of statehood, when it comes, should not simply mark a political milestone but reaffirm the Constitution's quiet genius: Its ability to combine unity with diversity, and authority with restraint.

*The writer is an academic lawyer and public policy professional specialising in constitutionalism and access to justice*



# In Trump’s tariff war, why the US Supreme Court is a battlefield

Ravi Dutta Mishra  
New Delhi, November 4

THE UNITED States Supreme Court is set to begin oral hearings from Wednesday to decide if President Donald Trump overstepped his powers granted under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose sweeping reciprocal tariffs. The Trump administration has leveraged these tariffs to sign a dozen trade deals; it is in advanced talks with India for one.

The outcome of the case could thus have severe consequences for these deals inked since early this year, including for India, which currently bears the brunt of 50% tariffs. India’s shipments to the US, its largest export destination, fell 12% in September, and exporters have been seeking relief measures. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met exporters to discuss ‘export competitiveness’.

While the court could very well back Trump, an adverse order could mean a reset in trade dynamics, and an opportunity for India to negotiate a better deal. Indian officials have said that the US is seeking market access for its products in exchange for a reduction in reciprocal tariffs, including on sensitive items such as genetically modified soyabean and corn.

## Significance of adverse order

The US has set reciprocal tariffs from 15-20% for countries in the ASEAN region, including some of its closest allies. India currently faces a reciprocal tariff of 25%, with an additional 25% tariff for importing Russian oil.

If the administration were to lose the case, the reciprocal tariffs will be declared invalid, and the Trump administration will have to initiate refunds to the tune of \$100 billion to US importers. According to an estimate by PwC, total tariff collections by the end of October stood at \$108 billion, with those on imports from China having the biggest share at \$34 billion. In the case of India, the comparable figure stood at \$487 million, according to PwC estimates.

“If the Supreme Court strikes down the Trump administration’s IEEPA tariff scheme entirely, the decision could declare the challenged tariffs invalid, requiring US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to cease collection and unwind the existing tariff structure. At the same time, importers could face the complex question of how to obtain refunds, as invalidation of the IEEPA tariffs may open the door to potential reimbursement of tariffs paid,” PwC said in a report.

## ● Importer jurisdiction and potential refund

ORIGIN COUNTRY	ESTIMATED TARIFFS TILL OCT
Reciprocal all countries	\$63.95 B
China & Hong Kong	\$34.19 B
Mexico	\$6.20 B
Canada	\$2.19 B
Brazil	\$632.37 M
India	\$487.27 M
Japan	\$359.57 M
Total	\$108.01 B

The invalidation of IEEPA would also reduce volatility in trade relations, as the US — without these IEEPA-based tariffs — could see this and future administrations return to other statutory tools such as Section 232 and Section 301, which have more defined limits.

That said, the Supreme Court currently has a 6-3 conservative majority. Conservative jurists have long supported the “unitary executive theory” according to which the US President has the sole authority over the executive branch. More often than not, recent judgements have widened presidential authority, or limited what can be constituted as overreach. As such, many experts believe that the SCOTUS is likely to uphold presidential powers in this case.

## Lower courts ruled against Trump

Court documents show that parties arguing against the tariffs include over a dozen small businesses. These far outnumber the parties defending the same.

Three lower courts have already ruled against the Trump administration. The case was first heard in the US District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, which in April rejected the government’s argument.

The US Court of International Trade (CIT) in June also held that IEEPA does not authorise the President to levy general tariffs. The US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in August ruled that Congress had never delegated such sweeping authority to the executive branch.

“If the Supreme Court strikes down Trump’s use of emergency powers, forcing the withdrawal of his ‘Liberation Day’ tariffs, the ruling would reverberate far beyond US borders. The decision would unravel the foundation of several recently negotiated trade arrangements with key partners such as the EU, Japan, South Korea and the UK — all of which were struck under the shadow of those tariffs and premised on reciprocal concessions. It would also disrupt ongoing talks with India, where tariff leverage has shaped Washington’s negotiating position,” Delhi-based think tank GTRI said in a report.

## But Trump has a plan B

With the legal powers under IEEPA in question, the Trump administration has dramatically increased the use of Section 232 tariffs. This is a specific provision in US trade law that entitles the American President to impose tariffs or quotas on imports if they are found to threaten “national security”. Tariffs under Section 232 have raised levies on aluminium, cars and car parts, copper, furniture, lumber, steel and timber, and fresh investigations have been launched into 10 other types of products.

Key investigations include the Trump administration’s review of imports of robotics and industrial machinery. The US is a net importer of these goods, importing \$25 billion more than it exported last year. The US has no major company mass-producing industrial robots and few domestic component suppliers, the Council on Foreign Relations said.

While tariffs under Section 232 would be far less sweeping than the reciprocal tariffs Trump managed under IEEPA, the former provides much stronger legal cover, as the US Supreme Court has on multiple occasions refused to entertain challenges due to the “national security” element in the statute.

However, Indian officials have said that Section 232 tariffs have not been a priority during negotiations, as the US tariffs under the statute are imposed equally on all countries and do not hurt competitiveness.

# How Bill Gates is reshaping discourse on climate action



AMITABH SINHA

RECENT REMARKS by Microsoft founder Bill Gates on climate change have had the desired effect — they have triggered a fierce debate on the effectiveness of the world’s current approach towards the problem.

In a memo published last week, Gates — an influential funder of climate-friendly technologies and solutions — questioned the ‘doomsday outlook’ on climate change, and said humanity would most likely survive this crisis. Instead of focusing all resources and energy on limiting the rise in temperatures, Gates advocated greater emphasis on improving health and prosperity, which, he argued, can make people better prepared to face climate impacts.

The arguments presented by Gates are not new. Mitigation (emission cuts) vs adaptation (building resilience) is an old debate in climate discussions. There is universal agreement that both are important and need to be deployed simultaneously to minimise the impacts of climate change. In the resource-constrained real world, however, trade-offs are imminent and hence certain actions need to be prioritised over others.

The memo signals a shift in Gates’ own position, from favouring a mitigation-centric approach to one that prioritises adaptation. Considering his ability to mobilise big money, this change in emphasis can have very important implications for global climate action.

Interestingly, Gates’ latest views align very well with the position that India has taken in the last two years. It is also likely to find support from many other developing countries that have been demanding greater attention, and support, for adaptation actions.

## The argument

In his memo, Gates has made three broad points. One, that while climate change is one of the most serious problems to have ever confronted humanity, it is not an existential threat. It won’t result in the end of civilisation, as is sometimes argued.

Two, that adhering to some temperature targets — the 1.5 or 2 degree Celsius tar-

## THE GATES MEMO AND THE CHINA WAY

CHINA’S ANNUAL emissions grew by four times between the mid-1990s and now, but it focused on bringing prosperity for its citizens. It also built huge technological capabilities, and deployed more renewable energy capacity than the rest of the world put together.

CHINA HAS recently announced that it is ready to decarbonise and reduce emissions. Given the renewable capacities it has built up, China would probably be able to decarbonise at a rate much faster than any other developed country has managed to do. And its rapid emission reductions would be the most consequential for the planet.

NOT EVERY developing country can emulate China, but this example lends credence to the arguments being made by Gates, and earlier by India.



gets mentioned in the Paris Agreement — is not the only way to address the problem of climate change.

And three, that health and prosperity, and higher levels of development particularly in the poorer regions, are probably the best defence against climate impacts. Improvements in agriculture, better health, greater access to heating and cooling, and efficient early warning systems for extreme weather events would not just improve the quality of lives but would also save lives from climate impacts.

As mentioned earlier, these are not necessarily new, or radical, arguments. But the mainstream narrative on climate action, advocated most strongly by scientists and climate activists, is dominated by demands for rapid emission cuts, an immediate energy transition, and an early elimination of fossil fuels. Not surprisingly, therefore, the strongest criticism of Gates’ memo has come from the scientific community, which thinks his views could weaken climate action.

“Bill Gates is deeply misguided on climate,” wrote Michael Mann, a prominent climate scientist and author of several books on climate change, while plugging one of his old articles in which he had countered similar arguments made in the

## Key Points

The memo signals a shift in Gates’ position, from favouring a mitigation-centric approach to one that prioritises adaptation.

● Considering his ability to mobilise big money, this change in emphasis can have very important implications for global climate action.

past. In a response he published in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Mann wrote that there was no way “to reboot the planet, if you crash it”. “The only safe and reliable way out when you find yourself in a climate hole is to stop digging — and burning — fossil fuels,” he wrote.

Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist at the Nature Conservancy and another prominent scientific voice, was quoted by *Axios* as saying that reducing emissions was not diverting resources but protecting them.

“People often think of climate change as a separate bucket at the end of a long row of other buckets of problems we are trying to fix... this includes poverty, disease and access to clean water. But climate change is not a separate bucket... it is a hole in every bucket,” she said.

There is also a very real possibility of Gates’ remarks being used by climate denialists to justify their own positions. US President Donald Trump’s immediate reaction, saying Gates’ comments showed ‘we’ had won the war on the climate change hoax, highlighted this danger.

## The rationale

But it is also not very difficult to see why Gates’ new position is being appreciated in some quarters as an acknowledgement of

Instead of focusing on mitigation, Gates has argued for prioritising adaptation, which has immediate benefits for developing countries

harsh realities. Efforts to reduce emissions have yielded minimal results so far. Annual global emissions are still on the rise. The sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said global emissions in 2030 needed to be at least 43 per cent below 2019 levels to keep alive hopes of meeting the 1.5 degree Celsius target.

All current estimates suggest that even 2 per cent reduction by 2030 would be difficult to achieve.

And scientists themselves maintain that even if global emissions somehow miraculously turned to zero all of a sudden, there would be no change in climate impacts for at least a few more decades.

That is because it is not the fresh emissions but the accumulated carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that leads to greenhouse effect. And CO2 remains in the atmosphere for centuries before disintegrating.

On the other hand, adaptation or building resilience provides immediate benefits. An effective early warning system, for example, can save hundreds or thousands of lives from extreme weather events. Also, adaptation brings local benefits, which is why it appeals more to the developing countries.

Despite this, less than 20 per cent of international climate finance is directed towards adaptation projects, something that developing countries have been angry about.

Gates’ new views are thus likely to find a lot of resonance among the developing countries.

## Echoes of Indian position

Interestingly, India did a similar reality check about two years ago, making almost the same arguments as Gates in its Economic Survey of 2024. Breaking away from the global narrative, it had said that keeping global temperatures under some arbitrary threshold was a “flawed” way of dealing with the climate crisis, and argued that rapid development and increase in incomes was the best insurance against climate impacts.

India had lamented the fact that development goals had been “downgraded” and reduction of global emissions elevated “to the pinnacle of all economic policies”. It made the case for allowing adequate space for developing countries like India to grow rapidly. The climate problem would also be resolved on the way, it argued.

# Movie on its way, revisiting the Supreme Court’s Shah Bano verdict

Vineet Bhalla  
New Delhi, November 4

THE BOLLYWOOD film *Haq*, releasing this Friday and starring Yami Gautam and Emraan Hashmi, is inspired by the Shah Bano case. The film now faces a legal challenge from the daughter of the woman who inspired it, allegedly for not seeking permission to use her identity.

Beginning with a 62-year-old Muslim woman’s plea, the case sparked national debates on issues such as secularism and minority rights.

## The case

In 1978, Shah Bano Begum of Indore was divorced by her husband and advocate Mohammed Ahmad Khan, after 43 years of marriage. He paid her a small maintenance initially, and then stopped. With no means to support herself, Shah Bano filed a petition in court under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973. This provision obligates a person with sufficient means to provide maintenance to those he is responsible for.

Khan contested the petition, arguing



Shah Bano Begum was divorced by her husband after 43 years of marriage. FILE

that his liability was limited to the period of *iddat* — the waiting period of about three months after divorce, during which the woman cannot remarry. However, courts directed Khan to pay a monthly amount. He then moved the Supreme Court.

In 1985, a five-judge Constitution Bench delivered a unanimous judgment, dismissing Khan’s appeal. The court held that Section 125 of the CrPC applies to all citizens irrespective of their religion. It was enacted

## Momentous consequences

● After the SC held that Shah Bano was entitled to maintenance, the Rajiv Gandhi government passed The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, to nullify the judgment.

● Then, under pressure for ‘bowing down to Muslim hardline groups’, it allowed for the locks of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya to be opened. The resultant events altered India’s politics.

to prevent destitution, and there was no reason to exclude Muslim women, who were entitled to claim maintenance from their former husbands even after *iddat* if they were unable to maintain themselves.

The Bench ruled that there was no conflict between Section 125 and Muslim personal law, adding that the Quran also imposes an obligation on a husband to provide for his divorced wife.

## The opposition

The verdict was met with fierce backlash from some Muslim groups, who saw it as an attack on their religious identity and personal law.

Facing political pressure, the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government passed The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, to nullify the judgment.

The law stipulated that a divorced Muslim woman was entitled to a “reasonable and fair provision and maintenance” from her former husband only for the *iddat* period.

That year, amid pressure from Hindu right-wing groups, who said the government had bowed down to hardline Mus-

lims, the gates of the Babri Masjid in Uttar Pradesh were unlocked under a Congress-led government. Thus, the case also proved pivotal in the lead-up to the Ayodhya mosque’s demolition in 1992.

## The aftermath

The 1986 Act was challenged, and the case came before a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in 2001. The court upheld the Act, focusing on a section which required the former husband to make “a reasonable and fair provision and maintenance to be made and paid to her within the *iddat* period.”

This was interpreted to mean that the payment during the *iddat* period had to be substantial enough to provide for the woman’s maintenance for the rest of her life, or until she remarried.

However, some ambiguity remained on whether the Act replaced Section 125 of the CrPC for Muslim women. The SC ruled in a 2024 judgment that the 1986 Act doesn’t bar a divorced Muslim woman from seeking maintenance under Section 125. It said they could seek a remedy under either of the laws, or both.

## { 2 THINGS TO KNOW }

# New research explains why orb weaver spiders add decorations to their webs

AFTER CRAFTING a gauzy web, a spider might reckon that the construction isn’t complete. Some spiders, known as orb weavers, often add decorations, typically spun from silk but sometimes using bits of insect cadavers or shed exoskeleton.

Spiders add big, noticeable features, known as stabilimenta, some looking like zigzags, others like a disk that’s been scribbled in thread, or even a big “X” that marks the web’s centre. A study published Wednesday in the journal *PLOS One* offers a new explanation for why spiders spin stabilimenta. There’s ample support for the idea



Wasp spiders are a species of orb weaver which are found in Europe. THE NYT

that stabilimenta distract birds or wasps that prey on spiders. Spiders are known for vibrating their webs, blurring the stabilimenta, and then scuttling through a hole in the disk or jumping away to safety. However, researchers have also hypothesised that

web accessories collect water or fool insects by reflecting UV light.

Spiders can detect snagged prey through vibrations coursing along the webs’ threads. And they can adjust the tension of a silk thread, altering how vibrations travel.

The study’s authors figured stabilimenta could also affect the speed and distance of such signals. THE NYT

# Situation is spiralling out of control: Drivers of continued conflict in Sudan

IN 2019, an image of a Sudanese woman standing atop a vehicle and addressing a crowd went viral online as a powerful symbol of hope in a country beset with conflict. Soon, the 30-year regime of President Omar al-Bashir collapsed, but what followed was further division and a war that continues. On Tuesday, United Nations General Secretary Antonio Guterres said the situation in Sudan was “spiralling out of control”, after a paramilitary force seized the city of el-Fasher in Darfur.

Primarily, competing power-grabbing attempts have contributed to the instability. An interim civilian-military government fell in 2021, following



Displaced families from el-Fasher at a camp where they sought refuge. AP

a coup led by military generals Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the head of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

While they promised elections by 2023, disagreements on the role of the RSF and the SAF led to a fallout. Since then, the country has witnessed a civil war that has left tens of thousands of people dead. The RSF has been accused of targeting the Massalit and other non-Arab people. Recently, the RSF’s advances have been accompanied by reports of “widespread executions”, Guterres said. ENS





## ● GIG ECONOMY

NEED FOR URGENT OVERHAUL, BACKED BY LEGAL RECOGNITION, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ACTIVE GOVERNANCE

# Promise and precarity

## AMIT KAPOOR

Chair, Institute for Competitiveness



convenience. Gig workers, while technically classified as “independent contractors”, often work in conditions resembling informal labour, i.e. long hours, low pay, and no protections. They lack entitlements such as paid leave, health insurance, and accident compensation. They depend on applications and ratings which govern their work allocation and job continuity, through opaque algorithms. Many hail from rural India and live under the

tial steps to address the issues outlined above. The Code on Social Security, 2020, formally recognises gig and platform workers as a distinct category and proposes creating a social security fund with contributions from platform companies. The FY26 Budget announced registration of online platform workers on the e-Shram portal, identity cards for gig workers, and access to health insurance under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya

Yojana. States like Rajasthan and Karnataka have taken it a step further. Rajasthan passed a forward-looking law, the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, 2023, mandating platform registration, creation of a welfare board, and grievance redress mechanisms. Similarly, Karnataka has introduced the Karnat-

aka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Ordinance, 2025, which requires platforms to contribute 1-5% per transaction toward a welfare fund. These steps signal intent to formalise and protect the workforce. But global practices are moving further in both scope and inclusivity. In the EU and Canada, the burden of proof is shifting to firms to justify classifying workers as independent contractors. This approach expands access to rights, including minimum wage, job security, and collective bargaining. While reforms suggest practical approaches, particularly in addressing worker misclassification and closing enforcement gaps, India must go further. With its vast consumer base, an expanding platform

Short, mobile, multilingual micro-courses in logistics, digital or AI tools can boost income and job quality

aka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Ordinance, 2025, which requires platforms to contribute 1-5% per transaction toward a welfare fund. These steps signal intent to formalise and protect the workforce. But global practices are moving further in both scope and inclusivity. In the EU and Canada, the burden of proof is shifting to firms to justify classifying workers as independent contractors. This approach expands access to rights, including minimum wage, job security, and collective bargaining. While reforms suggest practical approaches, particularly in addressing worker misclassification and closing enforcement gaps, India must go further. With its vast consumer base, an expanding platform

economy demands a fair, accountable, tailored, and long-term systemic overhaul.

First, the legal classification of gig work must evolve to reflect its hybrid nature and the realities of platform-based labour. The Code on Social Security, 2020, marks an important first step in this direction. It recognises gig and platform workers and envisions support structures, such as helplines and facilitation centres, to help workers register and enrol in social security schemes. It also assigns responsibility to state governments for addressing employment-related issues under existing labour laws. Its provisions must be translated into accessible, enforceable protections that strike a balance between platform viability and worker welfare. Second, to supplement this, a universal ID linked to social security benefits must be integrated with the e-Shram portal to help track contributions and ensure benefits follow workers across platforms and locations.

Third, India must invest in skill building programmes tailored for gig workers. Short, mobile, multilingual micro-courses in logistics, digital or AI tools can boost income and job quality. Digital literacy and safety training, particularly for women, can close access gaps and improve working conditions. Fourth, grievance redress mechanisms must be platform-mandated, transparent, and worker-friendly. Finally, gender-inclusive policies must be a core priority. Access to menstrual leave and safety features, especially for those in care and delivery work, can make the sector more equitable.

India's gig economy is at a critical juncture. It holds the potential to unlock employment, innovation, and inclusive growth. But without a strong rights-based foundation and comprehensive reform, it risks becoming another site of exploitation and inequity. An urgent overhaul, backed by legal recognition, social protection, and active governance, can transform gig work from a precarious hustle into a pathway to prosperity.

With inputs from Nabha Joshi, researcher, Institute for Competitiveness

## Policy paradox

SC's nod to revisit Vodafone Idea's AGR offers relief but raises questions on state-backed rescues

**T**HE SUPREME COURT'S (SC) clarification that the government can revisit the entire adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues of Vodafone Idea (Vi), rather than just the additional demand of ₹9,450 crore, comes as a big breather not just for the beleaguered telecom operator but also for the government. The AGR has been a drag on Vi's fund-raising efforts and competitive standing. For the government too, which now holds a 49% stake in the company, the verdict comes as a relief since it has a direct interest in ensuring the company's survival. Be that as it may, the larger question remains: Is this the right way to revive a company or to extend policy support? The AGR dispute, which dates back to over two decades, was a legal battle between the government and the telecom operators over the definition of AGR. The government won that case in 2019, resulting in a staggering ₹1.47 lakh-crore liability for the industry. The SC then refused to offer any relief, directing the telcos to pay up in full. The government's subsequent package, allowing the conversion of dues into equity and providing moratoriums, was seen as the most it could do without appearing to be bending rules or favouring private firms.

Now, the SC has taken a more flexible view, citing the government's 49% equity stake and the broader public interest involved. In effect, what the court earlier dismissed has been brought back under the policy domain, but only because the company has become quasi-state-owned. This selective relaxation raises uncomfortable questions. The matter has always been one of policy, yet the government avoided taking a clear stance earlier, haunted perhaps by the spectre of the 2G scam and the fear of being accused of favouring private players at the expense of the exchequer. The judiciary, on its part, confined itself to a narrow legalistic reading of the contract and the definition of AGR, ignoring the financial realities of the telecom sector.

The implicit lesson seems to be that if a private company is to be saved, first make it government-owned. BSNL stands as the best example of this approach. Despite being perpetually loss-making, it continues to receive bailout after bailout since 2019, totalling over ₹3.2 lakh crore. That Vi needs immediate relief is undeniable. The company, with AGR dues pegged at around ₹83,400 crore and total liabilities of nearly ₹2 lakh crore, has been weighed down by an unsustainable debt burden. The ability to reassess and possibly reduce the dues could ease the pressure on its balance sheet, help it raise funds, and restore some investor confidence.

True, the government is now deeply enmeshed in Vi's fate, but if its intent is truly reformist then it must now also come out with a clear exit plan. Similarly, if BSNL cannot stand on its own despite repeated revival packages, it is time to reassess whether taxpayer money should be used to fund it. Both the government and the court have handled the AGR issue with hesitation and inconsistency, responding more to crisis than principle. For real reform, the government must now draw a line—revisit dues where necessary, enable market correction, but then step back. Otherwise, rescue plans will turn into costly habits, blurring the line between reform and dependence.

# A wistful farewell to Buffett's annual letters

**INNOVATION AND INFLUENCE** are very distinct phenomena. Bob Dylan, for instance, didn't invent folk music: He borrowed extensively from Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and others in the folk revival movement of the fifties and sixties, yet he became far more influential than any of them. When he decided to go electric in the mid-1960s, rock n' roll was already a dominant force in pop culture, yet Dylan became far more important for the genre than nearly all of the bands and solo acts that came before him.

Such is the relationship between Warren Buffett and earlier finance and investing writers, especially Benjamin Graham, author of *The Intelligent Investor*. Buffett didn't dream up most of the ideas he espoused—many came straight out of Graham's teachings—but he brought them to the masses through the Berkshire Hathaway annual letters and gave us all a proof of concept through the company's extraordinary performance. In doing so, he earned his place as our greatest investor and leading finance and investing writer. Without Buffett, we may not be talking about Graham at all.

So, it was with a tinge of sadness that I learned last week that Buffett was poised to relinquish his most important annual writing exercise: the Berkshire letter. As part of this decision to step down as chief executive at the end of the year, the *Wall Street Journal* has reported that Buffett, 95, will pass the authorship of the letter to his successor, Greg Abel. It is the end of an era, and a time to reflect on Buffett's accomplishments.

Buffett's most memorable theme was the flightiness of “Mr. Market” and the need to stay focused on intrinsic value. For Buffett, Mr. Market—a character first conceived by Graham—was forever doomed to live with “incurable emotional problems”, as he wrote in Berkshire's 1987 letter. At times Mr. Market was euphoric (prices were too high), and at others he was deeply depressed (prices were too low), but investors always had the discretion to ignore him or take him up on his occasionally bargain-bin prices.

The key, for Buffett, was to make sure you did your homework and had a firm grasp on the intrinsic value of your would-be investments. “Indeed, if you aren't certain that you understand and can value your business far better than Mr. Market, you don't belong in the game,” Buffett wrote. “As they say in poker, “If you've been in the game 30 minutes and you don't know who the patsy is, you're the patsy.”

Many of Buffett's other recurring themes flowed naturally from that view of the market. If the market was manic and unpredictable, the key was to invest in a disciplined manner. Investors should only buy firms they were capable of understanding and never be wooed by non-intuitive sales pitches and Wall Street esoterica. As a manager, he tried to explain Berkshire's annual performance as if he were explaining it to his younger sister “Bertie”, AKA Roberta Buffett Elliott—someone with common sense and a keen interest in business news, but no particular expertise in economics or accounting. That readability is what made Buffett's essays so great.

He claimed no particular gift for timing the market, but insisted on making investments with a “margin of safety”, another Grahamism that means buying at a price well cheaper than one's estimate of intrinsic value. And ultimately, Buffett has always insisted investors maintain a long time horizon. At Berkshire, he was focused on attracting shareholders who shared that philosophy and was more than happy if that resulted in minimal trading in the firm's own stock. “We don't understand the CEO who wants lots of stock activity, for that can be achieved only if many of his owners are constantly exiting,” he wrote in the 1988 letter. “At what other organisation—school, club, church, etc.—do leaders cheer when members leave?”

It's turning into an interesting time for Buffett to step aside, both as an executive and a public intellectual. Much like the period before the financial crisis, Berkshire's cash has been soaring, hitting a record \$381.7 billion in the third quarter. That and Berkshire's underweight orientation toward the hot tech and communications sectors have its stock portfolio returning just about 4.9% this year, even as the S&P 500 advanced 17.7%. If Buffett were interpreting his own results, he'd probably caution us against making too much about one year of underperformance.

And he'd focus on economic performance, rather than volatile market outcomes. “After all,” he wrote in 1983, “why should the time required for a planet to circle the sun synchronise precisely with the time required for business actions to pay off? Instead, we recommend not less than a five-year test as a rough yardstick of economic performance.” Come 2030, we'll have to turn to Greg Abel to help us make sense of the results and decide if Berkshire is still living up to Buffett's expectations.

**T**HE GIG ECONOMY is no longer a fringe, niche pocket of India's labour market. It is steadily becoming a central force and reshaping the way people work and earn a living. The increasing modernity and ease of digital platforms are changing the nature of employment, revealing both growing opportunities and inequalities, as well as the independence and insecurity of jobs.

Over the past decade, gig and platform-based work has expanded swiftly in labour markets across developed and developing countries. From food delivery and ride-hailing to freelance consulting and care services, millions now rely on apps and algorithms for income. In the US, more than one-third of workers report expecting to rely on gig work to make ends meet. In Malaysia, approximately 70% of gig workers are part-time workers. At the heart of these shifts are shared conditions of rising living costs, a preference for flexible hours, easy access to digital tools and platforms, and advances in digital infrastructure and AI-driven platforms.

India showcases a dramatic expansion trend. According to NITI Aayog and Economic Survey 2023-24, the number of gig workers is projected to rise from 7.7 million in 2020-21 to 23.5 million by 2030, comprising 6.7% of the non-agricultural workforce or 4.1% of India's total workforce by 2029-30. The sector contributes 1.25% to GDP, and is projected to treble and grow to 4% by 2030. Several factors are fuelling its growth. With platforms like Swiggy, Ola, Zomato, and Urban Company expanding rapidly and connecting millions with on-demand jobs, urban areas have become hubs of this transformation.

Yet, these gains come at a cost. A 2023 Fair Work India study revealed delivery and ride-hailing workers earn ₹15,000-20,000 per month, despite working extensive hours, which places them below the minimum wage thresholds. In addition to this, the “10-minute delivery” race often turns into a relentless daily hustle for gig workers, who bear risks, face safety issues, and endure fatigue to cater to consumer

## N CHANDRA MOHAN

The writer is an economics and business commentator based in New Delhi

**THERE ARE HUGE** takeaways for India from US President Donald Trump's visit to Asia, which saw leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, and South Korea fawn over him and conclude deals that may have undermined their leverage as a regional grouping. Trump, however, met his comeuppance dealing with President Xi Jinping and secured a fragile trade truce on terms that tacitly recognise the US and China as equals. There is an opportunity for India to engage more closely with ASEAN that has faced the full brunt of the tensions between these two great powers that have an outsized presence in the region. The US is the largest investor while China is the largest trading partner and their rivalry will only intensify.

For a region that struggles to maintain closer relations with both the US and China, Trump's tariffs on ASEAN members—ranging from 10% to 49%—struck a body blow to America's standing in the grouping. Although he stated the US is 100% with the region, his approach is largely transactional in slapping Malaysia, Thailand, and Cambodia with levies of 24%, 36%, and 49% respectively, and later negotiating them down to 19% after signing deals for critical minerals with Malaysia and brokering a peace deal between Thailand and Cambodia. There are deep-seated concerns over 40% tariffs on transshipped goods from China, 100% tariffs on branded pharmaceuticals, and prospective

sector-specific levies on semiconductors.

ASEAN equally has concerns with China's growing military power despite being closely integrated with supply chains from the mainland and recently upgrading its bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). There have been frequent disputes with member nations like the Philippines in the South China Sea. The grouping has not been able to counter China's aggressive claims although there is a non-binding ASEAN-China code of conduct aimed at managing this festering conflict, a process that needs to be speeded up. In this regard, the exhortation by the US to these nations to stand firm and strengthen their maritime forces to counter the dragon's “destabilising actions” in the South China Sea is a non-starter.

At a time when Southeast Asia feels that the US has turned its back on the region and has anxieties over China's aggression in the South China Sea, there is a window open for India to offer stability in its partnership with this grouping. Although ASEAN leaders lavished praise on Trump and accepted his one-sided trade deals, they know the region is not his priority as he walked away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in his first term as US President, which later morphed into the 12-member Comprehensive and Progres-

sive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). India can also similarly ink bilateral deals but it's better to deal with the grouping once the review of its ASEAN FTA is over by end-2025.

India must leverage the opportunities in the \$4-trillion grouping as it is foundational to its Look East policy and pivot to the prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Stakeholders like India Inc can contribute by stepping up investments like the Aditya Birla Group did in the yesteryear. Unfortunately, at a time when the grouping is attracting record inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) of \$226 billion, those from India have receded to \$3.3 billion in 2024 from \$4.4 billion in 2010 when we inked the FTA in goods with ASEAN. India's FDI in manufacturing is also negligible, at \$262 million or 8% of the total FDI inflows in 2024, according to ASEAN's data portal. The Tata Group has exited its manufacturing presence. The good news of late, however, is that our fintech start-ups are targeting countries in the region like Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, and the Philippines as the next big frontier.

The ASEAN FTA can work better for India if it encourages domestic industry to set up permanent establishments in these economies to seize emerging oppor-

tunities to integrate with global value chains. Anil Wadhwa, former secretary (east) in the ministry of external affairs, has recently written that India is likely to propose greater cooperation with ASEAN members under its various production-linked incentive schemes in order to strengthen supply chains with the grouping. The most efficacious means, however, of integrating with supply chains in Southeast Asia is by engaging more closely with both China and the US that has 6,000-odd companies operating in the region.

Building on our relationship with Southeast Asia could be a basis for reconsidering joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is after all ASEAN-plus with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. A Beijing-based economist, Liqing Zhang, argues that India could export more to China by joining the RCEP. India is broadening its economic cooperation and trade agreement with Australia and negotiating a FTA with New Zealand. Besides these two nations, four ASEAN nations are part of the CPTPP which India could contemplate joining in the future. Looking east with greater confidence is warranted due to a heightened Sino-US rivalry despite an uneasy trade truce. There is an opportunity for India as America is interested in only bilateral deals while China asserts itself through force in the region.

Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A quiet revolution

Apropos of “A big win” (*FE*, November 4), the sight of proud fathers cheering their daughters in blue as India lifted the women's World Cup was as moving as the victory itself. It symbolised a quiet revolution, one where daughters are finally being seen, not as dependents or keepers of family honour, but as achievers in their own right. Behind every stroke of Harmanpreet Kaur and

every six from Shafali Verma stood a father who chose faith over fear, support over control. In a society where too many daughters are shackled by prejudice or violence, these cricketers and their fathers have rewritten the script of parenthood. They show that true protection lies not in restriction, but in empowerment. A daughter's dreams are not a threat to family pride, but its brightest expression. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

### Climate finance gap

Three decades have passed since the first Conference of the Parties (COP) was held at Berlin in 1995. Except for the ritual annual meet, conspicuous action from developed nations is missing. India reaching 250 gigawatt (Gw) of installed capacity of renewable energy, against a target of 500 Gw by 2030, is a great milestone. The COP27 in Egypt paved the way for

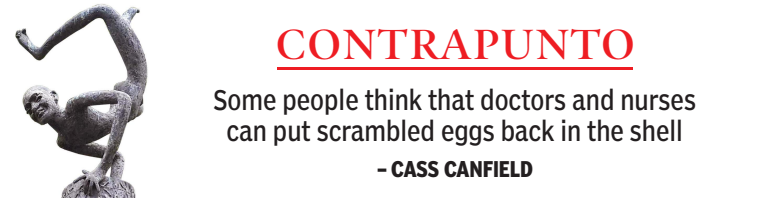
establishing a loss and damage fund to support poorer countries in climate mitigation, but there has been not much improvement in mobilising funds. The US's sudden exit from the Paris agreement was a major setback. It is hoped that COP30 would put pressure to mobilise the targeted \$1.3 trillion annually by 2035. —RV Baskaran, Pune

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CONTRAPUNTO

Some people think that doctors and nurses can put scrambled eggs back in the shell

- CASS CANFIELD

What Doctor Ordered

Our docs, nurses are in demand globally. Why can't we fix med infra here & also become top med tourism spot?

It's unsurprising yet heartening to see that India's doctors and nurses are the largest group of migrant health workers in OECD member countries. In 2020-2021, 75k doctors moved to practise in other countries as did 1.2L nurses, per data released in the International Migration Outlook 2025 report. Two points.

● First, it confirms trends since the turn of the century, and globalisation, that migration of skilled workforce is a mainstay for developed economies to address in the most obvious way the challenges of an ageing population and growing demand for healthcare. To that end, about a quarter of doctors in service in OECD nations are migrants.

● Second, protectionist anti-migration policies are not in the self-interest of countries. Nations recognise this, and are tailoring policy to recruit healthcare workers from countries like India.

The OECD report points to a Belgian project that recruits and trains Indian nurses for the Flemish healthcare system, especially geriatric care. The two-year course's initial months include training in Kerala where Dutch is also taught. Such initiatives are welcome as are govt-to-govt endeavours such as recruitment agreements with England and Ireland.

Over half of Ireland's nursing workforce in 2023 was trained abroad, the country is home to a robust Indian nurses' diaspora.

When this is the reality – a high global demand for Indian doctors and nurses – why is the domestic outlook so gloomy? Clearly what is taught in govt medical colleges as well as private ones not focused on profiteering alone (high capitation fees, sham merit, ghost faculty, poor infra) is holding Indians in good stead. The OECD report makes it all the more a priority that govt fix the medical colleges ecosystem – decentralising the all-India entrance exam NEET that over 2.4mn sat for last year, is just the starting point. Take the registration of doctors. Months ago, NMC reported under 1.5L doctors registered in Tamil Nadu, while the state council registered over 2L. For Delhi, NMC had fewer than 31.5k docs but the Delhi council data for 2020 had over 72,600. There are no answers to where 40k docs disappeared. Add to that the statewide skew in numbers of doctors and the massive urban-rural divide in infra and staff.

In allowing these problems to fester and at best attempting band-aid solutions, India is underutilising its potential as a top healthcare destination. Ranked 10th globally, India's medical tourism market is projected to reach \$58bn by 2035 at CAGR of 12.3%. Over 6.4L medical tourist visas were issued in 2024. Yet, fragmented care, growing distrust in private hospitals for overcharging and unnecessary procedures, and poor follow-up are marrring India's many advantages.

MAD MATH

Trump wants nuke testing. Others want nukes. No winners in a nuclear war. But arms lobby wins in nuclear race

Mad mathematics – that's what nuke competition is. Nuclear armed countries have enough warheads to destroy the world many times over. But most want more. And it's no surprise that Trump has ordered resumption of nuke testing. He claims Russia, China and North Korea are doing it. There's no proof Moscow and Beijing are mushroom-clouding again. Yes, Kim Jong Un is. But he runs a rogue regime. Trump's real motivation is mad math. Putin is expanding his nuclear weapons delivery systems. Xi wants 1,000 nukes by 2030. But Trump has multiple delivery options too and he can feel damn macho by asking generals to tell him about America's 5,000 nukes. So, what's bugging him?



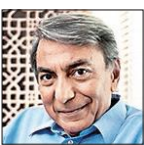
Answer: nuke geopolitics is crazy. Israel has nukes but doesn't deny or confirm it. America lets it be. But Israel's adversaries think of going nuclear. Other nuke-seeking nations argue that nukes will make them safer – they point to Libya, which gave up nuke ambitions and is in chaos, to Ukraine, which gave up nukes and got invaded by Putin. Even a child knows a nuclear war has no winner. But apparently, govts have a hard time understanding this.

The nuclear arms race however has one clear winner – the arms lobby. Backward linkages of nuclear testing directly benefit arms manufacturers. They are in clover anyway, given the number of conflicts going on in the world. Look closely, there's a pattern. Sow chaos, supply weapons to conflicting sides, which in turn creates more chaos and finally forces warring parties to consider nukes. Globally, the military industrial complex is getting fat on a market worth approx \$2.5tn annually. But it wants more. The likes of Trump, who btw wants the Nobel Peace Prize, are happy to feed that greed. And the math gets madder.

Words of whizzdom

Of all languages, English has the weirdest vocabulary – and it's getting weirder

Jug Suraiya



"'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves/Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:/All mimsy were the borogoves,/And the mome raths outgrabe." – Lewis Carroll.

Lewis Carroll made up words, admitting unauthorised migrants into the community of language. Already playing host to a legitimately resident verbal population, estimated between 600,000 and a million words, English is the most verbose of the world's languages. It might be likened to a tropical rainforest with the most exotic and esoteric verbal flora and fauna.

With 45 letters, 'pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis' is generally deemed the longest word in English, denoting a lung disease caused by inhaling volcanic dust.

However, with 28 letters, 'antidisestablishmentarianism' is considered to be one of the longest non-scientific terms, connoting the double negative of a view which is against the destabilisation of established norms and is therefore in favour of convention.

Josefa Heifetz Byrne's Dictionary of Unusual, Obscure, and Preposterous Words is a delightful compilation collated from a lexical cornucopia of sources covering 6,000 words.

secondopinion

Ranking from 'aa', which means a form of Hawaiian lava, and 'abecedarian', a person learning the alphabet, the dictionary goes all the way to 'zzzjoanw', a Maori drum.

Published in 1974, the dictionary needs an Indianised update as with between 125mn and 228mn second-language English speakers, India is the most anglophone country in the world. And who should be the compiler of such a dictionary, but that apotheosis of authoritative articulation, bespoke bestower of bombastic ballyhoo, expositor of extraordinary expression, supremo of sesquipedalian semantic sententiousness, prestidigitator of polysyllabic prolixity, the wunderkind of waffle?

Who but the person who could coin a generic term for such variegated verbiage and call them Tharoorisms?

Bihari Mukhiyas: Handy & Held Back

They form an 8,000-strong network of last-mile leaders in the state and are central to village politics. That they just can't go up the political ladder reflects how power lies not with the people but far, far away

M R Sharan



Professor of Development Economics

One summer evening this year, we walked to the house of the mukhiya – the elected head of the Gram Panchayat – in a village in Bihar. The approach road was half-built and slippery, pitch dark stretches broken only by the glow of our phone torches. The mukhiya had a small meeting space in his front yard, plastic chairs scattered beneath a low ceiling, deserted at that hour. We – researchers visiting from Patna – met him in his modest living room, gathered around his cot as he spoke in the dim white light.

He was young, scruffy, with the easy assurance of someone who had come up through mazdoor activism. His words carried humour, irony, and an unmistakable intelligence. Around him sat a handful of young men – his loyal coterie – who laughed at his jokes and nodded as he spoke about everything under his charge: *anganwadis* and roads, drains and streetlights, self-help groups and schemes.

He could have been mistaken for the beating heart of democracy in Bihar: a young local leader, vested with the people's mandate, charting a path of development, a miniature version of the MLA or MP. That impression would not have been quite true.

Bihar's 8,000+ mukhiyas are each directly elected by Gram Panchayat citizens of population roughly 10,000. On paper, they're responsible for panchayat development. They head the village council of about 13 elected ward members. They're expected to decide on infra projects, identify beneficiaries for schemes, address grievances with govt departments, convene Gram Sabhas to plan local development, and finance these activities through central/state grants and local taxes.

Mukhiyas and ward members are often better educated than those they represent. But they aren't really elite – most far less wealthy than politicians who dominate higher-tier elections. And reservations mean that 50% of mukhiyas and ward members are women, 17% SCs and up to 20% EBCs.

Given their centrality to village politics and as the state's most extensive network of 'last-mile' leaders, it's only natural political parties would seek to tap mukhiyas to extend their reach. Yet Bihar Panchayati Raj Act prohibits this. They're barred from contesting on party symbols, expected to remain nonpartisan. This rule is

observed more in the breach. As one mukhiya said, "It is as if the party symbol is stamped on my back."

Mukhiyas mobilise voters in favour of particular candidates, accompany party workers on door-to-door campaigns, help identify and persuade swing households, and sometimes act as booth managers on polling day. Some go further: coordinate vehicles, arrange food for campaign teams, provide updates from the field.

Caste plays a central role in how mukhiyas mobilise. Parties are built along caste lines and mukhiyas' own base, too, bound by it. Ward members come from a range of castes – every ward represents caste-homogenous constituencies of about 1,000 people each – and are recruited by parties as well. A 2024 survey suggests nearly 40% of ward members report links to parties.

Ask mukhiyas about their own political aspirations, and they'll present a paradox. Part of why they work with parties is to rise up the political hierarchy, to contest MLA elections or aim even higher. This makes complete sense. If the pool of elected representatives is seen as an organisation, mukhiyas and ward members occupy its lowest tier. The most capable naturally aspire to climb upward. Yet when asked how many people they know who've actually done so, most mukhiyas struggle to name even one. In other words, the political ladder is broken.

BIHAR 2025

Why is this so? For two key structural reasons, both rooted in the nature of decentralisation in India. First, in Bihar – as elsewhere – decentralisation remains incomplete, making it difficult for mukhiyas to govern effectively. Gram Panchayats and their councils rarely chart independent development paths; they depend heavily on higher tiers for funds, functions and functionaries.

Mukhiyas spend an inordinate amount of time at higher block and district offices, lobbying to get schemes sanctioned or implemented in their areas. Funds are often tied to specific programmes, not necessarily what their constituents value. This limits their ability to mobilise local taxes or signal capability – to parties, to voters or to the wider political system.

The second structural reason is that competence alone is rarely enough for higher-tier elections. Without the funds to secure a party ticket or run an independent campaign, even the most capable mukhiyas find themselves sidelined. As one mukhiya who simply lacked the means lamented



Where There's A Will, There's A Billionaire @ 20

20-something tech billionaires, like the trio of AI startup Mercor, fire millions of dreams, but few remain in the club for long. It's a different story when billionaires will their wealth to children and grandchildren

Abhilash.Gaur@timesofindia.com



The AI boom is minting billionaires. There are around 500 AI unicorns already, and just the top four had created 15 billionaires by March. Last week added three more, an unremarkable figure when four billionaires (of all kinds) are added every week, on average. But 22-year-old Adarsh Hiremath, Surya Midha and Brendan Foody are the youngest self-made billionaires ever. By breaking Mark Zuckerberg's 2008 record – he was 23 then – they've become the tech world's equivalent of Renaud Lavillenie, who smashed Sergey Bubka's two-decade-old pole vault record in 2014. That Hiremath and Midha have Indian roots stokes our interest further.

Is this an inflection point? Have we entered an epoch where wealth and age don't grow together anymore? Hiremath, Midha, Foody and their startup Mercor seem to confirm what other 20-something billionaires like Sam Bankman-Fried, Pedro Franceschi, Ryan Breslow, etc, have made us surmise before.

Not so fast | John Rockefeller, the first dollar billionaire, was 77 when he hit the mark in 1916. Since then, the median age at which people amass their first billion has slipped to 67. Anyone who makes it by 50 is still considered 'young', because only about 10% of the world's 3,500-odd billionaires form that cohort. But with tech wizards like Hiremath, Midha and Foody making their first billion in the early 20s, is the median age of billionaires about to crash?

Yes, but not for the reason we wish. While sunny valuations of firms like Mercor create the perception that entrepreneurship, and self-made men and women, are having their moment, investment bank UBS reported in 2023 that for the first time in a decade, more people had become billionaires via inheritance than entrepreneurship. And this trend will deepen as the thousands of ageing billionaires will their fortunes to their children and grandchildren. That's the coming 'Great Wealth Transfer'.

This is a reversal | Contrast this with Chicago Booth professor Steve Kaplan and Stanford professor Joshua Rauh's 2014 analysis that showed more people with middle-income backgrounds had been making it to the Forbes 400 list of richest Americans. The number of billionaires with super-rich backgrounds had almost halved from 60% in 1982 to 32% in 2011. The share of those who grew up poor held steady at 20%. But middle-class kids – the Bill Gates and Warren Buffets and Philip Knights – had raced up on merit and entrepreneurship.

What's happening now, behind the tech-fuelled euphoria, is actually a reversion to wealth perpetuating wealth. In Jan, Oxford made the more worrying claim that 60% of billionaire wealth comes from "inheritance, monopoly

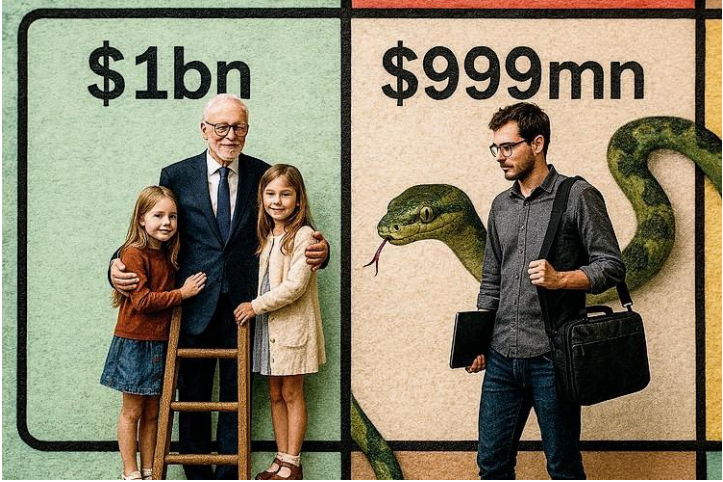
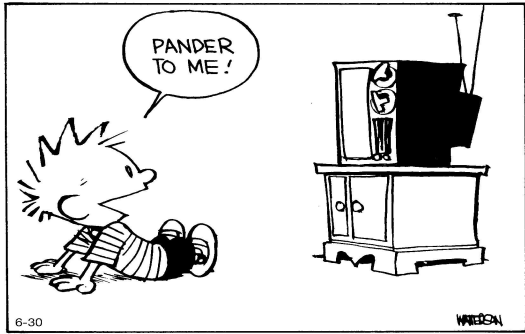
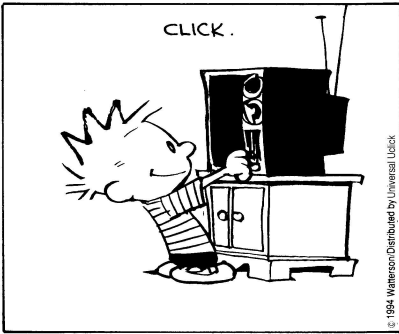


Image: AI

power or crony connections". Its report, titled 'Takers Not Makers', said 36% of billionaire wealth flows from inheritance, 18% is acquired through monopolies and 6% from crony sources. "Over 1,000 of today's billionaires will pass on more than \$5.2tn to their heirs over the next two to three decades," it said, citing a UBS estimate.

Tech wealth is precarious | So, the early 2000s' Zuckerberrgs and today's Hiremaths and Midhas may not be exceptions, but they aren't going to be the rule either.

Calvin & Hobbes



Living Guru Nanak's Teachings Is True Celebration

Anandmurti Gurumaa

On Guru Nanak's Prakash Parv, the truest celebration lies not in rituals or festivities, but in understanding the essence of his teachings. Guru Nanak's *bani* explains that by the grace of the Guru, one comes to know one's true Self. One who truly realises 'Who am I?' also realises the Supreme, and all desires and cravings naturally come to an end.

Those who spend time in the company of sages and sing the praises of the Lord become free from all ailments. One might wonder – how can singing the Lord's glory cure disease? To attend the holy congregation, one rises before dawn. Rising early, one begins to practise yogic discipline. Guru Nanak emphasises that

one who engages in kirtan daily attains great peace. Yet here, kirtan does not mean singing aloud with instruments; it is the inner melody of remembrance that continues silently within, just as the heartbeats go on naturally.

When one speaks, let your words glorify the Divine; otherwise, remain silent. Such a person, even amidst worldly duties, lives like a sage. This is a mantra for every householder: to let remembrance of the Divine hum silently within, even as one continues daily work. There is no need for outward display – chanting aloud or turning rosary beads. True kirtan happens inwardly, as remembrance and awareness.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Just as the mind sometimes drifts to loved ones even in satsang, so too, let remembrance of the Divine stay ever-present within.

The Divine is infinite, boundless, and all-pervading. Even if millions realise Him, He remains inexhaustible. The one whose mind is absorbed in the Divine remains unshaken and fearless. Nothing can disturb a tranquil mind, but an ignorant person finds misery in everything. The worldly man suffers, while the sage remains serene.

One who is blessed by the Lord fears no one, for when Truth becomes one's support, a person becomes his own refuge. Guru Nanak teaches that when he 'looks', he

perceives the very source of everything. You may see a man, a woman, a tree, an animal, a mountain, or a star – but the Guru sees their root, the origin from which all arises. Entire universe has emerged from that Supreme Reality and will one day dissolve into it. Guru Nanak perceives that very essence – the Supreme Being who is both subtle and gross, unseen and seen, formless and the manifest.

True bliss lies only in knowledge; therefore, seek knowledge and live in bliss. Let your life be filled with music of joy, devotion, and divine wisdom, for the compassionate Guru has showered boundless grace upon humanity.

On the sacred occasion of Gurmurab, to truly reflect upon and live by Guru Nanak's teachings is the real celebration.

Sacred space



For every true statement there is an opposite one that is also true; that language and the confines of time lead people to adhere to one fixed belief that does not account for fullness of the truth...

Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha





Editor's  
TAKE

## A flood of promises as stage is set for Bihar polls

Bihar stands poised at a crossroads between aspiration and fatigue, between its past and the promise of unrealised potential

Bihar is in the throes of yet another election, a five year event that changes nothing on the ground but jolts it to the hilt. As Bihar heads into the first phase of polling on November 6, the stage is set for one of the most fiercely contested Assembly elections in recent times. This election is crucial as the stakes are high-not just for Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and the NDA alliance, but also for INDIA bloc led by the RJD-Congress combine as their strength and cohesion would be tested. In a state where political equations are based on caste calculus and shifting alliance is more of a rule than exception, both sides are presenting sharply contrasting narratives. The issues are not new but promises are. Predictably the narrative is far removed from the actual problems and solutions. The Bihar voters are being promised the moon – Sita temple to flood control to revival of cities to defence corridor – almost everything under the sun but are bereft of the immediate concerns of the man who would press the button on the EVM.

The NDA, spearheaded by the BJP, is projecting its campaign around Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Viksit Bihar" vision and Nitish Kumar's governance record-however frayed it may have become. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, addressing rallies in Sheohar and Sitamarhi, unveiled an ambitious roadmap: a defence corridor to generate industrial employment, revival of closed sugar mills, factories in every district, and the transformation of airports to global standards. When and how that happens is another matter altogether.

Perhaps the most emotive promise is Shah's assurance to make Bihar "flood-free"-a recurring tragedy that has crippled the state's economy for decades. The NDA vows to harness the Koshi River to irrigate 50,000 hectares in Mithilanchal and create a commission for flood control.

The plan to launch a Vande Bharat Express from Sitamarhi to Ayodhya, alongside a ₹850-crore Sita temple at Punaura Dham, blends development with cultural symbolism – a familiar BJP strategy to fuse infrastructure with identity politics. On the other side, the INDIA bloc is fighting a battle framed around unemployment, price rise, and the erosion of social justice which is at utopian as NDA's pitch for big ticket developments. Tejashwi Yadav continues to position himself as the voice of Bihar's youth, repeatedly invoking the twin crises of migration and joblessness but does not tell how it would it would be overcome. The Congress, though playing a secondary role but energised with Rahul Gandhi Bullet rallies, seeks to reassert its electoral relevance through a welfare-centric plank that includes farmer support and women's empowerment. But it is never a straight fight in Bihar; the growing presence of smaller, regional, and fringe players – like Pappu Yadav's Jan Adhikar Party, the AIMIM, and several caste-based outfits complicate the scenario and confuse the voters. While they may not win many seats, their role as vote-splitters could decisively alter outcomes in closely contested constituencies and swing margins and influence coalition arithmetic. The outcome of course would be available when EVMs are counted on November 14.

# A battle of mandates, leadership, and legacy

The Bihar Assembly election 2025 stands at the confluence of legacy, caste arithmetic, and leadership calculus – a defining contest that may reshape India's political equilibrium ahead of 2026



KALYANI SHANKAR

The upcoming 2025 Bihar Assembly election is expected to be fiercely competitive, with significant implications for all parties involved. While opinion polls favour the ruling NDA (National Democratic Alliance), they obscure strong anti-incumbency sentiments against Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. BJP leaders are already claiming victory. Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared on X that the BJP-NDA will register a comprehensive win in Bihar.

Political analysts predict that the polls involve the parties and their leaders. They also depend on leadership, caste dynamics, and voter perceptions. The INDIA bloc, led by the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and allied with Congress and smaller parties, seeks to end two decades of NDA rule. With strong leadership and organisation, the mood of the electorate suggests a volatile race ahead.

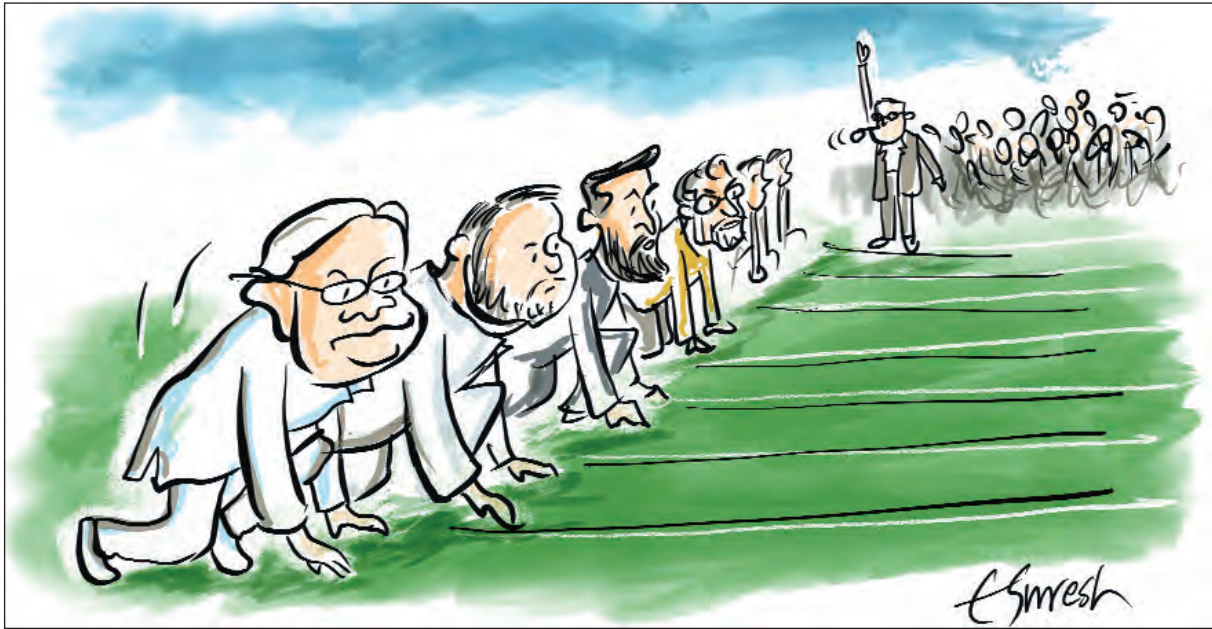
Dissatisfaction among local MLAs, combined with a lack of development and job creation in rural areas, weakens the ruling alliance's support. Although the NDA is backed by upper castes and older voters, its inability to engage youth and OBC (Other Backward Classes) groups presents challenges for the party.

The results of the elections are greatly influenced by the campaign leaders of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Kumar maintains strong support from voters, especially women, who appreciate his initiatives such as free electricity, clean water, and a plan to create one crore (10 million) jobs. Additionally, he has allocated ₹10,000 each for a women's welfare programme that aids 25 lakh women.

The C-Voter survey showed a fluctuating popularity of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar; respondents selected him as their preferred Chief Minister. A surprising contender was Prashant Kishor, leader of the Jana Suraj Party, who emerged as a favoured candidate with 16 per cent of the vote.

The NDA has a solid network across Bihar, comprising workers from both the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and JD(U) (Janata Dal United), as well as backing from RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) groups. Recent development projects supported by the Prime Minister have helped strengthen the NDA's campaign.

The BJP backed the JD(U) with top BJP leaders campaigning for the NDA, and financing is not an issue. However, the NDA struggles at the local level, where it lacks the same level of credibility and grassroots support as its opponents. The RJD's chief ministerial candidate, Tejashwi Yadav, faces a significant



THE YOUTH VOTE AND OVERALL TURNOUT WILL BE KEY IN SHAPING BIHAR'S FUTURE. THE LATEST VOTEVIBE SURVEY SHOWS A TIGHT RACE, WITH THE MGB AT 34.7 PER CENT AND THE NDA AT 34.4 PER CENT. JAN SURAJ HAS 12.3 PER CENT SUPPORT, WHILE 8.4 PER CENT ANTICIPATE A HUNG ASSEMBLY

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The Pioneer

challenge despite having a loyal Muslim-Yadav voter base that accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the electorate. The latest C-Voter survey indicates that he remains the top choice for the Chief Minister position in Bihar. Tejashwi, son of Lalu Yadav, is popular among the youth and has promised several populist measures to voters. They include increased social welfare benefits, such as pensions and healthcare, as well as job creation initiatives through government employment drives and support for small businesses.

Tejashwi leads the RJD, but his father, Lalu Prasad Yadav, and other family members still wield significant influence. Family disputes often force Tejashwi to focus on resolving internal conflicts rather than party strategy. Some face legal issues, including an ED investigation into the land-for-jobs scam.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had not previously campaigned but now plans to hold rallies and roadshows to mobilise support from Congress loyalists. His sister, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, is also actively campaigning in the state. However, the party struggles due to a lack of strong local leaders. Congress's ongoing underperformance is seen as a weak link in the coalition. Since the 1995 Bihar Assembly elections, Congress has not managed to win more than 30 seats in any election.

This time, the Congress has fielded 61 candidates, with 56 of those seats seeing direct competition against the BJP and JD(U) -

seats largely under NDA control.

The BJP mainly operates in urban and semi-urban areas, which comprise around 30 per cent of the population. Its upper-caste dominance, a result of historical and social factors, restricts its appeal to backward and marginalised communities, which could be a challenge in a state like Bihar with a significant OBC and Dalit population. The BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have been campaigning in Bihar.

The NDA highlights Nitish Kumar's welfare experience, while the INDIA bloc emphasises young leadership and boosting voter participation. The youth vote and overall turnout will be key in shaping Bihar's future.

The latest VoteVibe survey shows a tight race, with the MGB at 34.7 per cent and the NDA at 34.4 per cent. Jan Suraj has 12.3 per cent support, while 8.4 per cent anticipate a hung assembly. This election is crucial because it can significantly impact the futures of many leaders at both local and national levels. If Modi and Amit Shah win, they will have a better chance in next year's elections.

A loss at this point in time for Nitish Kumar may be the end of his political career. Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi also face uncertainty about their futures. The results for Chirag Paswan, Prashant Kishor, and other smaller parties are crucial. Overall, the election results will help some leaders and create challenges for others. It will be a nail-biting experience.

## The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

# Their win redefined what it means to be strong



ASHA IYER KUMAR

## 2ND OPINION

THE PIONEER

On Sunday, when the ball popped out of Amanjot Kaur's hands once, twice, before nestling safely back in, more than a billion hearts went into overdrive. When Jemi dropped a crucial catch, the same multitude dropped their heads into their hands with a groan. And when the captain latched on to the ball to settle the match, a nation roared in unison. Reams will be written about this victory for decades to come, as they were after 1983. But this time, it means more than fireworks, confetti, and streamers. It reflects more than resolve, grit, and resilience. It could also become something greater than a new chapter in the book of empowerment. Every hero has a story behind her or him, and the women in blue are no different. They are all part of a narrative of

struggle and long toil. The fact that they are women must have only made it tougher for them to break barriers. They must have fought opposition on all fronts. The hurdles must have come in all forms-people, attitudes, belief systems, societal norms, and their own bodies.

Every time one of them lunged at a ball to stop it or swung the bat heavily for a shot, I was reminded of their physical staying power on the ground. Unlike football or tennis, which keeps players on the turf for not more than two or three hours, cricket demands humongous amounts of stamina, force, and muscle power. Let's face it-a woman's body is not designed for long duress. Fitness for women is not just about the brawn; it is also about their hormones. Their menstrual cycles and the discomforts that accompany them are things they have had to fight and win, match after match. It is a subject not discussed often, for when they are on the field, fielding or chasing a score, they are sportspersons determined to enthrall and entertain. Few ever pause to think that they may be wearing pads other than the batting ones.

Their fixtures and schedules are not planned around their biology. They play through cramps, fatigue, and mood swings because they are fiercely focused on winning. They cannot let the world see them wince because they are

heroes waiting to be haloed by their fans. Their preparation thus goes beyond mere practice; they must learn to manage what to most women is unmanageable.

Although tracking their menstrual cycles, nutrition, hydration, and other medical support are part of professional training for women in sports, it is not easy to carry the inevitabilities of the body to the field. They play on, finding recourse in pain management tools because they cannot let physical vulnerabilities come between them and their dreams. If confronting a formidable opponent requires immense mental strength, doing so during their monthly cycle demands Himalayan fortitude.

This victory is not just about how the girls made every Indian man-including the chauvinists, misogynists, and woman-haters-stand up and applaud Indian women in collective pride; it is also about how they defied nature's intrinsics to redefine strength and endurance. It is a story of resilience that played out through a season of cramps, pain, and discomfort-a story that only a woman will fully understand. Seen in that light, this win transcends all realms of comparison and gender equations and sits in a league of its own.

## The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

The writer is a Dubai-based author, columnist, independent journalist and children's writing coach

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Balancing freedom and digital safety

The Supreme Court's recent observation on the petition seeking a ban on pornography highlights the urgent need for a balanced approach to online content regulation. A blanket ban, as seen in Nepal, is impractical and potentially counterproductive.

However, protecting minors from exposure to explicit material remains a grave concern. The Central Government must implement a comprehensive Digital Safety and Awareness Policy focusing on technological regulation, literacy, and parental empowerment. Measures like mandatory content filters on minors' devices, AI-based age verification, and partnerships with ISPs are vital. Digital education must be integrated into school curricula to help children distinguish healthy information from harmful content. India needs preventive governance-safeguarding minors while respecting adult freedom and digital rights.

The goal should not be prohibition but protection through awareness, accountability, and innovation. Only through empathy and education can we shape a digital world where freedom thrives responsibly and where every child can browse without fear. This balance between liberty and protection must define India's digital future.

VIJAYKUMAR H K | RAICHUR

## Celebrating Guru Nanak's eternal light

Guru Nanak Jayanti, the birth anniversary of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, will be celebrated on November 5, 2025, marking his 556th birth anniversary. Devotees will visit Gurudwaras, participate in processions, and share his teachings.

Guru Nanak Purab holds profound significance as a day to honour the holy Guru and embody his message, encouraging followers to overcome the five vices-lust, greed, attachment, anger, and pride. His timeless wisdom is enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred scripture of Sikhism.

Also known as *Gurpurab*, the occasion is momentous for the Sikh community worldwide. According to Sikh tradition, the celebration takes place on the full moon day of the Indian lunar month of Karthik. The festivities begin two days prior, with Akhand Path, a continuous recitation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in Gurudwaras. The main day commences with Prabhat Pheris, early morning processions that move through localities singing hymns.

The day, also called *Prakash Utsav*, symbolises light over ignorance and inspires devotees to live with truth, compassion, and selfless service – the essence of Guru Nanak's teachings.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

## Flexible attendance, healthier minds

The Delhi High Court's recent ruling on attendance norms for law students marks a significant step towards prioritising students' mental health and well-being in academic institutions.

The relaxation of attendance norms will relieve students from the pressure of strict classroom attendance, allowing them to focus on overall development and prepare for competitive exams. In today's competitive academic environment, students face immense pressure to excel, prepare for exams, and build their careers. Rigid attendance rules only add to this strain, leaving little time for self-care or extracurricular activities.

This ruling should apply to all undergraduate and postgraduate students. Completing degrees in non-technical subjects doesn't guarantee jobs; preparation for competitive exams is equally crucial. Managing assignments, seminars, and strict attendance simultaneously causes stress and anxiety.

A flexible approach would enable students to recharge and refocus. Colleges and universities must adopt such policies to prioritise student well-being. This landmark ruling marks a progressive shift towards a more compassionate and student-centric academic framework across India.

SUBHALAXMI LENKA | BENGALURU

## KERALA'S POVERTY-FREE CLAIM SPARKS POLITICAL FIRESTORM

The Kerala Government's recent declaration that the state is "free from extreme poverty" has ignited widespread protests from the opposition and evoked mixed reactions from citizens across the state. The announcement marks a significant milestone in Kerala's developmental history, as poverty has been a longstanding social challenge since time immemorial.

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) boycotted the Assembly session, denouncing the declaration as fraudulent and a distortion of reality. Although the initiative faced several early hurdles, in the long run it may prove to be a blessing in disguise for the ruling party, particularly with the Assembly elections drawing near. Nevertheless, reports continue to emerge from

various districts indicating that sections of the population still live in conditions of extreme poverty.

Despite these inconsistencies, the vision of eradicating poverty remains a commendable and forward-looking endeavour by the Government.

Rather than resorting to political confrontation, the opposition should cooperate with the Government in identifying those genuinely affected and in formulating effective rehabilitation measures.

Only through such a united and humane approach can this ambitious social mission reach its true and sustainable fruition, ensuring that no citizen of Kerala remains deprived of basic dignity and livelihood.

P VALLATH | KERALA

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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# Digital discipline: Crafting minds beyond the glow of screens

Our educational mission is not just to prepare youth for jobs; we are charged with equipping them for life. It is essential that we transform screen addiction into opportunities for skill development and sports engagement



DINESH SOOD

India's youth is often hailed as its greatest asset, yet excessive digital habits are jeopardising this potential. As screens bombard our children — from smartphones and streaming services to gaming and endless scrolling — a troubling pattern is emerging: attention spans are shrinking, social skills are fading, and physical health is deteriorating

As a dedicated skill alliance partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), we directly witness this transformation among thousands of young learners across India and abroad. Students entering our training programmes today do not lack aptitude; they lack attention. Their curiosity is high, but their focus is fractured. The battle against screen addiction extends beyond parental concern; it is an urgent educational, social, and national priority.

## Screen Dependence: The New Learning Deficit

According to a 2023 UNICEF India study, children aged 10 to 17 now spend an alarming average of 4.4 hours a day on recreational screen time — up from just 2 hours before the pandemic. The World Health Organisation warns that prolonged screen exposure during formative years can stunt brain development, hinder language acquisition, and lead to chronic sleep deprivation.

Closer to home, counsellors are reporting a disturbing increase in anxiety, irritability, and plummeting grades — classic symptoms of what psychologists call “digital fatigue.” In training centres, instructors are increasingly observing that learners struggle to engage in sustained physical or skill-based activities, whether related to hospitality tasks or creative design. The irony is stark: while the digital economy opens new doors, unchecked digital dependence undermines the concentration and discipline vital to seizing those opportunities.

## From Addiction to Action


Skill training is the definitive antidote to passive screen time. When learners shift





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ACCORDING TO A 2023 UNICEF INDIA STUDY, CHILDREN AGED 10 TO 17 NOW SPEND AN ALARMING AVERAGE OF 4.4 HOURS A DAY ON RECREATIONAL SCREEN TIME — UP FROM JUST 2 HOURS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

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from merely consuming content to actively creating value — from tapping screens to handling tools, engaging in the performing arts, mastering grooming tasks, working with robotics kits, or coding — they rediscover their purpose. Our extensive experience across India and numerous international partnerships demonstrates that hands-on skill learning revolutionises not just employability but also lifestyle. Students who once squandered their evenings on gaming are now developing essential grooming and makeover skills, crafting innovative wearable prototypes and jewellery, repairing drones, or volunteering as sports coaches.

The focus must move from chasing fleeting dopamine hits to committing to deliberate practice. This vision aligns with our mission to cultivate a skilled, confident, and future-ready youth base that recognises learning as a lifelong, balanced pursuit.

It is imperative for training academies to incorporate Digital Discipline modules into every skill programme. Before starting technical training, students must undergo a rigorous seven-day “Detox to Focus” workshop, emphasising screen-

time awareness, self-regulation, and daily movement goals (a minimum of 45 minutes of sport or yoga). They will also learn to use technology mindfully — transforming phones into tools, not toys — and participate in peer mentoring circles to discuss vital topics like sleep, focus, and motivation. The results will be undeniable.

Within just one year, we can expect marked improvements in attendance, hands-on performance scores, and overall mood and discipline among trainees. The message is clear: when training becomes experiential and engaging, screens lose their grip.

## Digital Inclusion with Human Connection

The global conversation about excessive screen use is escalating, and it is time for decisive action. Japan's Ministry of Education has taken the critical step of capping screen exposure in schools, while employers in the UK are proactively offering “digital detox” retreats for their staff. India must seize this moment to lead with a robust model — “Digital Inclusion with Human Connection.” By

directly linking the National Skill Development Corporation's (NSDC) skill mission to public health goals, we can unequivocally demonstrate that productivity and well-being are not opposing forces; they are powerful allies. The future workforce will demand more than just coding skills; essential human qualities like concentration, empathy, and teamwork are non-negotiable for success — and they cannot be nurtured through a touchscreen alone.

## Fostering Focus as a 21st-Century Skill

India's next major initiative in skill development must address attention as a paramount frontier. We must establish focus, discipline, and emotional balance as measurable competencies within our educational frameworks.

Polymakers will have to incentivise skill development partners to integrate mental wellness and physical activity modules into their curricula. Let us implement national awards to recognise “screen-light” schools and academies that excel in promoting digital balance programmes.

Private organisations should be mobilised to create impactful, expert-led

# A palpable dream of clean air in Delhi NCR



BALRAJ MEHTA

“Air pollution is turning Mother Nature prematurely grey.”— Irv Kupcinet Diwali has come and gone, paddy has been harvested, and the winter is upon us — and the attention has once again, like an annual feature, been focused on air pollution. I say ‘annual’ because air quality is bad most of the year round and generally gets eyeballs in the months of October and November! Bad air quality is all around us to see — blackened ceiling fans, greenish-black phlegm we cough out after prolonged outings in the open, and smudged collars of two-wheeler riders. Hospitals are reporting an increasing number of people with respiratory complaints.

A renowned heart surgeon of India has said on record that when they open patients up for heart surgery, they notice significantly blackened lungs — majorly from breathing polluted air. All this is common knowledge; in fact, so common that it has stopped bothering people! Particulate pollution has been the world's greatest risk to health and well-being ever since the industrial age.

The Energy Policy Institute of the University of Chicago brought out in 2024 that the average lifespan of an Indian is reduced by more than five years, and that of Delhiites by 8.2 years, due to air pollution! This is alarming as it is, but more worrisome is the casualness and insincerity with which this subject is handled by the Governments and the civic agencies. Even if we believe the policy guidelines and legal provisions are clear and unambiguous, their implementation and effect on the ground leave much to be desired.

The main factors of air pollution are the particulate matter which comes about from roadside dust, industrial and construction activity, vehicular exhaust, as also stubble burning. Foul gases from drains and industrial efflux also contribute to polluting the air in their own way. We are clear, in theory, that it can be checked by ensuring industrial and large-scale control, proper monitoring and data analysis, emission reduction, and embracing green alternatives. But the effects seen on the ground belie trust in our understanding.

Whatever be our level of understanding of the problem, the crux of the matter is that we

need to clean up our act! My impression is that whatever the local and Central bodies are doing is grossly inadequate, perfunctory, and often not fully executed at the ground level due to political interference and all-pervasive corruption. Why can't we build many air purifier towers like the one built in the city of Xian in Shaanxi Province of China? A 200-foot-high tower built over an area equal to half a football field is powered by solar electricity and cleans up the air around it in many square kilometres! We must learn from the experiences of major cities of the world and their efforts to check air pollution, as this issue affects the most vulnerable members of our society — children and the elderly. Suffering due to ill health, loss of academic and working hours, and the extra burden on household incomes can be largely avoided if concerted, long-term, and effective actions are taken.

Stricter enforcement of the existing provisions and employing some novel, out-of-the-box solutions can bring excellent results. Failed experiments like the Odd-Even Scheme and the BRT Corridors need not be repeated, and yet a healthy air quality can be achieved

if the Governmental will is established. Construction activity needs to be monitored closely, and compliance ensured throughout the jurisdiction of the municipalities, irrespective of political patronage.

Proper disposal of construction debris is a vital concern. There is widespread corruption in the machinery mandated to check violations and to take preventive and punitive measures. A confidential channel for reporting violations and a blockchain-type foolproof processing system is a must for ensuring the writ of the law runs transparently.

Roadside and surface dust need to be regularly vacuumed; large-scale mechanical means for permanent removal will improve the situation over a period. The present practice of manually sweeping it out is inefficient, irregular, and evidently inadequate.

I have some radical views on controlling vehicular pollution effectively:

- No one should be allowed to buy a vehicle unless they have a certified parking place in their house. This practice has been put to good use in Port Blair and must be applied across the board, starting from Delhi NCR and all metro cities.
- Polluting vehicles must immediately be pulled off the road once detected and detained till tested and cleared. Traffic police teams need to be enhanced with pollution-checking vans with attendant equipment for on-the-spot verification, testing, and certifying. The usual seizure, impounding, and fines/challans must continue under the scrutiny of bodycams for all police personnel and dashcams for their vehicles.

- Parking fees have been doubled recently in Delhi but should have been increased ten times. My recommendation is to levy parking fees at hourly rates of ₹200 for four-wheelers and ₹100 for two-wheelers.
- PUC validity should be reduced to three months for all vehicles older than one year.
- Delhi Metro and Rapid Rail should substantially increase their frequency and capacity to take maximum passengers off the roads.
- Travelling solo in a four-wheeler should be discouraged with a heavy fine, if the Government can consider enforcing it feasibly.

Factories, power plants, and brick kiln chimneys are major sources of particulate pollutants in the air. Various techniques are available to capture the solid particles before the gases are released into the atmosphere. These are costly and hence deployed minimally because the owners know they can get away with such violations.

A national-level, mission-mode effort must be put in place immediately, and I hope this gets the attention of the powers-that-be to get this genie back in the bottle!

As regards stubble burning, during my recent trip to areas of Haryana bordering Delhi, I saw a very welcome sight of baling machines working and huge stacks of paddy straw bales on the ground. I also came across huge dumps of the same on the sites of a couple of brick kilns.

This needs to be encouraged, and multiple industries need to be set up to use paddy straw and other plant materials for producing eco-friendly utility items. Decongesting the capital should be considered by shifting out parts of the Government machinery to satellite townships with adequate living and social infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, entertainment, and other commercial facilities to reduce traffic in the main cities.

A recent announcement by the DDA to develop the first Transit-Oriented Development Project at Karkardooma Housing Scheme 2025 is a welcome step, and all future developments must ideally be on similar lines. Transparency is needed in what the Government agencies are planning, doing, and not doing.

An open house should be held at fixed intervals, like a ‘Jan Adaalat’, at various levels to highlight Government actions and plans and to handle complaints. CAG audit mandated to oversee and examine the performance of Government efforts will ascertain the ROI of investments and help the policymaking machinery to better plan in future. Let us work together to ensure that ‘Clean Air for All’ does not remain a dream for long!

The writer is a Major General and has been decorated with Sena Medal

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# Diplomacy through debate



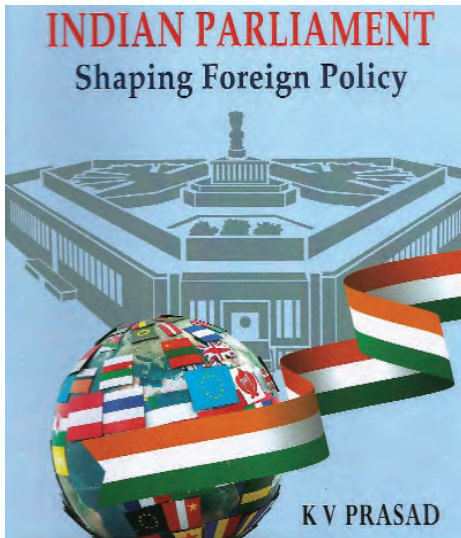
SANTHANAM PRABHAKAR

In this well-researched book, veteran journalist KV Prasad focuses on initiatives of the Indian Parliament. It is not merely a rumination on the author's vast exposure and long journalistic journey; he painstakingly brings out how the apex legislative body played a prominent role in the framing and reinforcing of the foreign policy of the country since 1947. It offers deep insights into the vast arena of foreign policy, tracing the role of Parliament. Indeed, the book provides a rigorous account of how successive Governments and Prime Ministers navigated challenging times within Parliament. The introduction delineates succinctly the devices available to the Members and the parliamentary processes involved in shaping foreign policy and the elaborate committee set up. It provides a clear picture of what readers can expect from the book.

Written perceptively about how the executive plays a decisive role in foreign policy as provisioned by the Constitution, the author's stress on the ‘minimalist’ role of Parliament is elaborated. This leitmotif is a recurring theme in the book. It demonstrates the evolution of debates and how MPs were taken into confidence by the executive, tracing the origins of foreign policy to 1921. Jawaharlal Nehru played a prominent part in steering the foreign policy and building consensus in Parliament until his death in 1964. He brought out a rather difficult debate explained in a candid and simple way and observed: “Nehru injected a level of transparency, a much-required trait in democracy.”

The book deals with three specific debates - IPKF in Sri Lanka, the World Trade Organisation, and the India-United States Civilian Nuclear Deal. It underscores how, during 1991 and 2003, Parliament, through its unanimous resolutions during the Gulf War, asserted itself, called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and expressed India's non-aligned position and refusal to join the US-led coalition against Iraq. In the backdrop of domestic politics, opposition, and the perspective of the Left parties, the book decodes parliamentary debates for the reader and explains how the Governments of the day succeeded.

The book explores how, on different occasions, the Indian Parliament played a significant role and how the Government handled opposition from states, and how states prevailed upon the Centre to safeguard their terrain. Offering a deep dive into the nuclear debate, the book tracks the evolution of nuclear policy since 1948, facing ‘nuclear apartheid’ from 1974, ‘Pokhran-II’ in 1998, and how



it culminated under the UPA Government. In the chapter on Civil Nuclear Cooperation, Prasad reminisces on the role of Parliament and the debates that shook the Government of the day. He surmises aptly that the “India-US Civil Nuclear Cooperation” remains a watershed moment in the country's quest for nuclear energy. Commenting on the debate in Parliament, the book quotes former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran: “It was not an easy ride for the Government [as discussions in Parliament] did complicate [negotiations].”

The author breaks down some of the most complex Government-Opposition battles fought in Parliament during the coalition era effectively,

with a free-flowing exposition of ideas and views, and how Governments manoeuvred foreign policy in difficult times. Prasad's book provides an authoritative account and a ringside view of what transpired in Parliament. He brings a fresh perspective on the subject, explaining unequivocally the policy parameters and how the Government faced the pulls and pressures from the Opposition.

The content in each chapter is richly and meticulously crafted, written in a lucid manner. The author deals with the subject with scrupulous honesty and abounds with references to debates and tactics deployed by both Government and Opposition in Parliament.

A comprehensive and valuable guide to engage and educate scholars in international relations, it is a masterly exploration of the impact of Parliament on foreign policy. The big takeaway from this book is the diligent record of how, even with its limited role, the Indian Parliament reinforces itself in every conceivable way and perspective in the framing of foreign policy. Overall, the book is outstanding.

The author, Prabhakar, is a former Joint Director of the Lok Sabha and a Delhi-based researcher and scholar

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## FIRST Column

videos in Hindi and regional languages that emphasise digital hygiene and encourage sports participation, specifically targeting youth in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.

## Establishing a Healthier Digital Culture

The recent advisory from Haryana Police advocating for screen-free routines in families is a vital and timely intervention. Yet, to achieve lasting change, this initiative must extend far beyond the family unit to encompass schools, skill development centres, and community programmes. Here is how the skill development ecosystem must rise to the challenge:

- Integrate “Digital Wellbeing” into All NSQF-Certified Courses: Every trainee — whether in retail, healthcare, or engineering — must learn how to effectively balance screen use and productivity.
- Launch Community Sports and Skill Festivals: Our academies must collaborate with district administrations to create “Screen-Free Sundays” that blend local sports, skill exhibitions, and career workshops.
- Implement Parental Engagement Sessions: Parents deserve guidance on managing digital behavior just as much as their children.
- Promote Hybrid Learning Wisely: Digital tools should be leveraged to enhance learning but must be complemented with tactile, human interaction to engage students fully.

## The Screen as a Tool, Not a Trap

As trainers, mentors, and leaders in nation-building, we must unequivocally declare that technology is a servant, not a master.

Our educational mission is not just to prepare youth for jobs; we are charged with equipping them for life. It is essential that we transform screen addiction into opportunities for skill development and sports engagement.

By doing so, we will not only preserve attention spans but also foster self-reliance, creativity, and a strong sense of community. The solution demands active engagement, skilled craftsmanship, and a laser-focused mindset, rather than promoting isolation. We can no longer afford to have unchecked screen usage; it is time for decisive action to create a balanced and healthy digital present and future.













## Tharoor in a spot yet again

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has once again stirred unease within his party, this time by writing an article denouncing dynasty politics. He argues that the Nehru-Gandhi family “cemented the idea that political leadership can be a birthright” and warns that dynastic politics poses a “grave threat to Indian democracy”. He goes further than before by naming both Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi as examples. It is a bold intervention—but also a deeply ironic one. There is no denying the contradiction between dynasty and democracy. In a pure democratic ideal, leadership should emerge from merit, not lineage. Yet India's reality is far more complex. Dynastic politics is not the monopoly of the Congress or the Opposition. The BJP, which never tires of attacking the Gandhis, has its own dynastic beneficiaries among MPs and MLAs.

Across parties, surnames often open doors that remain firmly shut for grassroots workers. Even regional parties, from Maharashtra to Uttar Pradesh, have built leadership structures around family loyalty rather than institutional development, proving that the phenomenon is entrenched far beyond the Congress fold. This is an uncomfortable truth, but it is a national truth—not merely a Congress failing.

What weakens Tharoor's argument is not his opposition to dynasty but his moral standing to make it. He campaigned enthusiastically for Priyanka Gandhi in Wayanad. More importantly, it was the same Congress leadership he now critiques that allowed him to parachute into Thiruvananthapuram, bypassing veterans who had worked for decades at the grassroots. The same “dynasty” backed his candidature for the United Nations Secretary-General—an ethically contentious move as he contested against a fellow Asian. It also entrusted him with a ministerial portfolio in the UPA government, a responsibility he lost due to his own missteps in a cricket-related controversy.

Tharoor cannot question internal democracy in the party after having contested—and lost—the election for Congress president. The current party chief may not possess Tharoor's linguistic polish, but he has been an effective parliamentarian and a steady organisational leader. Merit, after all, is a relative term. Tharoor enjoyed elite education, global exposure and privileged opportunities that millions of Indians can only dream of—not because he rose from the grassroots, but because of the circumstances of his birth. The Congress has produced leaders like Lal Bahadur Shastri, PV Narasimha Rao, and Dr Manmohan Singh, who had no dynastic crutches. Even those with political lineage must face the electorate, as MK Stalin did before becoming Chief Minister in his own right. Critiquing dynasty is legitimate. But shooting from the hip does not build national stature. In politics, as in life, credibility comes not just from speaking sharply but from speaking from a place of consistency and humility.

## Trump's loose nuclear talk

The credibility of US President Donald Trump is such that one often does not know whether to laugh or to cry over his statements, which are frequently couched in vagueness and bravado. During the entire Cold War period, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union used the N-word (nuclear), at least in public, to scare each other. Even during the Cuban Missile Crisis, arguably the tensest moment in modern history, leaders avoided throwing that word around. Yet Trump wields it casually, as if unable to distinguish weapons capable of annihilating civilisation from the guns American school students bring to campus to perpetrate occasional mayhem.

His latest claim that China, North Korea, Russia, and Pakistan have been conducting underground nuclear tests forces one to pause. If true, it is not merely another headline-grabbing remark but a strategic shock with serious implications, especially for India. Take Pakistan, whose nuclear programme has been built on pilferage, espionage, clandestine deals, and covert assistance from China and North Korea. Islamabad has never been shy of violating international norms; it is also the only nuclear-armed nation that routinely threatens first use at the slightest provocation. So if Trump genuinely knows Pakistan has been conducting secret nuclear tests, what has he done to restrain the rogue state? The question is unavoidable. After all, he has rolled out the red carpet for the Pakistani Army chief at the White House and lavished praise on him on multiple occasions—gestures his predecessors would have replaced with a stern warning or diplomatic pressure.

Since India first demonstrated its nuclear capability in 1974, it has conducted only five underground tests—all in May 1998. Immediately thereafter, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee unilaterally declared a moratorium on further testing and affirmed a “no first use” doctrine. India has honoured these commitments faithfully, even as its neighbours have reportedly built capabilities in the shadows. If Trump can be believed, China and Pakistan have conducted multiple covert tests over the years. Has India taken cognisance of possible nuclear activity in its neighbourhood? In 1998, India's nuclear establishment declared with confidence that “the tests had significantly enhanced its capacity for computer-simulated designs and would allow subcritical experiments, if necessary”. That is precisely the route other responsible nuclear states take: strengthening deterrence without destabilising the international environment. India, which has placed some of the heaviest satellites in orbit, certainly possesses the scientific and technological prowess to keep its deterrence credible under laboratory conditions.

The goal is not aggression but assurance—that India will not be caught off guard by hostile neighbours. It is time for our defence establishment to reassure the public that the nation remains secure, alert, and scientifically prepared in a neighbourhood where nuclear irresponsibility, unfortunately, appears to be gaining traction.



*The Road Ahead*

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

The union government has exhibited an impressive degree of fiscal prudence over the past decade. But some states are fiscally profligate and are facing ways and means problems on a regular basis and getting into a debt trap. As a result, their capital investments are inadequate, and future growth is retarded. It will be useful to understand how some of the state governments are mired in fiscal crisis so that remedial steps can be taken to redress the situation.

A democratic government assumes office and survives in power with the consent of the people. It is always relatively easy and tempting to entice the voters with short-term, tangible, and individual welfare programmes that put money into their pockets immediately, rather than investing in collective needs and the long-term future. This reconciliation of short-term desires with long-term good is difficult even in families, but the bonds of love, trust and loyalty make difficult choices easier. Also, as families are frugal and care for outcomes, the benefits of working for a better future are relatively easy to appreciate. But in the public domain, there is always a healthy scepticism of the government's intentions and capacity to deliver the long-term good, and there is a tendency to opt for

immediate benefits at the cost of the future.

Short-term maximisation of benefits is exacerbated when corruption is ubiquitous, service delivery is poor, and public expenditure is often not resulting in public good. Even in rich countries and mature democracies, this tendency to indulge in unsustainable individual welfare is evident. In the United States, about 43 million people, or one-eighth of the population, are on food stamps, the equivalent of free rations in India. In Germany, a robust and powerful economy not too long ago, there is a sense of crisis as welfare expenditure is unchecked and productivity is stagnating. In the UK and France, too, unsustainable welfare, low investment in the future, and demographic changes with increased life spans are making it difficult to manage public finances. If rich countries are finding it difficult to protect the future, we can imagine the challenges poorer countries face.

In general, in India the government spends more to produce less. The average wage bill of a government employee is most often two to three times what a worker is paid in the market for the same job! The difference is in the competitive market there is accountability, and the worker has to produce quality goods or services the consumers are willing to buy. Otherwise, the

business will fail, and the worker will have no livelihood.

As the government enjoys a monopoly and collects taxes by force, whether people get quality services or not, and the employee has lifelong job security, there is no accountability, and often money is spent without any benefit to people. Education is a classic example. For any society, particularly our society, quality education and skills are vital to grow the economy and create jobs. Governments are spending vast sums on education. In several states, per-child expenditure in schools is over Rs 100,000. And yet the outcomes are appalling! Similarly, many services in government are of poor quality, and people feel cheated. As a result, parties rely on short-term, tangible welfare at the cost of long-term public good to entice voters. Free power, free food, free water, monthly welfare payments, and many other forms of what are loosely called ‘freebies’ have become the staple of our electoral politics.

Unsustainable welfare at the cost of the core functions of government and collective needs of people only perpetuates mass poverty and undermines the future of the children. Some states and political parties have been reasonably good at balancing short-term welfare with long-term good. Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra

are examples of prudent management of public finances. But some parties have abandoned even the pretence of building a better future and are focused on maximising short-term individual benefits at the cost of the future. Andhra Pradesh between 2019 and 2024 was an example of an efficient welfare system with very little focus on infrastructure and investment. The current government in AP has further increased short-term welfare expenditure, deepening the fiscal crisis, though there is also an emphasis on infrastructure and investment. The current governing parties in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka have opted for unsustainable welfare. As a result, relatively rich states are mired in fiscal problems (Telangana and Karnataka), or states already struggling are in crisis.

The promises made to the electorate in Bihar are an extreme example of the impending fiscal crisis and future collapse if remedial steps are not taken quickly. These promises include about 1.25 crore youth to get government jobs (a minimum cost of Rs 450,000 crore per year without any benefit to people), 10.64 lakh Jeevika Didis to get permanent jobs (Rs 38,000 crore), direct benefit transfer to women at Rs 2500 per month (Rs 30,000 crore), unemployment allowance of Rs 2000 per month (Rs

19,000 crore), every household to get 200 units of free power (Rs 7500 crore), free health insurance up to Rs 25 lakh to all the poor (Rs 8-10,000 crore) and reverting to old, unfunded, defined benefit to all government employees (potential additional cost running up to Rs 50-100,000 crore per year in the future!). The cost of these promises amounts to an outrageous Rs 5,50,000 crores per year and a further burden of Rs 50,000-1,00,000 crores per year for pensions in the future at current prices.

Remember, Bihar's GSDP is Rs 9,91,000 crore, and the electoral promises made now will, if implemented, entail a total annual expenditure well in excess of the total wealth produced by all the people of Bihar! Even 100% taxation will not be enough to meet government expenditure! The danger to the country and the future of our children is clear, present and imminent. There is a potential disaster undermining our future. But all is not lost. If we act with some wisdom and restraint, we can retrieve the situation, protect the future, and balance the short-term desires with long-term needs. Let us look at the realistic options in the next column.

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# Art and science of innovation: India's crossroads moment

Every breakthrough has tested not just human imagination but human values too. What begins as a creative act often ends as a moral question



*Mirror to Society*

SRINATH SRIDHARAN

Every story of progress begins with a question. Somewhere in the long journey of humankind, an early ancestor must have stared at a spark and wondered what else it could do. Fire was not just warmth or light; it was the first spark of imagination. When someone rolled a piece of wood and discovered the wheel, it was not only about movement; it was about freedom. From cave paintings to language and from iron tools to agriculture, each breakthrough said the same thing—life could be better.

Human innovation has always carried that restless need to move beyond what exists. Those early experiments were not planned or approved by anyone. The discovery of fire helped cook food, but it also burnt forests. The wheel moved carts and armies alike. Writing preserved wisdom but also spread deceit. The story of invention has never been a straight road of good ideas. It has always been a winding path of hope, curiosity, and consequence. We advanced not because we always got it right, but because we never stopped trying.

When the Renaissance arrived, innovation found both language and wings. Leonardo imagined

flight before the world was ready. Galileo turned his telescope to the sky and saw what belief systems refused to accept. Newton explained the universe through mathematics yet admitted that he was only collecting pebbles on the shore of a vast ocean of truth. History remembers their brilliance but forgets how much resistance they faced. Every innovator who changes the world also unsettles it. Discovery is never comfortable.

The industrial age turned innovation into a revolution of its own. The steam engine, electricity and later the automobile made the world smaller and faster. Factories rose, cities expanded, and nations began to think in terms of machines and scale. Yet the same revolutions that gave us comfort also created conflict and inequality. Every advance in efficiency carried a cost in human and environmental terms.

That pattern still holds true. The internet connected billions but also made truth a matter of opinion. Artificial intelligence can detect diseases and fake identities with the same ease. Social media has become both the global village square and the global echo chamber. Innovation always arrives before understanding catches up.

When Alexander Fleming found

penicillin, it was by accident. When the Wright brothers flew, they were not thinking of how air power would change war. When scientists split the atom, they unlocked both energy and annihilation. Every breakthrough begins in curiosity and ends in consequence.

Innovation runs on speed. Governance runs on caution. The innovator experiments for months. The policymaker debates for years. That gap is inevitable, but it is also dangerous. When regulation moves too slowly, society becomes the test lab. When it moves too fast, creativity suffocates. Finding balance between freedom and foresight is one of the hardest tasks of leadership today.

Modern policy leaders face an even sharper version of this dilemma. The technologies they must regulate are often the ones they barely understand yet must urgently enable. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, digital assets and climate engineering carry immense promise and hidden perils. Governments must bring such technologies into daily life while protecting citizens and democracy itself. A single misstep can either slow down innovation or unleash chaos.

The challenge for policymakers is

not only to control technology but also to cultivate it responsibly. They must encourage experimentation and ensure accountability. They must promote global competitiveness without losing ethical ground. Building guardrails without building walls is the real art of governance. It requires agility, moral clarity and imagination—qualities that modern bureaucracies often struggle with.

India stands at a remarkable moment in this story. Aadhaar, UPI and the Digital Health Mission have shown how technology can expand access and dignity at once. Our young minds are experimenting with artificial intelligence, green energy and new materials. Our entrepreneurs are building at a pace that challenges global assumptions.

For a country like ours, the question is not whether we can innovate. We already are. The question is how to embed ethics, humility, and social purpose into the process. We cannot afford to treat morality as an afterthought. The systems we create today will shape the choices of generations. It is not enough to celebrate success in labs or startups. We must also build institutions that understand the rhythm of change. Innovation that ignores its con-

sequences will eventually face its own regulation.

We must rethink how innovation is taught, funded and governed. It is not only a technical or commercial pursuit; it is a moral and philosophical one. The innovator must ask not just “Can I do this?” but also “Should I?” The regulator must ask not only “What rule applies?” but also “What principle matters?” Citizens must learn to question how technology shapes their lives, not just how convenient it makes them. Innovation is not the job of a few; it is a shared social project.

The art of innovation is the courage to imagine what does not exist. The science of innovation is the discipline to make it real. What gives both meaning is the wisdom to know when enough is enough.

Progress is not only about invention; it is about intention. The future will belong not to those who build recklessly or regulate fearfully, but to those who build with conscience and curiosity in equal measure. How far are we willing to go? And what are we willing to give up to get there? The answers will define not just the next phase of innovation but civilisation itself.

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Empty promises

Amit Shah promised in his rally for the NDA that he will make Bihar secure from flood fury if the NDA wins the election. This is interesting, as the NDA has been in power for more than a decade in Bihar, with Nitish Kumar as the CM. And in all these years, he couldn't make the state safe from furious floods. Every year thousands of people become victims of floods. What was the government waiting for all these years?

**Dr Shashikala Joshi, Ujjain**

#### Pensioners suffer

Pensioners must submit their annual life certificate between November 1 and 30 to ensure their pension payments continue without interruption. Opinions on the life certificate are generally positive, though some concerns exist about the process, such as the occasional system glitches and the need for an Aadhaar number. This is just harassment for the senior

#### India's Metro Network

For over a decade now, India's metro network and its ridership have become a symbol of urban awakening and its culture. What began as a cautious step into mass rapid transit has evolved into a nationwide movement, streamlining daily commutes and reducing congestion in major cities. The metro is no longer just a mode of transport; it's a lifeline pulsing through the heart of India's growth story, driven by ambition, innovation, and a vision of sustainable urban living. India now proudly stands as the world's third-largest metro network. From under-river tunnels to driverless trains and water metros, India is setting new standards in modern urban mobility.

**Ranganathan Sivakumar, Mumbai**

citizens. Pensioners are made to run from pillar to post in the name of life certificates.

**Jayanthy Subramaniam, Mumbai**

#### Migration flow

India is the world's largest source of migrants to OECD countries, according to the International Migration Outlook 2025 report. The report reveals that permanent migration flows to developed economies remain 15 per cent above pre-pandemic levels. The

surge is in skilled labour migration from India, particularly in the healthcare sector. Indian healthcare professionals now form a significant part of the workforce in countries such as the UK, US, Canada, and Australia. Yet, credential recognition remains a persistent challenge, often preventing highly qualified doctors and nurses from working at their skill level upon migration.

**Bhagwan Thadani, Mumbai**



HASAN ZAIDI

#### Andrew's downfall

Prince Andrew, son of the late Queen Elizabeth II, has been stripped of his title and will move out of his royal residence in the latest fallout from his relationship with the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Andrew's association with Epstein, even without a criminal conviction, deeply damaged the monarchy's reputation. Andrew's downfall is a cautionary tale about arrogance, accountability, and the heavy price of ignoring public re-

sponsibility.

**Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai**

#### Tale of 2 T-shirts

Australian PM Anthony Albanese has been pulled up for publicly wearing a Joy Division brand T-shirt with the words “Unknown pleasures”. Joy Division's name is associated with groups of women kept as sexual slaves in Nazi concentration camps during WWII. Albanese was asked to apologise. Recently, a lawyer moved the Madras

HC over Dy CM Stalin sporting a white T-shirt with the DMK party symbol, contending that the Dy CM's ‘casual attire’ smacks of dress code violation, as a public servant cannot wear a political party symbol while discharging duties as a public servant.

**P.G. Menon, Chennai**

#### Drunken driving

Apropos to two reports, “13 killed in dumper rampage in Jaipur” and “20 dead in Telangana bus-lorry collision” (Nov 4), most of the road accidents are due to reckless and drunken driving, besides overloading beyond permissible limits and the bad condition of the vehicles. Before issuing a fitness certificate (FC), RTO officials have to thoroughly check the condition of the vehicles and their road-worthiness. The police and the RTO officials must conduct nakabandi on highways and arterial roads to ensure drivers are not in an inebriated state.

**H.P. Murali, Bengaluru**







OUR VIEW



# Export headwinds: Can services ride them out?

Weak merchandise exports to the US aren't a surprise, but service exports have slumped too. However, India's 'de facto exports' could rise even as direct earnings from service exports fall

At first glance, India's export story remains intact. Merchandise exports grew 6.7% year-on-year this September, on par with their growth in August. That's the good news. As September was the first full month in which America's steep 50% extra tariff came to bear on our US-bound exports, the fact that overall shipments held up against this adversity offers some cause for comfort. However, a closer look at the month's numbers released by the ministry of commerce, broken up by destination, offers a less cheerful picture. Exports to the US, our largest trade partner, fell 12% from their level a year earlier, marking their fourth straight month of decline. This was only to be expected, given the harsh levies imposed by US President Donald Trump, first in early April ('reciprocal') and then hiked on 27 August (openly punitive). This double whammy has led the US share in our pie of exports to shrink from nearly 24% in June—its largest—to 15% in September. Fortunately, this decline was more than offset by rising shipments to other foreign markets. Exports to the UAE, UK, China, Hong Kong and Bangladesh, among others, rose in double digits.

As far as Indian exports of goods go, not all sectors have been hit equally hard. This is partly a consequence of uneven US barriers. Major export sectors like petroleum, electronics and pharma were spared, though starting late September, the US raised its tariff on branded drugs to 100%. The net result is that we have some success stories, like electronics, whose exports surged 50.5% in September, while other sectors found trade headwinds hard to ride out. For example, the US-focused sector of gems and jewellery grew only 0.4% that month, its year-

on-year growth skidding to a near halt from 15.6% logged in August. The government now has the tough job of identifying the worst-hit sectors and extending selective support, as these are likely to be among the most labour-intensive. Meanwhile, recent dynamics of the US-China relationship suggest we cannot count on a tariff edge over Chinese exporters. A trade deal struck this summer with the UK and a partnership agreement with the European Free Trade Association should help unlock new markets, even as we await a US-India trade deal.

But the other news that should perhaps worry us relates to service exports, long our bulwark against trade barriers for merchandise. These fell in September to \$30.8 billion, down 5.5% from the same month a year ago, a sudden reversal from the 12.2% rise recorded in August this year. Consequently, India's overall export growth—counting both goods and services—slumped to just 0.8% in September, compared to 9.3% in August. Unfortunately, the horizon for services does not look any brighter. Adverse US moves such as its hike in H-1B visa fees, its flip-flops of clarification notwithstanding, risk disrupting Indian service exports further. Since the US is the largest destination for these, prolonged uncertainty on this front is bound to hurt. According to a report by financial services company Emkay, visa restrictions could slow growth in Indian IT service exports to low single digits. Of course, it is possible that as more US businesses move work overseas to escape the punitive effect of the visa-fee hike and India attracts many more global capability centres, what we lose on the swings we could gain on the roundabouts. In other words, jobs and 'de facto exports' could rise even as our earnings from direct service exports fall.

THEIR VIEW

# Our lofty goals are cued by the statecraft of aspirations

RAJAT KATHURIA



is dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and professor of economics at Shiv Nadar University.

India's developmental journey over the last decade or so has been marked by an ambitious setting of goals—defined by slogans, timelines, dashboards and often quantified targets. From Digital India to Smart Cities and from Swachh Bharat to Viksit Bharat by 2047, the state has enunciated an expansive vision of transformation, sometimes articulated in terms of bold national targets, such as 100% sanitation coverage, creating 20 million formal jobs, giving every gram panchayat broadband connectivity, doubling farm incomes and making 100 cities 'smart,' among others. These are not merely technocratic goals, but instruments of aspiration, designed to galvanize the 'steel frame' (our civil services), mobilize citizens and signal intent. It reflects a belief in the transformational power of political will—that somehow, through resolve, coordination and scale, India can leapfrog to become a high-income country.

The latest goal to appear on the horizon is around today's global obsession: Artificial

intelligence (AI). It is estimated that AI will add up to \$600 billion to the Indian economy by 2035. That's roughly \$60 billion a year. A new Niti Aayog report, *AI for Viksit Bharat: The Opportunity for Accelerated Economic Growth*, contends that efficiency gains from AI may not lead to unemployment because those displaced from routine jobs will be re-employed through reskilling and upskilling in the same sector.

Of course, this assumption could go horribly wrong. As could others. Ask an economist why she assumes so much and you will perhaps come away more confused than enlightened. More seriously, the report's assumptions around reskilling and reemployment, while sound in theory, are hostage to logistical and educational challenges, given the sheer scale of India's population and uneven access to quality training. The risk is that without a massive and rapid transformation in educational infrastructure, India's demographic dividend could diminish as large segments of the workforce get left behind. Add to that the digital and data divide that persists, and the efficacy of AI models, particularly for the rural-development applications that the report mentions, will be severely crimped. What's more, rapid deployment of AI, without a commen-

surate strengthening of cybersecurity infrastructure and legal safeguards, could make India's digital ecosystem vulnerable to a range of new threats, from deepfakes and misinformation to large-scale data breaches and financial fraud.

The inimitable Sir Humphrey had once said in the iconic BBC series *Yes, Prime Minister* that the purpose of minutes is not to record decisions; it is to protect people. One is tempted to adapt this droll observation to assert that the purpose of targets is not to achieve results; it is to protect the state from inertia, criticism and perhaps from itself. And this is not just spin; there is a method in that targets serve a purpose far beyond technocratic planning. They are instruments of state aspiration that reach far and wide.

They animate the bureaucratic machinery. A quantified goal, even if implausible, triggers action. The targets offer political traction, allowing the translation of abstract promises into deliverable metrics. An open-

defecation-free city or 20 million new jobs plays better at the hustings than nuanced institutional reform. Narratives of progress are also essential in a democracy where symbols of development matter as much as substance. For the distant diaspora, they signal India's arrival as the world's fastest growing major economy, giving them new-found clout that goes beyond their own art and craft.

Yet, many (if not all) of these targets tend to be missed, often by wide margins. One suspects this is not accidental, but a consequence of structural weaknesses in the system, which is marked by a centralization of vision and decentralization of the administrative burden without the concomitant and essential financial autonomy. Over-ambition at the top and administrative and financial undercapacity at the bottom is a recipe for disappointment. Add to that the absence of reliable baseline data and a persistent conflation of inputs with outcomes, and what we get is a pipeline of developmental announce-

ments without enough absorption capacity.

Back to the AI mission. With its promise of a \$600 billion GDP boost by 2035, it echoes the transformative language of India's IT revolution. But the support infrastructure, data security, multilingual models and skilling at scale are still nascent. It is a target with vision, but without scaffolding. Yet, we persist. To govern India without targets is to fly without instruments. Targets, like Sir Humphrey's minutes, do not guarantee truth, but provide a cover. They create movement where stillness would prevail and accountability where vagueness might fester. More generously, one could say we are a young democracy, managing old institutions while facing new problems. Unlike China, we may not always reach our destination, but a bold target gives us direction, and more importantly, something to revise in the next cycle.

So the next time we talk of a trillion-dollar digital economy or 100% AI skilling across the hinterland, don't ask whether it's achievable—in all probability, it is not. Ask what work the target is doing, politically, institutionally and symbolically. Because in India, and perhaps Whitehall, targets don't forerun achievement. They protect beliefs and, of course, a select group of people.

*These are the author's personal views.*

# The Centre's redefined strategy has put Naxalism on its last legs

The government's multipronged approach has led Naxals to lay down arms and reduced violence



**AMAR PATNAIK** is a former member of the Rajya Sabha, former CAG bureaucrat and founding partner of A&N Legal Solutions LLP.

In a recent interaction with security personnel in Chhattisgarh, India's minister of home affairs Amit Shah reiterated the government's commitment to eliminate left-wing extremism and violence, referred to as Naxalism, by March 2026. Naxalism has been a menace in this country since the Naxal Movement started in 1967. Between 2014 and 2024, there has been a 53% decline in Naxal activity, as estimated by the Centre, which has said that the count of Naxal-affected districts has decreased from 128 to 18. The activity decline has led to a 73% drop in security personnel deaths and a 70% reduction in civilian casualties. This is a remarkable achievement, reflecting the Union government's commitment to effectively extinguish Naxalism in India. Since law-and-order is a state subject, the role of state governments in this effort must also be appreciated.

**The Centre's comprehensive strategy:** In March, the home ministry outlined a four-pronged strategy for the mammoth task of ridding India of the Naxal threat. First, it focused on strengthening the law-and-order infrastructure in affected states by adequately equipping police forces as well as the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), particularly with modern assault rifles and other weapons. It also invested in their training, integration and capacity-building. Second, the Union govern-

ment established camps called Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). These are operated jointly by the CAPF and state police. As of March, around 302 of these camps had been established. Third, the government has been taking steps to restrict the funding of Naxals. The fourth and perhaps the most important effort has been to focus on development to reduce discontent among people.

**How has the Centre's strategy changed:** The Union government's stance on tackling the menace of Naxal violence has changed considerably. Up until 2014, there was no national strategy to complement the efforts of affected states. This was perhaps one of the biggest failures of the previous government—the lack of a uniform national strategy to facilitate Centre-state coordination for curbing the threat.

The reasoning behind this could have arguably been that since matters of public order and policing are state subjects under the Seventh Schedule of India's Constitution, the Union government deemed it fit at the time to let states deal with the complex issue of Naxalism. However, given the rate at which Naxal attacks were growing in the country, the incumbent government decided to recognize the problem and intervene sharply after coming to power in 2014.

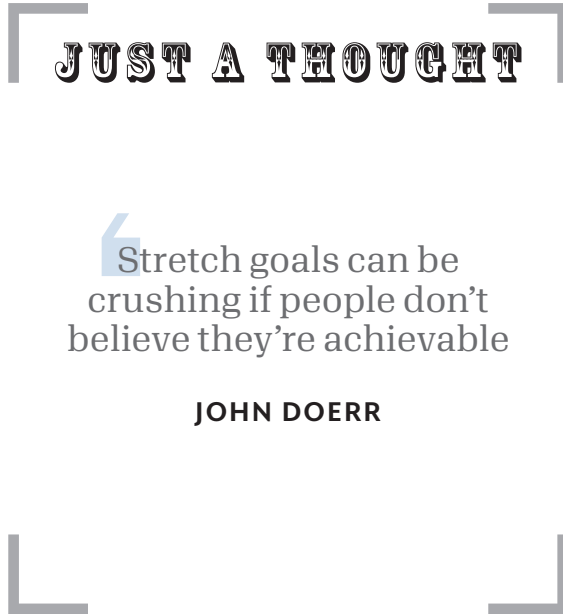
In 2015, New Delhi introduced a National Policy and Action Plan that sought to end Naxalism in the country. This was the first instance of the government coming out with a comprehensive strategy that focused on addressing a combination of factors that were helping Naxals get away with impunity. With this shift, the government was no longer looking at solving these problems in isolation of each other, but focused on solving them in tandem with each other as well as attacking the root cause of the Naxal movement—discontent among people. To this end, in the last decade, there has been a remarkable effort on the Union government's part to implement good governance schemes.

As per data shared by the minister of state for home affairs in the Upper House of Parliament, in the five years from 2019-20 to 2023-24, the Centre has released ₹4,350.8 crore for capacity-building initiatives in Naxal-affected districts of the country.

The Union government has also streamlined the process for Naxal surrenders by improving the formal surrender and rehabilitation guidelines. While this scheme was introduced before the current government came to power, it has been augmented by not just instant compensation packages for Naxals who lay down arms, but also their reintegration with society. For example, the 'good village' scheme in the state of Chhattisgarh seeks to provide welfare, education and employment opportunities to surrendered cadres. Such schemes target Naxals who are already disillusioned with the movement and incentivize them to give up arms in exchange for the prospect of a better life.

**Peace in 'red corridors':** The Union government has made considerable strides in eliminating Naxalism through a comprehensive strategy characterized by enhanced dialogue, security and coordination. Its success is reflected in the mass surrender of Naxals over the past decade. As per data released by the ministry of home affairs in both Houses of Parliament and conveyed through press briefings, Naxal surrenders before 2014 were in the hundreds, whereas surrenders have numbered in the thousands since then. Between 2009 and 2014, government data shows that 2,132 Naxals surrendered. In 2023 and 2024 alone, there were 1,045 and 928 surrenders, respectively. In October this year, there has been another significant increase in the number of Naxals who have put down their guns.

These mass surrenders, coupled with the Union government's comprehensive strategy to combat Naxalism, suggest that this insurgency is finally dying out in India.









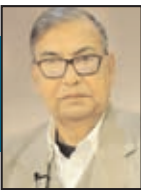
DECCAN  
Chronicle

5 NOVEMBER 2025

Subhani



# Yunus bid for silent coup to humiliate B'desh Army



Manash Ghosh

**British lawyers' forum Doughty Street Chambers has documentary proof and irrefutable evidence that the Yunus regime is responsible for killing 400 Awami League leaders and workers and the custodial death of 21 party followers**

Bangladesh's interim government chief adviser Muhammad Yunus, after publicly confessing in New York last year that Sheikh Hasina's ouster was made possible by the execution of a meticulously designed plan, now seems to be working on a similar sinister gameplan to create discontent and disaffection in the rank and file of the country's only surviving disciplined institution: the 1,60,000-strong military. This is intended to turn the military into a demoralised toothless tiger so that the armed cadres of the Jamaat-e-Islami and other radical Islamic terror groups can have a free run across the country.

Mr Yunus' real objective is to raise an armed Islamic militia on the lines of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards, whose prime task will be to preserve and protect the country's "second revolution" of August 5, 2024, when Sheikh Hasina was ousted.

Just as Iran's IRGC was raised by Ayatollah Khomeini as a force loyal only to his new government, Mr Yunus wants to rely on a force which his solely his own. He finds the Bangladesh Army not wholly reliable as it is riven with factions, and has a sizeable pro-Awami League section wedded to the ideals of "muktijuddho", the 1971 freedom struggle, which he feels may obstruct plans to establish the supremacy of his new National Citizens' Party (NCP) and make it the key arbiter to determine its Islamic destiny.

But the inherent danger of this anti-military strategy is that will invariably lead to a confrontation with the Army, whose officers and men will not accept such a move lying down, and will surely hit back, that may snowball into a serious law and order issue, Mr Yunus, therefore, must be extremely careful

about what he says and does in this respect.

Having already demoralised the police and reducing it to an almost non-performing outfit by targeting its officers and personnel in mass killings during the "oust Hasina" movement, Mr Yunus is now trying to make the Army play second fiddle to his unconstitutional civilian government. He is taking the unprecedented step of allowing the country's International War Crimes Tribunal put 25 senior Army officers of the rank of colonel, brigadier, major-general and lieutenant-general on trial for "crimes against humanity" during the Hasina era. Trials by military court under the Army Act was deliberately avoided to affirm his civilian government's supremacy.

When a non-military court like IWCT issues arrest warrants on senior officers, the morale, honour and pride of the military are severely undermined and challenged. Worse, the IWCT framed extraordinary rules specifically for trying these officers, which provided for instant termination of service as soon as the arrest warrants were issued. The purpose was to humiliate the Army while providing amnesty to the Islamic militants responsible for the mass slaughter of policemen. The Yunus administration's first act, on being installed in power, was to release 12 top Islamic terrorists, including those jailed for the manslaughter committed at Dhaka's Holey Artisan Bakery in 2016. Besides, 346 convicts of at least 10 Islamic militant outfits, including those involved in arms smuggling, were given bail. Also, 724 convicts were allowed to flee from jail, and no effort has been made to apprehend them. More worryingly, 5,753 automatic weapons were allowed to be looted from 500 police and prison

armouries before and after Sheikh Hasina's ouster. Also, the mystery over the widespread use of modern sniper rifles to kill policemen and student demonstrators before and on the day of Hasina's ouster remains unresolved. This is because these guns are solely used by the Bangladesh military and by the police and paramilitary forces.

Some of these specialised weapons are now being recovered in secret alcoves or bedding piles of students' homes in recovery drives conducted by the Army. One of Mr Yunus' advisers, a retired brigadier, made a startling revelation that he himself had become the target of sniper rifles and it was only a timely tipoff that saved his life.

It is no secret that relations between Mr Yunus and Army chief Gen. Waker-uz-Zaman are severely strained. Both have tried to outsmart each other many times to get the upper hand. This is another reason why Mr Yunus wants his own loyal militia. For his government to bring order in the country, he needs an enforcement mechanism which only an armed militia, with policing and judicial powers, can deliver.

Mr Yunus' greatest dilemma now is whether to give in to rising international pressure to hold free and fair inclusive elections in which the Awami League will be allowed to participate. For that he will have to lift the ban imposed on the Awami League's political functioning. In an open letter to Mr Yunus, six leading Western human rights bodies, including Human Rights Watch and the Committee to Protect Journalists, have urged him to lift the ban on all kinds of political activities that the

country's biggest and oldest party has been subjected to since May and create a level playing field which will facilitate its participation in the forthcoming February 2026 elections.

What has come as the worst indictment of the Yunus regime's "gross violation" of human rights is from the prestigious British lawyers' forum, Doughty Street Chambers (DSC), which with documentary proof and irrefutable evidence has accused his government of being solely responsible for killing 400 Awami League leaders and workers and also the custodial death of 21 party followers tortured to death while held in jail custody without trial. DSC has officially placed its complaints against the Yunus government before the IWCT, which the tribunal might find hard to reject. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is one of the key members of this forum. Sources said it was Mr Starmer's dim view of Mr Yunus' brutal repression of the main Opposition party that made him reject Mr Yunus' request for an appointment when he visited London in July.

But the biggest pressure to lift the ban on the Awami League's political activities has come from Sheikh Hasina's New York-based son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, who told a US news agency in a recent interview that the country's unstable and turbulent situation could worsen if the Awami League was forcibly kept out of elections. Any such exercise without the Awami League, which gets over 35 per cent of the vote, would be a "sham" election and the results would not be credible both at home and abroad. Mr Joy also said that allowing the Awami League at the eleventh hour would also not be acceptable as that would help Mr Yunus rig the election to bring the Islamists to power.

*Manash Ghosh is a veteran journalist who had covered the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, and is the author of several books including, most recently, Mujib's Blunders: The Power and the Plot Behind His Killing.*

## LETTERS

### MR. WOMEN'S CRICKET

Indian domestic cricket heavyweight Amol Mazumdar, who is the coach of the Indian women's cricket, is in the spotlight after the historic ODI World Cup win by the Women in Blue. Mazumdar's cricket journey is one of perseverance, unmatched consistency, and unfulfilled dreams at the international level. Despite scoring over 11,000 first-class runs, he never got the opportunity to represent India. When the BCCI appointed Mazumdar as the head coach of the Indian women's cricket team in Oct. 2023, his impact was immediate. Under his coaching, the women's cricket team grew in confidence and self-belief, and this has resulted in triumph in the ODI world cup.

**R. Sivakumar, Chennai**

### HELP ARM UKRAINE

Apropos report 'More patriot def. systems for Ukraine'. Ukraine president Zelenskyy has been asking the US to supply not only Patriot missiles but also the Tomahawk, the long-range, low flying cruise missiles to counter Russia. But Mr. Trump dilly-dallied, saying he will bring about a cease-fire. Meanwhile Russia stepped up its attacks, capturing many towns. Had Mr. Trump supplied the missiles earlier, Ukraine would have checkmated or even attacked deep inside Russia forcing it to come for peace-talks. Instead, he slapped sanctions and provoked Russia.

**A.Seshagiri Rao, Chennai**

### RISK OF GLOBAL ARMS RACE

The U.S. announcement to resume "non-critical" nuclear tests marks a troubling reversal of decades-long restraint under the CTBT spirit. It risks reigniting a global arms race as Russia, China, North Korea, and Pakistan may justify parallel actions. Such competitive nuclear signalling could destabilize deterrence frameworks and weaken non-proliferation norms. For India, which maintains a voluntary moratorium since Pokhran-II, strategic prudence is vital. India must strengthen seismic and radiological monitoring, enhance simulation-based testing capabilities, and pursue diplomacy for renewed global test restraint.

**Gopalaswamy J, Chennai**

### MALDIVES' SMOKING BAN

It is gratifying that the Maldives health ministry is implementing a generational ban on smoking since Nov. 1 for anyone born after Jan. 2007. The legislation is impressive despite the repeal of a similar act within a year of its promulgation by the New Zealand government banning smoking. One fervently hopes this partial generational ban, the first of its kind ever introduced, will do a world of good to the younger folks. A similar enactment is most welcome for our country too.

**S. Vaithianathan, Madurai**

## Lip service not enough, give science more funds

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement that India is working to build a modern innovation ecosystem and is focusing on improving ease of doing research in the country as well as his exhortation that the focus of research should be shifted to addressing the emerging challenges faced by humanity are welcome but how the government he heads has conducted itself in facilitating these noble aims in the last one decade is a bit uncertain.

Interestingly, the Prime Minister was speaking at the first edition of the Emerging Science, Technology and Innovation Conclave (ESTIC) 2025. The new event is expected to replace the Indian Science Congress (ISC) which died a slow death in 2023. The ISC, which predated Indian independence and is considered one of the finest assemblies of scientific minds all over the world, had earned notoriety for professing pseudo-science, much to the chagrin of the community, immediately before it was shut down.

The Prime Minister said India was backing high-risk and high-impact research and development projects and is fostering private investments to emerge as a science and technology powerhouse. The Prime Minister, who also launched a ₹1-lakh-crore investment fund for the purpose, placed before the scientific community the need to shift the focus from food security to nutrition security. Next-generation biofortified crops can help combat malnutrition globally, he asserted. Mr Modi also drew the attention of the scientific community to some other pressing demands of the country and the world, such as low-cost soil health enhancers and bio-fertilisers, the mapping of genomic diversity to advance personalised medicine and disease prediction and new and affordable innovations in clean energy storage.

It is the responsibility of the political leadership to place the demands of society before the scientific community. Mr Modi was also right in pointing out that change is not linear but exponential as research can come up with products and processes that can bypass its own protocols and processes and offer breakthrough solutions. Nutrition security is indeed a laudable goal but the reality on the ground is that India as a country is yet to achieve food security — about 60 per cent of its people are being provided food-grains for free. It is important that the country's thought leaders have their ear to the ground to set realistic goals and achieve them.

Mr Modi claimed that the government has undertaken several reforms in financial rules and procurement policies and pointed out that India's R&D expenditure has doubled in the last decade when the number of registered patents increased 17 times so that India is now the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem. It may, however, be noted that the increase in funds availability in the government sector in this period has not been commensurate with the growth of the economy. As per available government data, the total R&D expenditure measured in terms of gross expenditure on research and development (GERD) as a percentage of GDP has in fact come down from 0.66 per cent in 2018-19 to 0.64 in 2022-23 even while this number is significantly high in China, varying from 3.4 to four. India's share in global R&D has grown from three per cent in 2000 to five per cent in 2023 whereas it grew from four per cent to 26 per cent in China.

If India were to reach the leading position it aims for in research and innovation, it must set realistic goals and spend money as per their requirements. There is no gainsaying that basic research world over is funded by the governments. Mr Modi must prod his government to change its approach towards research if he is serious about his scientific dream that is to use knowledge as a tool to solve the nation's problems.

## Unsafe roads: Focus on safety

Aspate of road accidents involving heavy vehicles, including buses and trucks, has been reported across the country. The recent incidents in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan were particularly gruesome and indicative of systemic deficiencies.

On November 3, a truck carrying a load of gravel collided with a bus coming from the opposite direction near Hyderabad. The impact caused the truck to dump several tonnes of gravel onto the bus, crushing at least 19 people to death. On the same day, a speeding dumper truck rammied into multiple vehicles in Jaipur, killing at least 13 and taking the total number of accident fatalities in Rajasthan to 45.

The accident in Telangana has especially shaken people's trust in public transport, coming just days after another bus caught fire when it ran over a motorcycle, killing 20 passengers near Kurnool.

Both accidents in Telangana were tragic examples of victims paying with their lives for the unintended errors of others — the inability of a truck driver to safely navigate a narrow road near Hyderabad, and the recklessness of an inebriated motorcyclist near Kurnool.

India records one of the world's highest numbers of road fatalities each year, with over 1.6 lakh deaths reported annually. Common contributing factors in most accidents involving heavy vehicles are narrow roads, speeding, inadequate training and driver fatigue.

Despite numerous safety campaigns and awareness drives, enforcement of basic road discipline remains weak. The government, therefore, should mandate better training and compliance systems for heavy vehicle drivers, improve road design and impose stronger penalties for traffic violations. It should also limit vehicle acceleration capability to align with infrastructure limits.

Heavy vehicles should be fitted with advanced control systems such as electronic stability control, automatic emergency braking (AEB) and driver drowsiness alert systems, which aid the driver in navigating the vehicle safety to its destination.

### DECCAN CHRONICLE

**KAUSHIK MITTER**  
Editor

**K. SUBHAKAR**  
Printer & Publisher

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Mohan  
Guruswamy



## Battle for Bihar: Democracy is dead... Long live democracy!

The Bihar election once again brings to the fore the quality of India's democratic debate. Bihar often prides itself as the home of the Licchavis, the first practitioners of collegial governance and rule by discussion in about 7-5th century BCE. Their institution of discussion and obtaining general consent was the "gana sangha". Of the 16 mahajanapada (great states) in ancient India, two located around today's Vaishali followed the gana sangha form of government. The electioneering in Vaishali by Union home minister Amit Shah and RJD's CM nominee Tejashwi Yadav was a different form of discussion than what took place in the mahaganasabha of the Licchavis. There was much name calling and extravagant promises, almost certainly impossible to keep, but meant to attract people's support. This was democracy without restraints. The Buddha, who delivered his last sermon in Vaishali before his Parinirvana, wouldn't recognise what transpired for democracy in Vaishali these past few weeks.

The democratic path depends most upon one human quality: Restraint. From restraint flows the spirit of accommodation, which leads to the path of reconciliation. Democracy is the only political system that seeks to reconcile diverse aspirations and demands to maximise their fulfilment.

Though mankind has known the spirit of democracy from time immemorial, the formal system of democracy is relatively recent. We seem to be still

learning to live within it. Not surprisingly, every now and then, the democratic system is subjected to challenges, usually from within the fold.

The errant ways of our political leadership at national and state levels is a matter of grave concern. The lack of intelligent and sensible debate in Parliament portends bad days for our democracy. Even the few who care to attend Parliament seem to be doing so more with the intention of making propaganda by deed by resorting to unparliamentary, mostly unsavoury, ways. No party seems without some blame attached to it, for this seems to have become the norm these days.

Even the treasury benches, who should know better, seem caught up in this frenzy to make small points at great cost to our democracy. Is it any wonder that few matters get discussed in depth and at length in Parliament these days? The Budget, for instance, gets little attention. The finance ministers say more to CII and Ficci before and after the Budget is announced as if it is only intended for them. As more importance is given to this constituency, more important and vital ones like the farm sector, the rural poor and the educated young get little attention and commitment in terms of resources.

A State that ignores the majority, especially a needy majority, and an increasingly angry and restive majority at that, does so at its own peril. The stresses and strains are showing everywhere around us. Not a day passes when some long-felt

demand doesn't result in an explosion of fury. Coercion begets more coercion, and soon the mob and State are fused together by paroxysms of violence. All restraint is thrown to the ill winds and with it goes the semblance of democracy. The ill winds have torn to shreds the sails of democracy meant to take the ship of state towards prosperity and national unity.

There is little purpose in citing instances, but even by today's deplorable standards, recent happenings in the Lok Sabha are a disgrace. Great leaders who founded our democracy, men like Jawaharlal Nehru, B.R. Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad would not recognise what is happening in the Lok Sabha these days. The House hardly meets. Good and qualified people no longer want to be part of a leadership that has made loot its prime purpose and does not care for political niceties and social courtesies.

Social justice has become the justification to perpetuate injustice, as if injustice in the name of one caste will set right all earlier wrongs, socially sanctioned or otherwise. The result is a government that doesn't care about economic development and growth, forgetting that it alone can bring change to our society. It is distressing that the Centre, with a responsibility to guide and help the states along the path of democracy towards constructive change, has abandoned its responsibilities for what it thinks is for the political advantage of its party. It is wrong

in its assessment, but by the time it realises this it may be too late?

All recent economic trends point towards accretion of wealth and the benefits of policy by a small minority. We now not only have one of the highest income inequalities in the world, but the regional imbalance indices are even worse. Even one of the country's worst droughts had not succeeded in awakening the government to the plight of the vast majority of our people who live under the shadow of the monsoon. The government's attitude is reflected in its latest Budget which has nothing worthwhile for poor and rural majority except a few dollops that mostly don't reach them.

Even worse is the limited focus of the national media, more so the English print media and television, on the concerns of a small and self-centred elite that propounds the so-called market reforms and so-called liberalisation only to help itself even more. The stock market loot and the sea of non-performing assets that have almost drowned the banking system are a lasting testimony to the concerns of this section for which the government mostly toils. In a true democracy the concerns and wants of the majority will be the focus of the State. Is it then surprising that people are increasingly resorting to coercion just to be heard?

*Mohan Guruswamy is a scholar and author. The views expressed here are his own.*



## Intense battle on in Bengaluru for a 'new' Congress CM

THE penultimate month of 2025 has begun in an unexpectedly turbulent manner in Karnataka. After all, the struggle for the pinnacle of power in the south-western state of India – the CM post – had been set in motion right from the day Congress assumed power in May 2023. While it is still unclear whether it had the backing of the high command or not, it seemed like there was an undeclared agreement between the top two leaders – Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy D K Shivakumar – that the two would trade places at the midpoint of the five-year government, which happens to be this month. As the deadline drew near, the pulls and pressures from both

lobbies started impacting the political atmosphere in the state for some weeks now. While the CM, who has survived similar power struggles throughout his long career, emphatically denied existence of any such power-sharing arrangement and asserted that he would last the full term, the Deputy CM, also the state unit chief, was not openly contradicting it yet had enough backers within the state Congress unit and government to raise a call in his favour. After having joined the Congress nearly 20 years back, Siddaramaiah has proved to be more useful and effective to the New Delhi power lobby.

His smart usage of the potent minority and backward caste cards

have kept his detractors a little wary of what his next moves could be and presumably, a better candidate for remaining at the top of the helm. In contrast, a life-long Congressman, Shivakumar, has been feted for his crisis management dexterity and ability to raise funds for various political wheeling-dealing in States where Congress is in power. Yet, he has been deprived of the CM chair as he doesn't have the aggregating influence of his arch-rival, who has survived vicious criticism from Opposition parties who have targeted him for his appeasement and conciliatory politics with caste groups and a defiant anti-Hindutva streak in most of his actions. Shivakumar has also not earned much apprecia-

tion for his 'friendly' attitude with the Opposition (read BJP) which has added to the former's problems by extending a welcoming approach if ever he decides to switch sides. That may not happen as DKS, as he is popularly known, has exhibited unflinching loyalty to the GOP high command and is unlikely to do something catastrophic as joining hands with his political foes.

Yet, vested interests on both sides keep loading the media with their sensational observations, the latest being that of Yathindra, son of the incumbent CM, who had predicted that his father may not be seen in active politics for long and speculated that a minister from Belagavi may be his replacement. Divided

that the Congress party is in the state, no one is now bothered to cover themselves with ambivalent statements or comments and freely express their opinions about whom they want as the next CM, provided the 'November revolution' takes effect. Bengaluru is awash with speculation and intense rumours on the power struggle drama once again as it has been in the past month or so. Bihar election results are awaited by Congress, which senses that they may be in with a chance to dislodge NDA and silence dissent in party units by announcing cabinet reshuffles or appealing rebels with a post or two. The battle has just taken a pause, but it has not come to a grinding halt, for sure.



## LETTERS

### Guru Nanak Jayanthi today

GURU Nanak Gurmurab holds profound significance as a day to honour the holy Guru and embody his teachings, encouraging followers to fight the five vices—lust, greed, attachment, anger and pride. His teachings are embedded in the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of Sikhs. Guru Nanak Jayanthi, also known as Gurmurab, which is being celebrated on Wednesday (Nov 5) is a momentous occasion for the Sikh community worldwide. It marks the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, the revered founder of Sikhism. According to Sikh tradition, this celebration takes place on the full moon day of the Indian lunar month of Kartik.

C K Subramaniam, Navi Mumbai

### Chevella horror: HC must take suo motu cognizance

IT'S heartbreaking that three college-going sisters from the same family died in a road accident at Chevella that killed 19 people on Monday. The impact was devastating – the truck, overloaded with small stones, left passengers half-buried under the debris. Who has the courage to console the victims' families, and who will take responsibility for the potholes that led to the collision? The High Court of Telangana should take suo motu cognizance of the accident and hold the Telangana government accountable for the poor maintenance of Hyderabad's roads.

Ganti Venkata Sudhir, Secunderabad

### Highway roads turn deathtraps

THE bus-truck collision on the National Highway near Mirjaguda, which claimed 19 lives, is a grim reminder of the quality of roads on the National Highway and the apathy of the state transport department. The accident was caused due to a pothole on the road that the truck driver tried to avoid and ended up colliding with the bus. Huge loans are taken from the World Bank to build National Highways, and the citizens also pay toll tax and yet the condition of roads remain pathetic and risky. Will the Minister of Highways and State Minister of Transport own responsibility for the mishap?

P R Ravinder, Hyderabad

### Punish errant drivers

THE gruesome accident near Chevella, involving a tipper truck and TGSRTC bus which collided head-on resulting in the death of 19 people was heart-wrenching. Some deaths were due to gravel being thrown on the passengers much like a shrapnel in a bomb blast; and burying the unwary travellers. Over speeding seems to be the cause for the accident. Rash and negligent driving must be strictly curbed on highways, which can be done by way of severe punishment and heavy penalties.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

### Don't malign women players

MANY self-styled cricket lovers celebrate players one day and trash them the next. Even as praise poured in for the Indian women's team after their historic World Cup win, an ugly post targeted one of the key players, who helped India cross the final hurdle. The troll mocked her saying her "God was on holiday" — a cheap and disgraceful remark. Such venom shows how shallow and reactionary our fandom has become. Sport is about respect, not ridicule. True supporters stand by their players through both triumph and trial. It's time we learn to cheer with dignity, not spew hate when things don't go our way.

N Nagarajan, Hyderabad

### Mazumdar displayed Chak De! spirit

A MOL Muzumdar, the unsung hero of Indian cricket, displays the spirit of coach Kabir Khan in Chak De! India. He never played for India but coached our women to the 2025 World Cup glory. With calm resolve and fierce faith, he united warriors and shattered barriers. His mantra is 'believe, build, conquer'.

TS Karthik, Chennai-10

### Women empowerment in Indian sport

A PROPOS 'Harman's angels cast a spell for ages' (THI, Nov 4), close on the heels of the men in blue winning the Asia Cup, the women in blue won the coveted ICC Women's World Cup for the first time. Surely this achievement will not only bolster women empowerment in Indian sport but also instil gender parity in the same. Indian women players displayed their abilities to match their male counterparts in every department of the game, an apt representation of sport in India, where cricket is almost a religion and cricketers' demigods.

Dr George Jacob, Kochi

thehansreader@gmail.com



## BENGALURU ONLINE

### Engineers given weekly targets to demolish illegal buildings

BENGALURU: The drive to remove unauthorized constructions in Bengaluru is picking up pace once again. The Bengaluru East Municipal Zone has set a weekly target for engineers to demolish eight illegal buildings as part of a renewed crackdown on unauthorized structures. Following the formation of the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), the city's civic officials have intensified their focus on illegal construction activities.

Bengaluru East Zonal Commissioner Lokhande Snehal Sudhakar recently convened a coordination meeting with municipal engineers, directing them to implement the demolition plan with strict timelines. Under the East Zone's jurisdiction, there are 8 divisions, 24 sub-divisions, and 50 wards. Officials have been instructed to compile and maintain complete data related to construction activities in their respective areas within a week. As per the directive, each division must remove at least one illegal building per week, resulting in a total of eight demolitions weekly across the East Zone.

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

# The decline of moral ethics and values in marital life



TADAKAMALLA MURALIDHAR

In Hindu tradition, marriage is considered a sacrament that unites two souls and two families. However, the present marriage system in India, whether arranged or love, is undergoing significant pressure and witnessing a transformation because of declining values within the families.

Spouses shift their responsibility and accountability for their own actions, which is known as the "blame game" resulting in misunderstandings, quarrels and fights and lack of happiness in marital life. The harmony between the spouses is damaged and a bitter experience is left between the two families of the married couple.

Thus, there is a possibility of breaking of the marital bond. The mind turns towards wrong thoughts about the spouse. One of the reasons is the absence of elders in the family to guide the younger ones and there are not as many joint families as there used to be earlier.

The ego of "me, mine" distances the couple from the idea of "we, ours". Like adding fuel to the fire, the instigation of parents also causes damage to the system.

In today's system, extra-marital affairs in the name of civilization are destroy-

ing marital life. Thus, situations arise in which the spouses do not want to live together.

The Union Government brought the Family Courts Act in 1984 as a viable measure to resolve rifts, misunderstandings and conflicts between the husband and wife through mediation, keeping them together without going in for a divorce, and providing speedy justice.

In Telangana State, three Family Courts were established for the first time in 1994 at the level of District Judge. Today, there is one Family Court in each district headquarters apart from two in the Hyderabad City limits, one in Secunderabad limits, three in NTR Nagar in Rangareddy district limits and one each in Malkajigiri and Kukatpally.

Approximately 2,000 to 2,500 cases are pending in each Family Court and each presiding judge calls about a hundred cases for hearing every day. Keeping in mind the increasing number of cases, unlike other courts, Family Courts are hearing cases even on Saturdays.

The presiding judges are working under a lot of pressure and carrying an unbearable burden because of the huge number of cases piled up before them.

Dispensation of justice by the presiding judges as desired by the divorcing couple is not an easy task. The two sides throw mud at each other with accusations, stubbornness, jealousy and hatred and sometimes quarrels in the courtroom itself. Filing of cases with false accusations with a malicious intention and trying to hurt the op-



**The two sides throw mud at each other with accusations, stubbornness, jealousy and hatred and sometimes quarrels in the courtroom itself. Filing of cases with false accusations with a malicious intention and trying to hurt the opponent in some way, intentional violation of court orders, and even accusations against the judge for any delay in issuing orders or for not delivering the expected order are not uncommon.**

ponent in some way, intentional violation of court orders, and even accusations against the judge for any delay in issuing orders or for not delivering the expected order are not uncommon.

Before the advent of the Family Courts Act, 1984 three judges, namely District Judge, Senior Civil Judge, and Magistrate, used to deal with matters pertaining to estranged spouses with different duties. However, after the enactment of this Act, all those duties are tacked to the Family Court Judge. The main duty of the Fam-

ily Court Judge is to first bridge the gap between the couple through mediation and overcome the problems and keep them together, and only as a last resort, grant order of divorce by dissolution of marriage.

Apart from these, restitution of conjugal rights, judicial separation for six months as provided by the law, declaration of marriage as nullity, custody of children, property disputes between husband and wife, temporary and permanent maintenance and domestic abuse cases are all dealt with by the Family Courts.

A significant portion

of divorce cases involve young couples with good income. There has been a large increase in two types of cases i.e., cases of divorce sought by mutual consent after one year of marriage under Section 13-B and cases where the spouses seek declaration of annulment of marriage within a month of marriage under Section 12.

In cases instituted under Section 13-B, the most common reason cited by the estranged couples for divorce is that their differences were irreconcilable and they are unable to get along in life. Once the mar-

riage is dissolved, the aspect of adjudication of giving of custody of children and the visitation rights is a herculean task.

In cases instituted under Section 12, the foundational issue will be the impotence of the man or frigidity of the woman. In divorce cases by mutual consent, the courts can somehow reconcile the couples and try for reunion by negotiation or mediation. In cases of annulment of marriages, the courts cannot compel the parties to marriage to remain together. Its task is to confirm the foundational issue by seeking opinion from an expert and grant annulment if the fact is proven rather than pushing for a fruitless reconciliation.

In ordinary criminal cases, a trial can be concluded in a few adjournments. But in family disputes, since the main task is to reunite the husband and wife rather than granting divorce at a stretch, the presiding judge must try to identify the problems like emotional misunderstandings, make the spouses talk openly and honestly with each other and then resolve the issues.

In any case, it can be said without an iota of doubt that of late, in the name of civilization, the Indian marital system has become very weak.

Only changes in the mental attitude of the spouses and their kith and kin can help the estranged couple to live together happily and their respective families can breathe easy.

(The writer is a retired District Judge based in Hyderabad)

# Bihar-The seat of ancient Indian civilisation

DR HYMA MOORTHY

Bihar, the region known historically as Magadha, Anga and Mithila has over the years evolved and transformed itself into a developing state, which makes for a laudable development.

In keeping with its rising status, this month's Assembly elections in the State has become a prestigious issue for several key players, especially to all political contenders in the fray as also the stakeholders and the people across the national firmament.

A unique feature of Bihar is that the more you try to understand the entire gamut of its politics, the more likely that it slips away like sand through your fingers. Not surprisingly, the upcoming elections are generating significant interest across the country, more so because the eventual outcome will have a significant bearing on national politics.

As things stand, the electoral dynamics of one of the largest states in India that are characterised by complex caste equations and high-stake battles make it a closely watched event.

What I gathered from television channels and pod-

casts is that people at the nukkads, tea stalls and village court yards, with their spirited conversations show that they keep track of the State's politics, and display their preferred ideas or parties. This shows that they are politically mature. The characteristic of every Bihari is that the individual nurtures a revolutionary temperament and speaks with a fearless mind.

Lest one forgets, this is the land of Gautama Buddha, Vardhamana Mahavira- the last Jain Tirthankara, and Chanakya. It is this very land that was once ruled by the Great Mauryan Empire, which unified a large part of the Indian sub-continent.

The Gupta Empire, often referred to as 'India's Golden Era', for its advancements in art, science and philosophy flourished in this region with Pataliputra (the present day Patna) as their capital.

Going deeper, Bihar was the seat of prestigious ancient Universities like Nalanda, Vikramshila, Odantapuri and Telhara, which figures prominently in the travel accounts of Chinese traveller HuienTsang, and Mithila University, which were major centres of learning with a global reputation.



They once symbolized the grandeur of ancient Indian Civilization.

Overtime, Bihar gradually lost its lustre and its rich heritage, glorious past and pioneering intellectual traditions. It has been observed that people from Bihar often hesitate to identify themselves as Biharis due to the negative connotations associated with the term. Historically, the word "Bihari" has evolved from a neutral geographical identifier to a derogatory label, symbolizing backwardness, poverty and lack of sophistication. It is such extremes that films and even the media often portray Biharis in a negative light, reinforcing stereotypes

and stigmatising the community.

However, of late, there is a growing movement to reclaim the term "Bihari" and challenge these negative perceptions. Many people from Bihar proudly declare their roots, using phrases like "Bihari hoon, garv hai" (I am a Bihari, and I am proud of it) to promote a positive identity to counter stereotypes.

One should not forget that Biharis are well represented in civil services, engineering and medical fields due to several factors. The State has a rich tradition of prioritising education with many students excelling in competitive exams at all

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India level. One can come across countless quality technical and medical institutions, thanks to the initiatives launched by the State government.

Bihari culture places high value on merit and hard work, which together drive students to excel academically and secure prestigious jobs and be assured of a prosperous future.

Bihar elections are crucial for all the parties as their reputation and leadership is being tested. At the end of the day, the real winners should be the people of Bihar. It's crucial for the elected representatives to

prioritise the State's development, progress and welfare of the people. Bihar has immense potential. A pro-people government can tap it to the fullest and also open up opportunities for its citizens, to eventually propel growth and prosperity.

One hopes that the focus of the contenders will be on key issues like infrastructure, education, and healthcare and job creation to ultimately improve the quality of life for the people of Bihar. All said and done, Bihar, especially its people, deserves leaders who will work tirelessly and strive for all-round betterment.



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

— Ramnath Goenka

## TRUMP RISKS DRAGGING WORLD INTO A NEW NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

US President Donald Trump's regressive decision on re-starting nuclear weapons tests throws a spanner in decades of global work on a moratorium. Except for rogue North Korea, no other country has violated the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that came into effect in 1996. The US signed it, but its senate never ratified the treaty. China, too, did not ratify it, and Russia revoked its ratification in 2023. Yet, the big three showed enough responsibility to stay off live testing. This norm could be torn asunder if the US administration walks the testing talk. Trump justified his decision saying Russia, China, North Korea, and Pakistan are already doing it. However, except for Pyongyang, there is no evidence of any other country indulging in live nuclear tests. US Energy Secretary Chris Wright sought to clarify that his boss's proposal does not involve live nuclear detonations. "These are system tests, non-critical explosions," he explained. But nuclear powers are not barred from sub-critical tests. So, what is the big deal? Chances are that Trump is following the Project 2025 playbook—a radical think tank's blueprint for governance during Trump 2.0—that urges the president to be willing to conduct tests in response to adversaries' actions. A major part of Trump 2.0's policy mess can be traced back to Project 2025.

Trump perhaps played the nuclear card because Russian President Vladimir Putin refused to scale down his maximalist demand for territory to end the Ukraine war. Instead, Putin spoke about three new cutting-edge nuclear assets—Poseidon, a nuclear-powered and -armed torpedo; Burevestnik, a nuclear cruise missile; and Satan 2, a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile that is supposed to be imminently deployed. While Putin knew what he was talking about, Trump's understanding of nuclear issues seems muddled. Besides, the faltering New START Treaty to reduce the stockpile of US and Russian nuclear arms is due to expire in another three months.

The problem with the resumption of live bomb testing is that it could prompt a global nuclear arms race to test and upgrade the existing stockpiles, throwing multilateral safeguards out of the window. At a time when the world is grappling with intense geopolitical tensions and climate change, it would be foolhardy to add the risk of nuclear radiation. One hopes better sense will prevail.

## SOIL SOLUTION CAN BOOST FARMING, CUT POLLUTION

A new initiative is underway in Karnataka to increase soil fertility and protection—focusing on sugarcane, but extendable to a wider range of crops. It involves reusing sugarcane waste and residues instead of burning them. Incinerating the waste destroys fertility, kills microorganisms essential for soil health, increases air pollution, and harms the environment. At least 3,000 hectares of farmland across five Karnataka districts have been selected for the initiative that includes training farmers in composting techniques to transform residues into organic manure.

Using agricultural waste-based organic compost not only supports microbial activity in the soil, but also improves its water efficiency, fertility, and reduces weed control expenses and dependence on chemical fertilisers. Mineralisation of organic matter in the soil helps increase the availability of phosphorus, a vital nutrient for plant growth and reproduction. Phosphorus is crucial for photosynthesis, energy transfer, and DNA synthesis in plants, and promotes robust root development, improves crop yields, and helps tolerate environmental stress like drought and salinity.

Earlier this month, International Union for Conservation of Nature, the global conservation agency, adopted a landmark motion to pave the way for the world's first model legal framework for soil protection. The IUCN will constitute a working group to develop the concepts and parameters for an international convention that would create the model law; it would then be hopefully integrated it into the national frameworks of IUCN's 88 member nations including India. This soil security law is expected to act as a catalyst for nations to integrate soil protection measures with their agricultural, climate, and restoration frameworks.

This is the right time for the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change, the state agriculture departments, and field experts to come together and exploit the opportunity offered by the twin initiatives unfolding in India and abroad—both of which aim to improve soil health, agriculture, and the quality and quantity of crop output. Pursuing safe practices for improving soil health by using organic waste and crop residues will undeniably yield bonuses. For one, it will lead to a significant reduction in stubble burning, which has drastically increased air pollution—across North India in general and around Delhi in particular. In the longer run, it will give a hefty boost to food security and benefit farmers through reduced production costs. It indeed would be an important win for all.

### QUICK TAKE

#### FALL OF THE MAPLE LEAF

INDIAN students' Canadian dream has soured. Far fewer Indian students applied to study there in 2025 and, at the same time, Canada rejected most of the applications. Armed with a new verification system, Canada rejected three in four Indian applications for post-secondary studies this year; compared to one in three two years ago. The Canadian authorities also confirmed that among the 1,550-odd applications linked to fraudulent letters of acceptance in 2023, most were from India. While it's impossible to police the huge industry of formal and informal overseas study consultants that has mushroomed across India, local authorities can probe those responsible for fraud once it comes to light. After all, it's Indians' reputation abroad that's at stake, too.

SRI Lankans went to polls on November 14, 2024 with the clear intent of ending the traditional two-party rule and electing an administration that would fight corruption and prosecute the corrupt.

The National People's Power (NPP), in their opposition days, did make it sound easy to bring the "stolen money back"; but the reality of a year in office showed it is harder to do. Still, for all that isn't achieved yet, the NPP administration has demonstrated a better political will to fight corruption than the earlier administrations.

So, a year on, the disenchantment with incumbency that has set in has more to do with the government's failure to provide economic relief, cut crippling taxes, and lower the unbearable cost of living than its fight against corruption. Before coming to office, the NPP had pledged to renegotiate with the International Monetary Fund, set up a new national development bank, and improve governance structures in a clear departure from the past.

However, this government has continued with the IMF process adopted by former President Ranil Wickremesinghe and has used provisions of the Anti-Corruption Act 2023 and the amended National Audit Act—two important measures taken by the former administration. The 2023 anti-graft law effectively expanded the mandate of the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, including in detection and prosecution, in probing the private sector, in seeking and facilitating international cooperation against corruption, and in making asset and liability declarations mandatory for public officials.

Another significant development was the enactment of the Regulation of Election Expenditure Act No 3 of 2023—a longstanding demand of civil society—that at long last allows regulation of election spending by parties and candidates. It was followed this year by the much-awaited Proceeds of Crime Act No 5 of 2025, which enables recovery of proceeds through freezing, forfeiture, and disposal. Both these are milestones in tackling graft. To make the bulwark stronger, the Companies (Amendment) Act No 12 of 2025 mandates the disclosure of beneficial owners, another vital step contributing to a stronger legal framework to combat systemic corruption. In effect, the anti-corruption legal

A year on, Sri Lanka's ruling alliance seems intent on keeping its promise to sharpen anti-graft laws and prosecute the corrupt. But it's failing to relieve the common man's financial burden

## NPP REPORT CARD: TWO TICKS AND A HEAVY CROSS

DILRUKSHI HANDUNNETTI

Award-winning journalist and lawyer; founder and director of the Colombo-based Center for Investigative Reporting



MANDAR PARDIKAR

framework that Sri Lanka has been developing for some time was finalised by the NPP administration this year. However, an important unfulfilled promise is the setting up of a public prosecutor's office to enable impartial prosecution.

The government has also made several arrests within a year, sparking a stinging political debate over their motives. Wickremesinghe was recently detained over accusations of improper use of public funds. The administration weathered sharp criticism from some opposition groups, but sent a strong public message that no one enjoyed immunity and the political elite would not be protected, as was done in the past. Convictions do take time, but in their absence—after boastful claims

of having sufficient evidence to prosecute—the failure to proceed beyond arrests will only invite public mistrust.

The government has also recently slashed some benefits of former presidents, reclaimed several state-owned homes occupied by them, and launched inquiries against former legislators, public servants, and police officers. It is inspiring to see the fight against corruption and some criticism for it is par for the course. But the litmus test will be how the NPP administration responds to allegations of corruption and lack of integrity among its own representatives.

The ruling alliance's self-proclaimed lily-white status was challenged within days of taking oath—when Asoka Ranwala, a first-time parliamentarian who

## ONUS BEYOND THE ₹51-CRORE BONUS

ANAND VASU

Journalist who has covered cricket for more than 25 years

THE floodgates opened by Harmanpreet Kaur & Co's World Cup win are unleashing wave after positive wave. There is the satisfaction every player steps onto the field for, the pride of parents and coaches who support from the sidelines, the inspiration of young girls and boys everywhere who will vocalise their dreams with less diffidence, and the inevitable claiming of credit.

There has even been talk on whether the ₹51-crore bonus the Board of Control for Cricket in India announced for the team and the support staff was enough. It's an exceptionally good space for women's cricket to be in, and those who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes will take the win. But India's win also presents a tremendous opportunity—one that does not come by often enough—and it will be interesting to see if the BCCI has the alacrity to seize it.

The question around the bonus is tricky. For starters, a bonus is not something you demand. When the Indian men's team won the Champions Trophy, they received a bonus of ₹58 crore, and given that the men's contingent is larger, the difference in amount is negligible. But this is the first World Cup win for the women, and you can see why there was the thought that the BCCI could have been more generous.

The other side of that coin is that women's cricket does not yet attract the sort of viewership the men's team does. And it is from this that revenue follows—an aspect the administrators fall back on to justify equal pay for matches (men and women play games of the same duration), but different pay scales in central contracts.

Also, the women play far fewer matches and therefore are remunerated less. This too is a complex issue, as the BCCI and perhaps the England and Australia boards are financially well enough to plough money into the women's game; but this is not the case elsewhere. Even if the BCCI wanted to give the Indian team more opportunities, the calendar would not come close to matching the men's game because there isn't enough viable opposition to play.

Now, all these are ground realities, but the opportunity before the Indian board is a clear one. While it must be acknowledged that the men's and

women's games are different ecosystems, it is less clear if the BCCI recognises its obligation to promote and support the men's and women's games with equal intent and resources.

The 'returns'—for want of a better word—from the women's game will be relatively insignificant compared to the men's. And yet, the game is not administered by the Board of Control for Men's Cricket in India. The opportunity before the BCCI is to embrace genuine inclusivity. If they see investing in women's cricket as its responsibility, and not as doing a favour to a game that cannot sustain itself financially, this World Cup win would have served its truest purpose.



BCCI's bonus for the women's team's World Cup win is comparable with what the men got after Champions Trophy. To build upon the success, several stakeholders will have to see more value in the women's game. Big crowds at well-managed tournaments can be a start

In the men's game, the BCCI has reaped the benefits of inclusivity. It was not that long ago that the sport was concentrated in metros. Anyone from smaller cities had to travel far to access infrastructure, coaching, and technical know-how.

That changed when talent fought its way from the hinterland to the highest level—Mahendra Singh Dhoni's being

an especially illustrative case. This then led to more investment, which in time ensured wider representation and access to a much larger talent pool.

In that sense, the BCCI has proof of concept in terms of investing in underserved sections of cricket in India. It pays dividends, and they have the money to do so. The will has historically been lacking; but that, too, has changed.

The women's team is better supported in terms of access to the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, quite possibly the best preparatory facility in cricket in the world that attracts top-notch coaching talent. Amol Muzundar is rightly getting credit for holding this team together; but others such as W V Raman and Ramesh Powar also played a part in laying the foundations. India's women now travel well and stay in comfort, and this has trickled down to the state level with the more responsible associations.

All the incremental improvements are welcome, but what will be a game-changer is a genuine paradigm shift. If the BCCI hopes to grow the women's game to greater strength, it needs other stakeholders to come to the party. Grounds must be filled, and to this end, series and tournaments must be planned in advance, with spectators given access to the same facilities as at men's matches. Broadcasters must see value in women's cricket, and the television rights need to be priced smartly. Sponsors have to get a genuine return on investment and stop viewing women's cricket as a part of their corporate social responsibility budget.

For all this to happen—and there is no reason it cannot—the first step is for the BCCI to put its money where its mouth is. The question should not be whether a ₹51-crore bonus is enough. Instead, it should be: where can we find the money to make this even bigger? Thankfully, the BCCI have no real difficulty on that count. All that remains is for them to be true to their name, and not see women's and men's cricket as two different entities.

(Views are personal)

was appointed parliament speaker, had his PhD claim challenged, forcing him to resign from the high office. A year later, he continues as an MP without offering a credible explanation about his failure to present his PhD certificate.

More serious allegations have been levelled against Energy Minister Kumara Jayakody over his involvement in the misappropriation of millions during his tenure at the Ceylon Fertiliser Company. Senior politician Wasantha Samarasinghe, the NPP's minister of trade and food security, is being investigated by the Colombo Fraud Investigation Bureau over an alleged fraud and forgery involving the lease of a public building and land belonging to the National Workers' Institute. The latest to come under the microscope is popular actor-turned-politician Jagath Manuwarna. On October 29, the Colombo Fort Magistrate issued a warrant for his arrest for failing to appear before the court in a 2008 case involving allegations of financial misconduct and conspiracy.

The new administration must be cognisant that it would be judged by its efficiency in dealing with corruption, malpractice, and integrity issues of its own, apart from others. Caesar's wife must be above suspicion, goes the adage—one that the NPP will do good to bear in mind and factor in the strong public expectations to protect its image as an anti-graft administration.

Fighting corruption will take time, as the wheels of justice roll slowly. Meanwhile, private citizens will have to contend with their overwhelming financial challenges as 12 million registered taxpayers face disproportionate levies.

As it marks its first year in office, the NPP administration should adopt a balancing act. While driving reforms and fighting corruption, it also needs to provide relief for the public reeling from the debilitating aftereffects of the 2022 economic collapse. The IMF-imposed austerity measures continue to tighten the noose around their necks. The poverty rate has increased to 24.5 percent, while the rate of school dropouts is on the rise, as is malnutrition. While single-mindedly chasing economic recovery goals, the government must not lose the early gains made by the country in both public healthcare and education. In the end, it is not possible to prioritise one over the other—reality calls for combining the two.

(Views are personal)  
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### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Gritty girls

Ref: *More than a world cup* (Nov 4). It's a fact that women have to work twice as hard to get recognition, but this time Team India have proved their worth beyond doubt. The grit and dedication of the girls bore fruit and words are inadequate in expressing the joy.  
**Elizabeth Koshy, Pathanamthitta**

#### Indonesian lesson

Ref: *A Balinese turnaround* (Nov 4). It is quite astonishing to see Indonesia, having attracted millions of tourists annually, creating an ideal of ecologically-responsible tourism. It is an appreciated decision, especially the limited use of water reservoirs.  
**Habib Khan, Haveri**

#### Tongue twister

Ref: *A linguistic game of definitions* (Nov 4). In Buddhism, there is an interesting tale which birthed the theory of nothing. A beggar, upon asking for alms, gets the reply, "Nothing will be given to you." He continues to wait, and when a passerby enquires, he replies, "I'm waiting to receive nothing." Something comes of nothing.  
**P Prema, Thanjavur**

#### Test cycle

Ref: *Pak on list of nations doing N-weapons test* (Nov 4). Pakistan's nuclear testing should not prompt a retaliatory response from any nation, as it could escalate into a cycle of reciprocal testing, undermining global stability. A tit-for-tat approach only exacerbates tensions, disrupts diplomatic efforts, and jeopardises regional security.  
**Prakash, Dharmapuri**

#### Sudanese crisis

Ref: *US pushes for Sudan truce* (Nov 4). Fierce clashes and displacement of thousands after the fall of El-Fasher in Sudan's Darfur makes it a humanitarian crisis. The conflict has also affected the Indian diaspora engaged in trade and healthcare. India should coordinate with the UN for evacuation and aid.  
**R S Narula, Patiala**

#### Dynasts' chokehold

Ref: *Dynastic politics a grave threat to democracy in India, says Tharoor* (Nov 4). Apart from posing a grave threat to democracy, nepotism triggers the mushrooming of smaller political parties, whose leaders find their progress choked by dynasts. Actor-turned-politician Vijay is a classic example who could have easily come under the DMK umbrella if the party had followed intra-party democracy.  
**N Balakrishnan, Chennai**



The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Glaring inequality

India's rich keep getting richer

GLOBAL inequality has reached emergency levels, according to a study conducted by a G20 panel of independent experts. The richest 1 per cent captured two-fifths of all new wealth created worldwide between 2000 and 2024, while the bottom half of humanity received a pittance — merely 1 per cent. India is no exception to this disturbing trend — the nation's richest 1 per cent have expanded their wealth by 62 per cent in just over two decades. The rich are steadily getting richer in the world's fourth-largest economy, but the poor are generally struggling to become less poor. This economic disparity has only worsened the skewed distribution of resources among the haves and the have-nots.

The panel report should prompt policymakers to find ways and means to bridge the ever-increasing gap. Last week, the Kerala government declared that the state had eradicated extreme poverty. Though this big claim has been doubted by some experts and rejected by Opposition parties, the benefits of people-centric development and community participation cannot be ignored. The initiative has helped thousands of extremely poor families get better access to food, healthcare, housing and means of livelihood. It makes sense to prepare and execute micro plans for each identified family. Other states can customise this model as per their needs and conditions.

It's natural for state and Central governments to latch on to favourable data. Earlier this year, the World Bank reported that India had managed to lift 17 crore people from extreme poverty between 2011-12 and 2022-23. The Centre patted itself on the back for a job well done, even as the methodology for reporting poverty estimates came under scrutiny. It has to be understood by all stakeholders that numbers alone cannot show the whole picture. Efforts to reduce poverty should make a qualitative difference on the ground. While economists are generally not keen on the imposition of wealth tax, the government must ensure that the super rich contribute their fair share to the exchequer. The focus should be on *Sabka Vikas*, which is a prerequisite for *Viksit Bharat*.

Darbar returns

Omar's bid to rebalance the regions

THE reopening of the Civil Secretariat in Jammu after a four-year hiatus marks more than the return of an administrative ritual. It signals both an economic revival and a calculated political message. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's decision to restore the age-old Darbar Move fulfils an election promise and seeks to reclaim the idea of balance between the two capitals of Jammu and Kashmir, abruptly disrupted after 2021. For decades, the Darbar Move has symbolised equitable governance. The physical shifting of the seat of power between Srinagar and Jammu was meant to bind the two regions emotionally and politically. While critics have called it an expensive colonial relic, its defenders have viewed it as a bridge of trust between areas long divided by geography and sentiment. Its suspension under the Lt Governor's administration, after the revocation of Article 370, had deepened Jammu's sense of alienation and fanned perceptions of centralisation.

Reviving the practice, therefore, carries unmistakable political undertones. For Omar Abdullah, it is a statement of regional assertion, a reminder that governance must not be confined to one valley. It has also revived political competition, with rival parties accusing the National Conference of exploiting symbolism for electoral mileage. Yet, the move has found resonance among Jammu's traders and employees who see it as both economic relief and restoration of parity.

Still, symbolism alone cannot heal divides. The government must now ensure that equitable development, employment and infrastructure follow this symbolic reconciliation. Reviving the Darbar Move has reopened old doors; making governance truly inclusive will decide whether they lead to a new beginning or another cycle of regional rivalry.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1925

The 'unbiased mind'

AN Anglo-Indian journal made the somewhat humorous observation that not having read the works of either Thomas Carlyle or John Ruskin, it could confidently hazard its unbiased opinion that Ruskin was the greater writer of the two. The point of the humour, we need scarcely say, was that familiarity with the works of an author tends to produce a bias in one's mind in their favour; and that consequently the only unbiased opinion in regard to them is the opinion of the man who knows nothing about them. One is reminded of this use of the word "unbiased" by the only favourable verdicts that have so far been expressed in any quarter, whether in England or India, regarding the new Viceregal appointment. The only good point which the authors of these verdicts have been able to discover in the new Viceroy, apart, of course, from his pedigree, his general education and culture and such parts as he took in the Wood-Winterton negotiations, is that he knows nothing about India and, therefore, presumably has an unbiased mind. Nothing else can be meant by the opinion just expressed by Lord Meston in the *Sunday Times* that "it may be a definite advantage that the Rt Hon EFL Wood brings a fresh and unbiased mind to bear on such grave issues" as he will have to deal with when he goes out to India. Unlike the literary or art critic, to whom knowledge of the subject matter of his criticism is the first essential thing, it may be an advantage for a statesman, who is to be called upon to deal with grave and complicated problems around which bitter controversies have centred in the past and do centre even now, not to have had any previous first-hand acquaintance with those problems.

OPINION

Ifs & buts beset India-US trade deal

Tactical accommodation between Washington and Beijing will shrink Delhi's room for manoeuvre



SHYAM SARAN  
FORMER FOREIGN SECRETARY

IS the conclusion of a trade deal between India and the US imminent? Have all the outstanding issues been resolved? One has stopped counting, but there has been a virtual cascade of reports claiming that a deal is round the corner over the past six months. However, the two sides have not yet succeeded in turning the corner.

What about the additional 25% tariff imposed on India on account of its purchases of oil from Russia? Now that major private sector buyers of oil are cutting back on purchases from Russian oil and gas majors Lukoil and Gazprom, which are now under US sanctions, would the additional 25% tariff imposed on India be removed? There are no signs of that so far.

Some observers derive hope of an early resolution from the renewal of the India-US Defence Cooperation Framework for another 10 years by *Raksha Mantri* Rajnath Singh and US Secretary for War ('Defence' is out!) Pete Hegseth on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus in Kuala Lumpur on October 31. It would appear that defence hardware and technology cooperation between the two countries remains intact. Perhaps that may be due to the US earning billions of dollars in hardware supplies to India. For a President constantly on the lookout to make a buck, this is in a separate compartment. But India needs to be careful.

At a future date, could Donald Trump object to India continuing to purchase sophisticated weapon systems from Russia, for example, the S-500, and refuse to supply some items or



RAY OF HOPE: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth signed the 10-year India-US Defence Framework in Kuala Lumpur on October 31. **PI**

components to India? It's possible. After all, one did not foresee the oil sanctions.

India has been singled out for punishment on account of purchasing oil from Russia even though China is a larger buyer and NATO allies *Türkiye* and Hungary are also significant importers. After the recent talks between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Trump in Busan on the sidelines of the APEC summit, the latter confirmed that he had not raised the issue of Chinese purchases of Russian oil.

So, India is being penalised because Trump believes it has little leverage but he dare not object to China's imports because Beijing can retaliate and has demonstrated its willingness to retaliate even if it has to endure some pain.

If India believes that its strategic partnership with the US helps in countervailing the Chinese challenge, it may need to think again. Not that the structural confrontation between the No. 1 and No. 2 powers will diminish in any way, but the tactical accommodation between

Strategic autonomy is a question of intent, not of capacity. India has the levers to advance its interests.

them will shrink India's room for manoeuvre. This needs to be acknowledged and addressed through agile and well-considered diplomacy.

An argument has been made that Trump's recent swing through Asia, the reaffirmation of alliances and partnerships, means that America's Indo-Pacific strategy remains valid. But the one component of the strategy which is of relevance to India — the Quad — seems to

have fallen off the radar. It seems unlikely that the Quad summit will take place in India before the year-end, as originally scheduled. Trump did not mention the Quad during his Asia visit. But more importantly neither did the other Quad partners — Australia and Japan. Perhaps they sensed Trump's indifference to it.

If India is looking for a 'Triad' instead of a Quad by intensifying its cooperation with Australia and Japan what would be its prospects? This needs cautious probing.

What other coping moves are available to India? An obvious one is already being pursued. This is a much closer all-round partnership with Europe, both bilaterally and through the European Union. Both sides appear focused on getting a trade agreement through before the end of the year. If Europe is serious about a major expansion in its defence capabilities, then it will need scale, highly qualified manpower and a predictable and growing market. India could provide all three. A stronger defence partnership with Europe will

also hedge against the unpredictability of the US as a defence partner for both sides. This ought to be a no-brainer.

I will repeat, like a broken record, the urgent need to secure our own sub-continental periphery. Not only through priority to bilateral relations with our neighbours but also through focusing on the regional dimension. The neighbourhood is not an irritating distraction. It is a missed opportunity. India must endeavour to become the engine of growth for South Asia and its chief security provider. Eventually this must include Pakistan in the calculations, however remote and difficult it may seem at present. The bigger challenge facing our region is climate change and a looming ecological crisis, which can only be addressed through regional collaboration. Only India can lead such collaboration.

Last but not least, India must consolidate its engagement with East and South East Asia. Its already considerable political and security profile must be matched by a solid economic pillar. Whether this involves re-engaging with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) or a bolder application to become a member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), should be the subject of serious policy discussions.

India has obvious strengths. It is still the fastest-growing major economy in a slowing global economy. It is an expanding market. It has enviable political stability in a turbulent world. It has an unmatched pool of scientific and technical manpower, including in the field of artificial intelligence. These are significant levers which, if used intelligently and with confidence, can advance India's interests and expand its strategic space. This applies to India's relations with China which are on a gradual upswing, and this should continue. Strategic autonomy is a question of intent, not of capacity.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

India's interest is best secured by maximising its options. — S Jaishankar

When oil lanterns dispelled darkness

KULBIR SINGH

DURING my childhood days in the 1950s, the majority of the villages in Punjab had no electricity supply. Kerosene or mustard oil lamps were commonly used. Mud houses had an *aala* (alcove) at the entrance and in the rooms for keeping the lamp. In the village gurdwara, mustard oil was used to light a large clay lamp on a wooden stand.

At night, someone in the family would carry a hurricane lantern from one place to another to find their way in the dark. At times, the lantern was hung from a hook in the middle of the door frame for covering a wider area under light. Most of the household chores were usually completed during the daytime. My mother used to prepare food for the night in the late-afternoon hours. It was also a prevalent practice to have dinner before sunset.

The hurricane lanterns were cleaned daily in the evening. My grandfather — a British Indian Army veteran — was a strict disciplinarian who wanted timely cleaning of lantern chimneys and refilling of kerosene in lamps. A depot in the village issued kerosene oil on the basis of the ration card.

As schoolgoing children, we would finish our homework before the evening. However, in the higher classes, studying at night was a must to cope with the syllabus. My parents purchased a large kerosene lamp with a raised base and bigger chimney glass. We cousins would sit around this lamp that emitted better light and study till late-night hours. We were literally burning the midnight oil.

The inauguration of the Bhakra Dam in October 1963 spurred electricity generation. It was a great boon for farmers, industries and households. Dedicated the dam to the nation, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru aptly described it as the "New Temple of Resurgent India". By the mid-1970s, all villages of Punjab were receiving power supply, making it one of the first states in the country to achieve 100 per cent rural electrification.

Initially, some villagers were reluctant to get an electricity connection, fearing electric shocks. However, electricity gradually became an integral part of every household. The practice of keeping hurricane lamps on standby continued for many years until inverters and domestic generators arrived.

Later, while serving in the CRPF, I was posted in remote areas of northeastern states where there was no electricity supply. We used hurricane lanterns and petromaxes, besides handheld battery torches. I could readily adjust to the familiar light from a hurricane lamp, which rekindled fond memories.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The new role models

Apropos of 'From streetlights to floodlights', the article charts the trajectory of the Indian women's cricket team and the players' determination and devotion to the game. All of them played well as a team under the captaincy of Harmanpreet Kaur to bring laurels to the nation, to themselves, their families and the states they belong to. The efforts of coach Amol Muzumdar to build a strong team and the BCCI's belief in him is also worth mentioning. The women's team has created a niche for itself that will motivate many others. The players have become role models for many Indians; the day may not be far when women's cricket will be more popular than men's cricket.

RAJESH CHANDER BALI, JALANDHAR

Vent to women's happiness

Refer to 'World champs'; India's womenfolk basked in reflected glory at the superb victory of the women's cricket team. The wins in the semifinal and the final won the hearts of even housewives, who skipped their favourite TV shows to switch over to a sports channel. Their unanimous opinion was '*Betiyon ne toh kamaal kar diya*'. Women cricketers are now stars in their own right and they have come out of the shadow of their male counterparts in India.

RAJ BAHADUR YADAV, FATEHABAD

Set the bar high in judiciary

Refer to 'Justice Surya Kant must turn promise into performance'; an efficient justice delivery system should inspire public faith and confidence of the stakeholders in the hallowed institution of judiciary. A judge can perform his duties well only if he is honest, independent, impartial, fearless and fair. The Chief Justice of India (CJI) must ensure that the selection of judges in the higher judiciary is transparent. Pending matters must be disposed of in a time bound manner. Mere promise is not enough; actions speak louder than words. The CJI is not only expected to dispense justice expeditiously and fairly in his own court room, he will set standards to be followed in the high courts and the lower courts too.

MD SHARMA, SHIMLA

Restraint is the answer to nukes

Apropos of 'Pak secretly testing nukes, claims Trump'; the alarming claims of nuclear weapons being tested secretly by nuclear-capable powers including China and Pakistan dangerously shatter the decades-long global testing moratorium. The alleged violation of the nuclear testing norms poses an immediate and grave threat to India's security environment, compelling New Delhi to reassess its strategic posture in an increasingly volatile, nuclearised neighbourhood. India should not fall into an arms race trap. New Delhi must leverage diplomatic channels and global non-proliferation partnerships to firmly stabilise regional dynamics and push for a return to restraint by all parties.

BALBIR SINGH KAKKAR, JALANDHAR

Climate policy a must

Governments often adopt cosmetic measures as solutions: New Delhi's experimentation with cloud seeding instead of addressing the structural causes of environmental degradation is a case in point. India can no longer afford to treat climate-related health issues as collateral damage. The government must integrate climate policy and the economic consequences of that policy with the principles of governance. Mitigatory actions will have to be taken across multiple fronts. However, public indifference to poor air quality is shocking because we have to acknowledge the problem before solving it.

YASH PAL RAJHAN, BY MAIL

Downsizing of PU Senate good

The reorganisation of the Panjab University Senate has been grabbing attention for the past few days. A casual analysis will reveal that people who are the least affected by this historic decision of the Central Government are criticising it the most and the persons who know the system well like former Vice Chancellors and senior professors are praising the latest decision of downsizing the university's governing body. It is interesting to note that top-ranked global universities like Oxford and Cambridge have 26 and 16 members, respectively, in the governing body, while the PU Senate had 90.

VK ANAND, CHANDIGARH



# In Guru Nanak's world, all were equal



JAGRUP SINGH SEKHON  
FORMER PROFESSOR, GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY

THE 556th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, falls today (November 5, 2025). His teachings and philosophy of universalism are more relevant in contemporary times as humanity is passing through all shades of serious crises and conflicts.

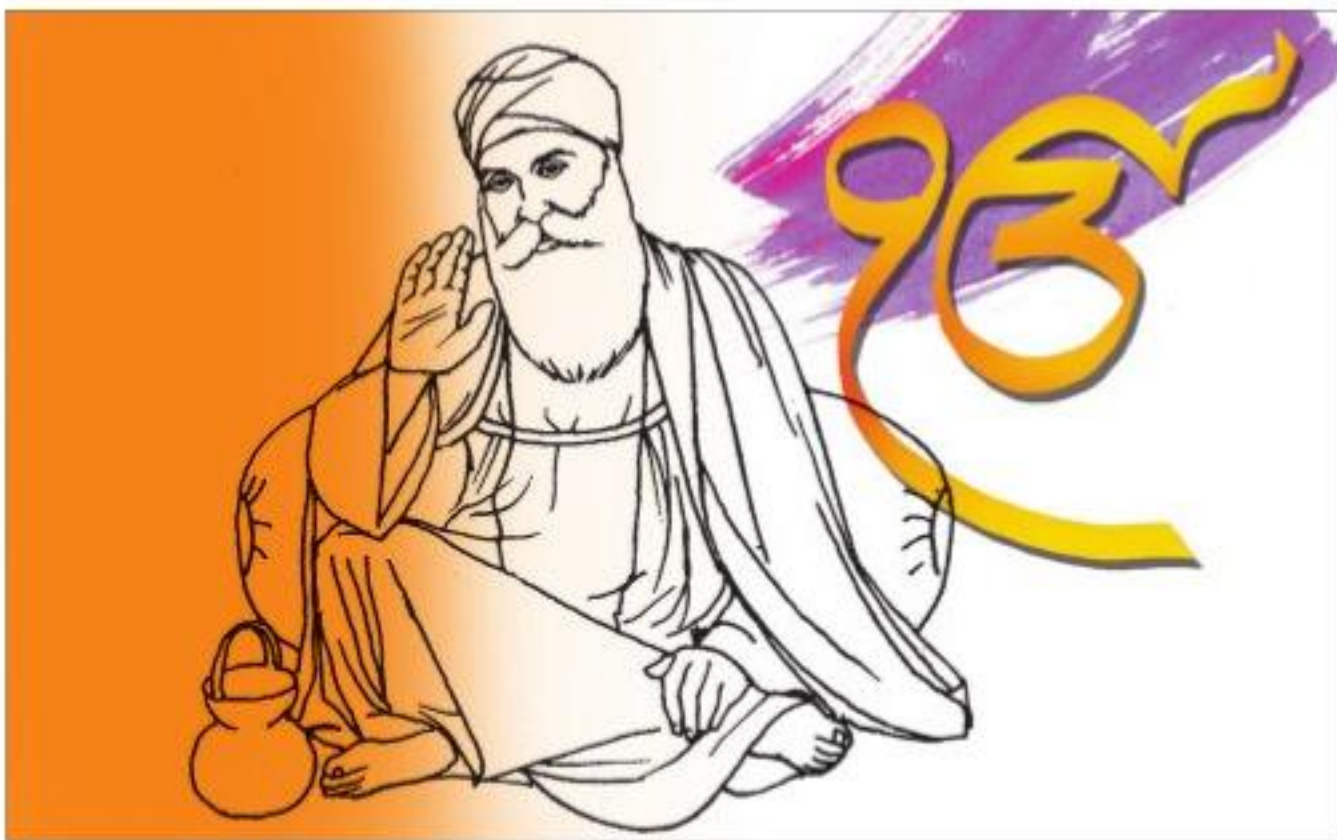
Baba Nanak laid a strong foundation for people-to-people dialogue. He himself practised dialogue to remove ignorance, sectarian practices and irrational divisions in the social structure — to liberate mankind from parochial thinking and biased approaches and to establish an egalitarian society based on justice and free from the darkness of blind ritualism and orthodox ways of life. Through his exemplary teachings, he sought to morally rejuvenate and regenerate the social system that was, according to him, then at its lowest level.

The teachings of Guru Nanak Dev show us the path

to establishing a just social order in which equality, liberty and fraternity are major concerns. He was familiar with the social structure of his times, which was based on inequality and injustice. He not only condemned but also challenged the social hierarchy in which dominant forces of all shades were exploiting the marginal sections of society. A strong critic of exploiters, he was fully aware of how the structure of exploitation of the poor by the rulers was coming in the way of establishing an egalitarian society.

In this context, the ideology of Baba Nanak was against the unjust order of the then Mughal ruler, Babur. He showed the path to rising above the distinctions of caste by his own example — he chose his closest disciples, Bhai Mardana and Bhai Bala, from the lower castes. In this way, he told the world that caste has no merit in his eyes.

The dignity of women also has a special place in the teachings of Guru Nanak. He not only talked about the equality of man and woman but also gave a special space to the woman as a creator and producer of children. In those days, women were considered very low in the social hierarchy and as man's property. Their roles were confined to the four walls of their houses. They faced discrimination and humiliation at various lev-



EGALITARIAN : Giving dignity to labour is an important contribution of his philosophy. SANDEEP JOSHI

els and were living undignified lives. Keeping these socio-cultural conditions in mind, Guru Nanak gave a very revolutionary idea by preaching the equality of women with men. The dignity of women has been underlined in the following verses of Guru Nanak:

*Bhand jamiye bhand nimmiye, bhand mangan veaho. Bhand hovey dosti, bhand challe raho.*

*Bhand mua bhand bhaiye, bhand hove bandhan.*

*So kyon mandaa akhiye jit jamme raajan.*

*Bhand hi bhand upje, Bhande baajh na koay.*

*Nanak bhande bahra, eko sacha soay.*

(From woman, man is born; within woman, man is con-

ceived; to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend; through woman, future generations come. When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to woman he is bound. So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all) — Guru Nanak, *Raag Aasaa Mehal 1*, Page 473)

The uniqueness of his deep philosophical insights gave birth to the concept of the word 'secularism'. He was among the first who paid homage to the ideal of 'Na ko Hindu, na Mussulman' (there is no Hindu; there is no Muslim) and that all are the creation of the Almighty.

Guru Nanak sought to liberate mankind from parochial thinking and establish a just, egalitarian society.

# Why Zohran Mamdani fights for the underdog in New York



TIBITA KANEENE  
POLITICAL DIRECTOR, NYC NEW LIBERALS

LAST Sunday night at Forest Hills Stadium in Queens, where Frank Sinatra once played, a packed crowd of 13,000 came out to see the man leading the race to be the next mayor of New York.

Zohran Mamdani, the charismatic state assemblyman and Democratic mayoral nominee, was joined by dozens of people, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen Bernie Sanders of Vermont, in a demonstration of his ascent to the pinnacle of New York politics.

The cheers for the 34-year-old Mamdani exceeded those for AOC and Bernie, two New York natives who are among the most popular politicians in America.

## True New Yorker

Mamdani has been vilified by Trump and other MAGA right-wingers as a radical Marxist who is allegedly plotting a communist revolution in New York City, and as a self-destructive and dangerous choice for the Democratic Party by those in the centre.

However, Mamdani has captivated the New York masses with his aspirational vision for a government that is morally conscious, protective of multiracial and multi-religious democracy, and hyper focused on the issues of greatest resonance to local residents. This last point is key: Despite making waves nationally, the way his campaign embodies the essential spirit — and the core concerns — of New Yorkers is indispensable for analysing Mamdani's mayoral candidacy.

Born in Uganda to parents of Indian descent — a Punjabi Hindu mother, Mira Nair, who is a celebrated, Oscar-nominated director; and a Muslim father, Mahmud Mamdani, a highly regarded professor of international politics at Columbia University — Zohran is committed to a tolerant, pluralist society. He studied at Bowdoin College, where he founded a chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, and after college worked as a foreclosure prevention and housing counselor. His background as a religious and ethnic minority in every country he has lived in and his experience working on community issues deeply inform his politics and he has not shied away from expressing that.

On the contrary, Mamdani affirmatively leans into his experiences and influences. In an age when authenticity is prized, this has worked well for him — the main-



READY : He parries attacks on his age, inexperience and ethnicity with a warm smile and affable wit. REUTERS

stream Democratic strategist David Axelrod called him "a powerfully articulate, authentic exponent of change." He parries attacks on his age and inexperience, religion and ethnicity, and alleged naivete with a warm smile and affable wit. But he can also address his identity more head-on when faced with Islamophobic attacks by his rivals, as his viral speech on his experience as a Muslim in New York City showed.

The cause that has presented Mamdani with perhaps his greatest political challenge is his passionate advocacy of Palestinian rights, especially in the face of the massive suffering in Gaza. Mamdani's perceived anti-Israel stance, including his initial refusal to disavow the phrase "globalise the intifada" — that, contrary to popular perception, he has not personally used — has alienated many New York Jews and

His background as a religious and ethnic minority in every country he has lived in and his experience working on community issues deeply inform his politics.

called into question his message of inclusion. Mamdani has countered by aggressive outreach the city's Jewish community, the largest in the world. He gathered business leaders and assured them he would discourage the use of that phrase going forward. Although Cuomo is still the clear favorite among New York Jews, Mamdani might have gained some ground, according to some polls.

But Mamdani continues to fuse a religious moral language with secular liberal institutionalism, an idealistic concern for the marginalised and the economic underdogs with a commitment to empirical governance and outcome-based goals. And he channels the love of New Yorkers for their city — which makes him hyper-focused on local conditions. (As an assemblyman in 2021, he went on a 15-day hunger strike to give debt relief to taxi medallion hold-

ers, whose exorbitant debts had resulted in multiple suicides.) But he also has an international sensibility that befits a city where nearly 40% of the population is foreign born.

## Friend of abundance

Likewise, Mamdani's democratic socialism is not the kind that seeks government control of the means of production. He is fond of arrangements like housing co-ops and community land trusts — akin to a kibbutz — which are collectively owned and managed; however, these entities still must compete in the overall marketplace and respond to market dynamics, not seek public subsidies. It is about keeping markets honest, not eliminating them.

Consider his efforts on behalf of food vendors. His campaign's first viral video featured Mamdani eating from a *halal* cart and talking to street vendors about inflation. He discussed the high cost of renting licences, related that to the price of the food, and then placed on the screen the Street Vendor Reform Package, an excellent and vital set of reforms, currently sitting on the City Council's desk.

More controversial is Mamdani's freeze-the-rent policy to deal with the city's notoriously high-priced rental market. Freezing rents for four years, even on a small subset of units as Mamdani is proposing, while their expenses

increase thanks to inflation, would cause about 200,000 or 20% of rent stabilised units to go bankrupt.

Mamdani also supports one city-owned grocery store in each borough that would either have to compete with the private market or operate at a loss. Such stores are supposed to ameliorate fresh food scarcity in areas where the market has failed. In practice, such policies have no effect on public health, and the savings that he postulates don't exist, so Mamdani would be wise to rethink this plan.

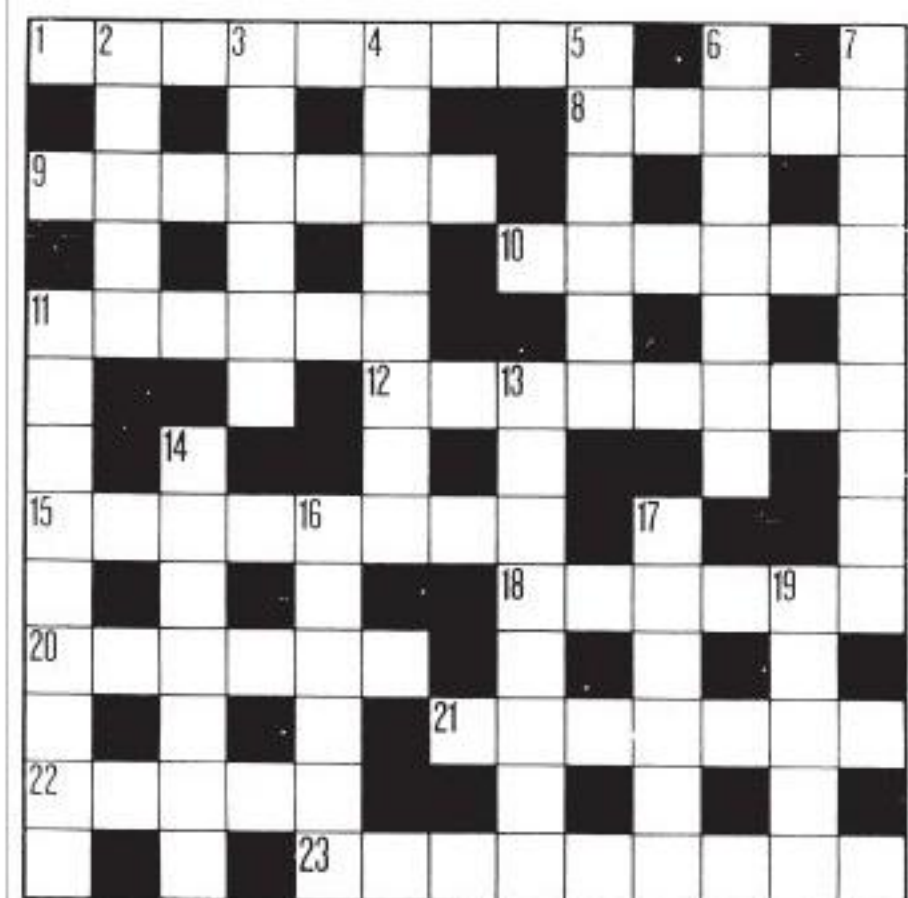
Mamdani no doubt sees elected office as an extension of social movements — and activism as a supplement to democracy — which is why he comes across as a radical. But the scope of his bad proposals is modest.

If elected, which is likely, Mamdani could certainly crash and burn. But it won't be because he is a radical determined to foist an ideological agenda on the city. It'll be because he is young and has no executive experience, or insufficiently relies on technocratic solutions. That would be a mistake in a complex city that is notoriously difficult to govern, partly because entrenched interests thwart national reforms of its many lopsided laws.

Time will tell whether Mamdani is as competent as he is likable and able to rise to the occasion.

Courtesy : Excerpted from 'The Unpopulist'

## QUICK CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- Maximum velocity (4,5)
- Latin American ballroom dance (5)
- Sharp blade attached to rifle (7)
- Change direction abruptly (6)
- Gas used in airships and balloons (6)
- Meet by chance (4,4)
- Idle feckless person (8)
- Over-indulgence (6)
- Offensive remark (6)
- Record of meeting's proceedings (7)
- Heating and cooking apparatus (5)
- Mealtime conversation (5,4)

### Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Express, 4 Leg up, 7 Dull, 8 One or two, 10 Watercress, 12 Craven, 13 Cherub, 15 Close ranks, 18 Bludgeon, 19 Dill, 20 Debut, 21 Earthly.

Down: 1 Endow, 2 Palatial, 3 Sundry, 4 Lion's share, 5 Gate, 6 Proverb, 9 Green light, 11 Brandish, 12 Crabbed, 14 Ashore, 16 Sally, 17 Numb.

### DOWN

- Habitual practice (5)
- Chance to participate (4-2)
- Introductory remarks (8)
- Come to a halt (4,2)
- Stamp (7)
- Basic essentials (4,5)
- Precipitately (9)
- Relevant (8)
- Outburst of anger (7)
- An artistic dance form (6)
- Mystical (6)
- Artillery projectile (5)

## SU DO KU



EASY

### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

### CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 5, 2025, WEDNESDAY

■ Shaka Samvat	1947
■ Kartik Shaka	14
■ Kartik Parvishite	20
■ Hijari	1447
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 15, up to 6.49 pm	
■ Siddhi Yoga up to 11.28 am	
■ Aashwin Nakshatra up to 9.40 am	
■ Bharni Nakshatra up to 6.34 am	
■ Moon in Aries sign	
■ Kartik Purnima	
■ Guru Nanak Dev Jyanti	
■ Gandmoola up to 9.40 am	

## FORECAST

SUNSET:	WEDNESDAY	17:33 HRS
SUNRISE:	THURSDAY	06:38 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	29	16
New Delhi	30	17
Amritsar	26	16
Bathinda	29	14
Jalandhar	26	16
Ludhiana	30	16
Bhiwani	29	14
Hisar	29	14
Sirsa	29	14
Dharamsala	26	12
Manali	17	05
Shimla	18	08
Srinagar	19	03
Jammu	25	13
Kargil	12	0
Leh	10	-02
Dehradun	28	14
Mussoorie	20	10

TEMPERATURE IN °C



● GLOBAL

# In Trump’s tariff war, why the US Supreme Court is a battlefield

Ravi Dutta Mishra  
New Delhi, November 4

THE UNITED States Supreme Court is set to begin oral hearings from Wednesday to decide if President Donald Trump overstepped his powers granted under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose sweeping reciprocal tariffs. The Trump administration has leveraged these tariffs to sign a dozen trade deals; it is in advanced talks with India for one.

The outcome of the case could thus have severe consequences for these deals inked since early this year, including for India, which currently bears the brunt of 50% tariffs. India’s shipments to the US, its largest export destination, fell 12% in September, and exporters have been seeking relief measures. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met exporters to discuss ‘export competitiveness’.

While the court could very well back Trump, an adverse order could mean a reset in trade dynamics, and an opportunity for India to negotiate a better deal. Indian officials have said that the US is seeking market access for its products in exchange for a reduction in reciprocal tariffs, including on sensitive items such as genetically modified soyabean and corn.

## Significance of adverse order

The US has set reciprocal tariffs from 15-20% for countries in the ASEAN region, including some of its closest allies. India currently faces a reciprocal tariff of 25%, with an additional 25% tariff for importing Russian oil.

If the administration were to lose the case, the reciprocal tariffs will be declared invalid, and the Trump administration will have to initiate refunds to the tune of \$100 billion to US importers. According to an estimate by PwC, total tariff collections by the end of October stood at \$108 billion, with those on imports from China having the biggest share at \$34 billion. In the case of India, the comparable figure stood at \$487 million, according to PwC estimates.

“If the Supreme Court strikes down the Trump administration’s IEEPA tariff scheme entirely, the decision could declare the challenged tariffs invalid, requiring US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to cease collection and unwind the existing tariff structure. At the same time, importers could face the complex question of how to obtain refunds, as invalidation of the IEEPA tariffs may open the door to potential reimbursement of tariffs paid,” PwC said in a report.

## ● Importer jurisdiction and potential refund

ORIGIN COUNTRY	ESTIMATED TARIFFS TILL OCT
Reciprocal all countries	\$63.95 B
China & Hong Kong	\$34.19 B
Mexico	\$6.20 B
Canada	\$2.19 B
Brazil	\$632.37 M
India	\$487.27 M
Japan	\$359.57 M
Total	\$108.01 B

The invalidation of IEEPA would also reduce volatility in trade relations, as the US — without these IEEPA-based tariffs — could see this and future administrations return to other statutory tools such as Section 232 and Section 301, which have more defined limits.

That said, the Supreme Court currently has a 6-3 conservative majority. Conservative jurists have long supported the “unitary executive theory” according to which the US President has the sole authority over the executive branch. More often than not, recent judgements have widened presidential authority, or limited what can be constituted as overreach. As such, many experts believe that the SCOTUS is likely to uphold presidential powers in this case.

## Lower courts ruled against Trump

Court documents show that parties arguing against the tariffs include over a dozen small businesses. These far outnumber the parties defending the same.

Three lower courts have already ruled against the Trump administration. The case was first heard in the US District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, which in April rejected the government’s argument.

The US Court of International Trade (CIT) in June also held that IEEPA does not authorise the President to levy general tariffs. The US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in August ruled that Congress had never delegated such sweeping authority to the executive branch.

“If the Supreme Court strikes down Trump’s use of emergency powers, forcing the withdrawal of his ‘Liberation Day’ tariffs, the ruling would reverberate far beyond US borders. The decision would unravel the foundation of several recently negotiated trade arrangements with key partners such as the EU, Japan, South Korea and the UK — all of which were struck under the shadow of those tariffs and premised on reciprocal concessions. It would also disrupt ongoing talks with India, where tariff leverage has shaped Washington’s negotiating position,” Delhi-based think tank GTRI said in a report.

## But Trump has a plan B

With the legal powers under IEEPA in question, the Trump administration has dramatically increased the use of Section 232 tariffs. This is a specific provision in US trade law that entitles the American President to impose tariffs or quotas on imports if they are found to threaten “national security”. Tariffs under Section 232 have raised levies on aluminium, cars and car parts, copper, furniture, lumber, steel and timber, and fresh investigations have been launched into 10 other types of products.

Key investigations include the Trump administration’s review of imports of robotics and industrial machinery. The US is a net importer of these goods, importing \$25 billion more than it exported last year. The US has no major company mass-producing industrial robots and few domestic component suppliers, the Council on Foreign Relations said.

While tariffs under Section 232 would be far less sweeping than the reciprocal tariffs Trump managed under IEEPA, the former provides much stronger legal cover, as the US Supreme Court has on multiple occasions refused to entertain challenges due to the “national security” element in the statute.

However, Indian officials have said that Section 232 tariffs have not been a priority during negotiations, as the US tariffs under the statute are imposed equally on all countries and do not hurt competitiveness.

● CLIMATE

# How Bill Gates is reshaping discourse on climate action



AMITABH SINHA

RECENT REMARKS by Microsoft founder Bill Gates on climate change have had the desired effect — they have triggered a fierce debate on the effectiveness of the world’s current approach towards the problem.

In a memo published last week, Gates — an influential funder of climate-friendly technologies and solutions — questioned the ‘doomsday outlook’ on climate change, and said humanity would most likely survive this crisis. Instead of focusing all resources and energy on limiting the rise in temperatures, Gates advocated greater emphasis on improving health and prosperity, which, he argued, can make people better prepared to face climate impacts.

The arguments presented by Gates are not new. Mitigation (emission cuts) vs adaptation (building resilience) is an old debate in climate discussions. There is universal agreement that both are important and need to be deployed simultaneously to minimise the impacts of climate change. In the resource-constrained real world, however, trade-offs are imminent and hence certain actions need to be prioritised over others.

The memo signals a shift in Gates’ own position, from favouring a mitigation-centric approach to one that prioritises adaptation. Considering his ability to mobilise big money, this change in emphasis can have very important implications for global climate action.

Interestingly, Gates’ latest views align very well with the position that India has taken in the last two years. It is also likely to find support from many other developing countries that have been demanding greater attention, and support, for adaptation actions.

## The argument

In his memo, Gates has made three broad points. One, that while climate change is one of the most serious problems to have ever confronted humanity, it is not an existential threat. It won’t result in the end of civilisation, as is sometimes argued.

Two, that adhering to some temperature targets — the 1.5 or 2 degree Celsius tar-

## THE GATES MEMO AND THE CHINA WAY

CHINA’S ANNUAL emissions grew by four times between the mid-1990s and now, but it focused on bringing prosperity for its citizens. It also built huge technological capabilities, and deployed more renewable energy capacity than the rest of the world put together.

CHINA HAS recently announced that it is ready to decarbonise and reduce emissions. Given the renewable capacities it has built up, China would probably be able to decarbonise at a rate much faster than any other developed country has managed to do. And its rapid emission reductions would be the most consequential for the planet.

NOT EVERY developing country can emulate China, but this example lends credence to the arguments being made by Gates, and earlier by India.



gets mentioned in the Paris Agreement — is not the only way to address the problem of climate change.

And three, that health and prosperity, and higher levels of development particularly in the poorer regions, are probably the best defence against climate impacts. Improvements in agriculture, better health, greater access to heating and cooling, and efficient early warning systems for extreme weather events would not just improve the quality of lives but would also save lives from climate impacts.

As mentioned earlier, these are not necessarily new, or radical, arguments. But the mainstream narrative on climate action, advocated most strongly by scientists and climate activists, is dominated by demands for rapid emission cuts, an immediate energy transition, and an early elimination of fossil fuels. Not surprisingly, therefore, the strongest criticism of Gates’ memo has come from the scientific community, which thinks his views could weaken climate action.

“Bill Gates is deeply misguided on climate,” wrote Michael Mann, a prominent climate scientist and author of several books on climate change, while plugging one of his old articles in which he had countered similar arguments made in the

## Key Points

The memo signals a shift in Gates’ position, from favouring a mitigation-centric approach to one that prioritises adaptation.

● Considering his ability to mobilise big money, this change in emphasis can have very important implications for global climate action.

past. In a response he published in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Mann wrote that there was no way “to reboot the planet, if you crash it”. “The only safe and reliable way out when you find yourself in a climate hole is to stop digging — and burning — fossil fuels,” he wrote.

Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist at the Nature Conservancy and another prominent scientific voice, was quoted by *Axios* as saying that reducing emissions was not diverting resources but protecting them.

“People often think of climate change as a separate bucket at the end of a long row of other buckets of problems we are trying to fix... this includes poverty, disease and access to clean water. But climate change is not a separate bucket... it is a hole in every bucket,” she said.

There is also a very real possibility of Gates’ remarks being used by climate denialists to justify their own positions. US President Donald Trump’s immediate reaction, saying Gates’ comments showed ‘we’ had won the war on the climate change hoax, highlighted this danger.

## The rationale

But it is also not very difficult to see why Gates’ new position is being appreciated in some quarters as an acknowledgement of

harsh realities. Efforts to reduce emissions have yielded minimal results so far. Annual global emissions are still on the rise. The sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said global emissions in 2030 needed to be at least 43 per cent below 2019 levels to keep alive hopes of meeting the 1.5 degree Celsius target.

All current estimates suggest that even 2 per cent reduction by 2030 would be difficult to achieve.

And scientists themselves maintain that even if global emissions somehow miraculously turned to zero all of a sudden, there would be no change in climate impacts for at least a few more decades.

That is because it is not the fresh emissions but the accumulated carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that leads to greenhouse effect. And CO2 remains in the atmosphere for centuries before disintegrating.

On the other hand, adaptation or building resilience provides immediate benefits. An effective early warning system, for example, can save hundreds or thousands of lives from extreme weather events. Also, adaptation brings local benefits, which is why it appeals more to the developing countries.

Despite this, less than 20 per cent of international climate finance is directed towards adaptation projects, something that developing countries have been angry about.

Gates’ new views are thus likely to find a lot of resonance among the developing countries.

## Echoes of Indian position

Interestingly, India did a similar reality check about two years ago, making almost the same arguments as Gates in its Economic Survey of 2024. Breaking away from the global narrative, it had said that keeping global temperatures under some arbitrary threshold was a “flawed” way of dealing with the climate crisis, and argued that rapid development and increase in incomes was the best insurance against climate impacts.

India had lamented the fact that development goals had been “downgraded” and reduction of global emissions elevated “to the pinnacle of all economic policies”. It made the case for allowing adequate space for developing countries like India to grow rapidly. The climate problem would also be resolved on the way, it argued.

● LAW

# Movie on its way, revisiting the Supreme Court’s Shah Bano verdict

Vineet Bhalla  
New Delhi, November 4

THE BOLLYWOOD film *Haq*, releasing this Friday and starring Yami Gautam and Emraan Hashmi, is inspired by the Shah Bano case. The film now faces a legal challenge from the daughter of the woman who inspired it, allegedly for not seeking permission to use her identity.

Beginning with a 62-year-old Muslim woman’s plea, the case sparked national debates on issues such as secularism and minority rights.

## The case

In 1978, Shah Bano Begum of Indore was divorced by her husband and advocate Mohammed Ahmad Khan, after 43 years of marriage. He paid her a small maintenance initially, and then stopped. With no means to support herself, Shah Bano filed a petition in court under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973. This provision obligates a person with sufficient means to provide maintenance to those he is responsible for.

Khan contested the petition, arguing



Shah Bano Begum was divorced by her husband after 43 years of marriage. FILE

that his liability was limited to the period of *iddat* — the waiting period of about three months after divorce, during which the woman cannot remarry. However, courts directed Khan to pay a monthly amount. He then moved the Supreme Court.

In 1985, a five-judge Constitution Bench delivered a unanimous judgment, dismissing Khan’s appeal. The court held that Section 125 of the CrPC applies to all citizens irrespective of their religion. It was enacted

## Momentous consequences

● After the SC held that Shah Bano was entitled to maintenance, the Rajiv Gandhi government passed The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, to nullify the judgment.

● Then, under pressure for ‘bowing down to Muslim hardline groups’, it allowed for the locks of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya to be opened. The resultant events altered India’s politics.

to prevent destitution, and there was no reason to exclude Muslim women, who were entitled to claim maintenance from their former husbands even after *iddat* if they were unable to maintain themselves.

The Bench ruled that there was no conflict between Section 125 and Muslim personal law, adding that the Quran also imposes an obligation on a husband to provide for his divorced wife.

## The opposition

The verdict was met with fierce backlash from some Muslim groups, who saw it as an attack on their religious identity and personal law.

Facing political pressure, the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government passed The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, to nullify the judgment.

The law stipulated that a divorced Muslim woman was entitled to a “reasonable and fair provision and maintenance” from her former husband only for the *iddat* period.

That year, amid pressure from Hindu right-wing groups, who said the government had bowed down to hardline Mus-

lims, the gates of the Babri Masjid in Uttar Pradesh were unlocked under a Congress-led government. Thus, the case also proved pivotal in the lead-up to the Ayodhya mosque’s demolition in 1992.

## The aftermath

The 1986 Act was challenged, and the case came before a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in 2001. The court upheld the Act, focusing on a section which required the former husband to make “a reasonable and fair provision and maintenance to be made and paid to her within the *iddat* period.”

This was interpreted to mean that the payment during the *iddat* period had to be substantial enough to provide for the woman’s maintenance for the rest of her life, or until she remarried.

However, some ambiguity remained on whether the Act replaced Section 125 of the CrPC for Muslim women. The SC ruled in a 2024 judgment that the 1986 Act doesn’t bar a divorced Muslim woman from seeking maintenance under Section 125. It said they could seek a remedy under either of the laws, or both.

# New research explains why orb weaver spiders add decorations to their webs

AFTER CRAFTING a gauzy web, a spider might reckon that the construction isn’t complete. Some spiders, known as orb weavers, often add decorations, typically spun from silk but sometimes using bits of insect cadavers or shed exoskeleton.

Spiders add big, noticeable features, known as stabilimenta, some looking like zigzags, others like a disk that’s been scribbled in thread, or even a big “X” that marks the web’s centre. A study published Wednesday in the journal *PLOS One* offers a new explanation for why spiders spin stabilimenta.

There’s ample support for the idea



Wasp spiders are a species of orb weaver which are found in Europe. THE NYT

that stabilimenta distract birds or wasps that prey on spiders. Spiders are known for vibrating their webs, blurring the stabilimenta, and then scuttling through a hole in the disk or jumping away to safety. However, researchers have also hypothesised that web accessories collect water or fool insects by reflecting UV light.

Spiders can detect snagged prey through vibrations coursing along the webs’ threads. And they can adjust the tension of a silk thread, altering how vibrations travel.

The study’s authors figured stabilimenta could also affect the speed and distance of such signals. THE NYT

# Situation is spiralling out of control: Drivers of continued conflict in Sudan

IN 2019, an image of a Sudanese woman standing atop a vehicle and addressing a crowd went viral online as a powerful symbol of hope in a country beset with conflict. Soon, the 30-year regime of President Omar al-Bashir collapsed, but what followed was further division and a war that continues. On Tuesday, United Nations General Secretary Antonio Guterres said the situation in Sudan was “spiralling out of control”, after a paramilitary force seized the city of el-Fasher in Darfur.

Primarily, competing power-grabbing attempts have contributed to the instability. An interim civilian-military government fell in 2021, following



Displaced families from el-Fasher at a camp where they sought refuge. AP

a coup led by military generals Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the head of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

While they promised elections by 2023, disagreements

on the role of the RSF and the SAF led to a fallout. Since then, the country has witnessed a civil war that has left tens of thousands of people dead.

The RSF has been accused of targeting the Massalit and other non-Arab people. Recently, the RSF’s advances have been accompanied by reports of “widespread executions”, Guterres said. ENS





## A deadly cycle of errors and neglect

Stampedes happen in India with alarming frequency, and they continue to be seen as accidents, like the ones that happen on our roads. But stampedes are not accidental and are caused by predictable, controllable factors, like many road accidents are. The stampede at a temple in Srikakulam, in Andhra Pradesh, which led to the death of at least nine people, mostly women and children, was also preventable. This year, India has lost scores of lives in stampedes – from the Kumbh tragedy through incidents at the New Delhi railway station, the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru, and a political rally in Karur. There have been other incidents that claimed fewer lives or were not reported.

Stampedes are invariably traced to overcrowding, poor preparedness, inadequate infrastructure, and lapses in safety and security arrangements, though the triggers could be different in each case. The Srikakulam incident is reported to have happened when a railing erected for crowd control collapsed. It caused people to fall off stairs, leading to chaos and trampling. The newly built, privately-owned temple received on Saturday five times the number of devotees it receives on a normal day – the railings and barricades in place were not enough to control the movement of people. The administration and the police have said they were not informed of the event, but it is their responsibility to take note of unusual crowding and ensure that order is maintained. The statement of the owner of the temple that it was “an act of God” shows how such incidents are viewed by many.

Guidelines issued by the National Disaster Management Authority and in the National Building Code comprise norms and courses of action to prevent stampedes and to handle them if they occur. Law enforcement personnel undergo training to tackle such situations. Still, these incidents keep occurring. Most of the stampedes happen in religious congregations, political rallies, and entertainment venues. The organisers often fail to assess the crowd volume, and even when they do, facilities to ensure orderly movement fall short. Crowd control is often left to untrained volunteers, and the authorities are found wanting in discharging their responsibilities. After every major stampede, inquiries are instituted, but punishment for lapses is rare. The fallout does not inform preparedness, lessons are not learnt, and the cycle of mishaps continues. Investigations are also found to be politicised, as in the case of the Karur stampede, failing to fix accountability and delaying the truth. Deterrence is key – the approach has to shift from an acceptance of inevitability to strong preventive measures backed up by quick follow-through action against the offenders.

Recurring stampedes have not led to better preparedness; enforcement of guidelines remains weak

## Logged out: Where governance loads slow

The chaos over the rollout of the SmartLock software for learner’s licences (LL) has once again exposed a chronic malaise that afflicts Karnataka’s digital governance. Regional Transport Offices across the state have reported a sharp drop in LL applications, with Chitradurga district witnessing an 80% fall. What was touted as a security upgrade to prevent impersonation has ended up locking out thousands of genuine applicants. That an IT-powered solution has created such inconvenience in the country’s technology capital is both ironic and alarming. The SmartLock software, designed to ensure tamper-proof online tests, is plagued by crashes and authentication failures. As a result, citizens are forced to spend hours on futile retries, lose fees, and face endless frustration.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. Major online initiatives by the state – the e-Khata system, Seva Sindhu, the social and educational survey app, Kaveri 2.0 – have suffered operational glitches. The e-Khata portal, meant to bring transparency, forced citizens to run from pillar to post, some even paying hefty bribes to “speed up” digital approvals. Property tax payments routinely fail; Seva Sindhu freezes, and Kaveri 2.0 goes offline for days. The survey app crashed repeatedly, causing serious distress among enumerators. Though the general public had the option to assess themselves, the systems did not present adequate support, leaving out many who missed the enumerators’ visits. Such design flaws routinely exclude a large number of users, undermining the promise of inclusive governance.

This recurring pattern raises a fundamental question: are these failures technical or human? Ideally, efficient digital systems should reduce human interface and minimise opportunities for corruption. Is that why their rollouts are often half-baked, without proper testing or feedback loops? Or is the state’s e-governance department simply out of its depth despite the wealth of IT talent surrounding it? Either way, it is distressing to note that a state known as India’s IT hub cannot deliver basic citizen services online without repeated meltdowns. Why does the Karnataka government fall short even with such impressive resources? The government must learn from successful models such as the passport system and the Income Tax portal. IT Minister Priyank Kharge must take personal responsibility to urgently fix these broken systems and restore public confidence. A state that powers global technology should not falter at home. It is time for Karnataka to build robust, reliable digital platforms that inspire the nation instead of applications that collapse under their own code.

Patchy delivery of e-services highlights tech gaps and undermines the idea of inclusive governance

Despite the young voter’s centrality, the state’s new-generation leaders are sticking to old, trite poll narratives

LT GEN BHOPINDER SINGH (RETD)

A disproportionately large number of bureaucrats and politicians with national relevance are from Bihar. Many of them have been trailblazers and can be seen working in the remotest parts of the country. The popular saying *ek Bihari, sab pe bhari* translates to ‘a singular Bihari can outweigh all others’, implying their fortitude and resilience. Historically, the likes of Chandragupta Maurya, Samrat Ashoka, and Chanakya have left an indelible imprint. The region has been a fount of wisdom with the likes of Vatsyayana and Aryabhata; profound spiritualists like Gautama Buddha and Mahavira have added incalculably to the Indian consciousness.

The world’s oldest residential university – Nalanda – was founded in the 5th Century CE and at one time had over 10,000 students from distant lands like Japan, Mongolia, China, and Myanmar. This ancient (and modern) backdrop should have lent itself to a progressive and well-developed socio-economic status for a state in independent India. Unfortunately, that is not the case, as Bihar languishes at the bottom with similarly struggling states in dealing with pertinent issues like multidimensional poverty, employment, and social inequities.

Bihar is also said to be one of the youngest states, with an estimated 57% population under the age of 25. This demographic dividend, however, is offset by the fact that Bihar also has the highest dependency ratio among Indian states. Therefore, the state is expected to prioritise serious challenges like a dearth of employment opportunities, low participation of women in the workforce, and shortcomings in sectors such as education, health, and skilling. Except, it hasn’t.

In a participative democracy, the recurrence of the election cycle offers an invaluable opportunity to evaluate alternative plans of political

parties and to choose the most robust among them. But have we reached that maturity to make such informed choices amongst alternative political persuasions? Does a state like Bihar go beyond the rote, regressive, and polarising agendas of caste, religion, and regionalism? The sad answer, despite the abundance of the inherent wisdom of the land and youth centrality in politics, is that it remains stuck in a language of yesterday. If the campaign pitches, espousals, and passions surrounding the Assembly election are anything to go by, there is little hope for real transformation of the state’s governance narrative.



Ironically, this election is marked by the presence of youngsters at the helm of political groupings – from the leader of the opposition Mahagathbandhan, Tejashwi Yadav, at 35 years, to the leader of the ‘third alternative’ Prashant Kishor, at 48 years. The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is similarly sprinkled with the likes of Samrat Choudhary, at 56, and Chirag Paswan, at 43, besides a slew of retained and debutant candidates who are in their 20s, 30s, and 40s.

### Flawed narratives of reform

They ought to be representing a different generational purpose. Their participation ought to fructify the maxim that when young minds join politics, old problems find new solutions. But the Indian experience shows no relevant space afforded to such generational cadres; they are often reduced to being trophy candidates, only to cre-

ate an optical illusion of ‘youthfulness’.

Take the example of 25-year-old Maithili Thakur, a precocious singing talent who represents the so-called ‘double engine’ possibility with a BJP nomination. As an exceptionally gifted and young artiste, she has the opportunity to infuse new vision, perspective, and dynamism as a woman from the relatively backward constituency of Alinagar (Darbhanga district). But besides playing the tired card of nativism and regionalist pride, as exemplified by the name Maithili and the region of Mithila, she has suggested as “reform” the renaming of Alinagar to Sitanagar.

This barely hides the age-old attempt of societal divide-and-rule. She has also confirmed absolute compliance with her party – “I am here just to support them. I will do whatever the party orders.”

The decidedly more politically astute and experienced Chirag Paswan had promised, ahead of the 2020 poll, a grand new Sita temple. There is fiscal ridiculousness in Tejashwi Yadav’s electoral promise to guarantee each family in the state a government job. That such a move would cost at least Rs 12 lakh crore for a state with a total budget of Rs 3 lakh crore has been conveniently left unexplained. Credence was thrown to the winds as Tejashwi merrily usurped a Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose slogan with his own campaign twist, “*Tum mujhe vote do, main tumhe naukri dunga*” (Give me your vote, I will give you jobs).

Even someone like Prashant Kishor has promised to lift the liquor ban “within one hour” of forming the government in the state. The claims about jobs and economic growth mark a shift in poll narratives in the state. That the promised scenario requires unrealistic levels of industrial investment and growth for which there are no credible plans makes these mere empty promises by Bihar’s ‘youth’ politicians.

Irrespective of who wins the Bihar election, the practical storyline of the state is unlikely to change, as its so-called young politicians will continue pandering to more of the same, ignoring real needs and aspirations, posturing with vacuous promises of change.

(The writer is a former Lt Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry)

## RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

# Just lather, that’s all

I was not a policeman. I was not a soldier. I was simply a teacher

BASAVARAJ DONUR

I often return, in the quiet of memory, to a story I read decades ago – a story that pressed deeply upon my conscience and still rests, unbroken, in the chambers of my subconscious. The title of the story is *Just Lather, That’s All*. Whoever reads it is bound to carry away both its message and its melody of plot.

It is the tale of a barber – a man with a razor in hand and a revolution in his heart. He serves a secret cause, nursing silence in the face of tyranny.

One day, the captain of a military unit – ordered to crush the rebellion – enters the barbershop, calm, unsuspecting, his revolver hanging carelessly on a hook, his beard offered to the blade of the very man who dreams of his death.

As the barber prepares his lather, a storm brews in his mind. The razor trembles between two paths – justice or betrayal, vengeance or vocation. Can a barber cut the throat of the man who sits before him unarmed? Can he kill a customer who comes only seeking the simple ritual of a shave, even if that man is his arch-enemy? Would he not, in that single act, sever his own professional soul?

The moral conflict burns through him; philosophy wrestles with passion until, at last, duty steadies his hand. “All that I can do is apply lather and shave my customer,” he whispers to himself.

When the captain rises to leave, he looks the barber in the eye and says softly, “Killing is not as easy as it seems.” Often I wonder: isn’t the work of a teacher like the work of a barber? The barber wields foam and blade; the teacher, blackboard and pencil.

The barber can cut a throat with his razor; the teacher can wound a spirit with his pen. I too once faced such a moment, a razor’s edge of decision. Two

scholars in my department forged their signatures in the attendance register so that one might roam free while the other sat confined to class.

I called them to my cabin. I laid before them two paths: confess, admit your fault, tender an unconditional apology – and, as a one-time grace, you shall be forgiven. But if you deny, I shall order an inquiry, and if guilt is proven, your names shall be struck from the rolls of the university. I added gently, yet firmly: “I know the truth already. What you have done is not a small error; it is a crime – a sin against trust.”

They looked at me, realising they had been caught, their courage crumbling. They bowed their heads, admitted their wrong, and pleaded for forgiveness.

And though part of me burnt with anger, longing to punish them, another voice rose within me – the promise I had made, the memory of who I was. I was not a policeman. I was not a soldier. I was simply a teacher.

And so, with the gentleness of lather, I forgave my students.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Digital arrests: An alarming trend

This refers to ‘SC: Rs 3,000 cr extorted in digital arrest cases’ (Nov 4). It is appalling that criminals have managed to swindle as much as Rs 3,000 crore from their victims by placing them under so-called ‘digital arrest’ for crimes they never committed. Despite repeated awareness campaigns and advertisements in both print and electronic media clarifying that ‘digital arrest’ does not exist under the IPC or the BNS, the gullible continue to be coerced into believing they will

soon be arrested unless they remit money to avoid such an outcome. The perpetrators of these crimes seem to have an uncanny ability to identify vulnerable targets, most often senior citizens who easily succumb to such threats. There is an urgent need for greater public awareness, as victims are sometimes held under duress for months until their savings are completely drained, leaving them in penury. **CV Aravind**, Bengaluru

voters. This has been done in the past without the resistance we see today. Such revisions are essential to ensure a clean and credible electoral process. Unfortunately, some present-day leaders are twisting the issue to mislead the public for their own political gains. Their protests are nothing but an obstruction to the legitimate functioning of the EC. People should not fall prey to such misleading propaganda. **VS Ganeshan**, Bengaluru

### Marred by violence

Apropos ‘JD(U) candidate held for murder; EC vows peaceful poll’ (Nov

3), it is shocking that poll-bound Bihar has once again revealed its violent side with the first killing of this election. The don-turned-politician Anant Singh, also known as “Chhote Sarkar”, the JD(U) candidate from Mokama, allegedly gunned down Dularchand Yadav, a supporter of Prashant Kishor’s Jan Suraj candidate Piyush Priyadarshi, on October 30. This may well be just the beginning. **M Basavaraj**, Davangere

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: [letters@deccanherald.co.in](mailto:letters@deccanherald.co.in) (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender’s postal address and phone number.

## SPEAK OUT

You (BJP’s Suvendu Adhikari and Sukanta Majumdar) come to Dankuni without CISF. You come with your men, and we will come with our men. We will see how big a *baper beta* (son of his father) you are. You won’t return from here.



Kalyan Banerjee, TMC MP

Threats are the last resort of a man with no vocabulary.

Tamora Pierce

## TO BE PRECISE



## IN PERSPECTIVE

# Laos calling: Can India raise its game?

China’s regional policy leverages infrastructure for influence. India’s track must run on inclusion and soft power

PRIVAN R NAIK

Sitting in the high-speed train from Luang Prabang to Vientiane, I could contemplate how China’s actions in Laos reflected its wider neighbourhood policy. The train carried not just passengers but a clear message on how China sees its neighbourhood, using connectivity as a means of control, infrastructure as influence and economic partnership as political leverage. Referred to as the ‘China Train’ in Laos, linking China to the Lao capital Vientiane, the Laos-China Railway (LCR) is a physical expression of Beijing’s neighbourhood policy, binding smaller countries into its economic and strategic orbit through steel and finance.

This was China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in action, weaving together South, Central, and Southeast Asia through transport, energy and digital corridors that originate in China and radiate outward. Laos, small and landlocked, seemed to be a model laboratory for this policy. The \$6-billion LCR is 70% financed by China’s Exim Bank and built largely by Chinese state firms forming the spine of a railway network that will eventually connect China to Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore.

By turning Laos from ‘landlocked’ to ‘land-linked,’ China has effectively redrawn the geopolitics of the Mekong. My journey would take me only two hours as opposed to the 7-10 hours required earlier. Freight movement between China and Vientiane now takes less than 10 hours, cutting costs by up to 40%. Over seven million tonnes of cargo were moved in 2024, and Chinese goods dominate Lao markets. Vientiane’s new skyline is dotted with Chinese banks, hotels, and real-estate projects mirroring the physical and economic imprint of Beijing’s neighbourhood outreach.

Easily discernible in Laos, Chinese financing locks countries into long-term debt and technical reliance, the economic entrenchment ensuring China is the indispensable partner for trade, hydropower, and investment. Laos was becoming not just a corridor for goods, but a corridor for Chinese influence.

Several regional projects follow the Laos pattern, the infrastructure financed and controlled by Beijing, both actions wrapped in a narrative of regional development. In Myanmar, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor connects Yunnan to the Bay of Bengal at Kyaukphyu. In Cambodia, Chinese firms are building highways, power plants, and a deep-sea port at Sihanoukville. In

Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) anchors Chinese access to the Arabian Sea.

### Dominance or diversity?

So what is India’s neighbourhood vision? India does have a neighbourhood policy, though of a different nature. New Delhi seeks a region linked by cooperation rather than dependence. While China builds corridors to consolidate its supply chains, Indian corridors open access and trust.

India’s ties with Laos date back to Buddhism’s spread from the Gangetic plains to the Mekong valley. Yet today, the contrast with China is striking. Sino-Lao trade exceeds \$3.5 billion annually; India’s trade clocks around \$250 million. India has offered over \$100 million in lines of credit for power transmission and irrigation, and runs training programmes under the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) framework. Small ripples beside China’s flood of capital. India lacks both direct connectivity (I flew to Bangkok to catch a train to Vientiane – no direct flights from India to Vientiane exist) and large-scale investment vehicles comparable to China’s state banks.

India’s regional policy has tools that can extend up to Laos. It can leverage private enterprise, transparency and technology, unlike China’s state-driven approach. The export of India’s Digital Public Infrastructure (UPI, Aadhaar) to partner countries can give Laos a low-cost digital backbone. Educational partnerships and Buddhist circuits, linking Bodhi Gaya, Sarnath, and Luang Prabang, can strengthen India’s moral influence in the region. Sub-regional bodies such as BIMSTEC and the MGC could provide diplomatic platforms to deepen trade and cultural engagement with Laos and its ASEAN neighbours.

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, once complete, could be extended through northern Thailand into Laos, linking Vientiane by road to India’s Northeast. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, connecting Kolkata port to Mizoram via Myanmar’s Sittwe, can serve as India’s eastern gateway to the Mekong.

India can combine physical connectivity, digital integration, and cultural diplomacy into one coherent neighbourhood policy. If China’s neighbourhood policy binds the region through infrastructure, India’s policy can liberate it through inclusivity. Laos should be wary of Chinese overreach and choose between two visions, one based on dominance, the other on diversity. India can offer a different path, a partnership that empowers rather than entraps. If New Delhi can turn its rhetoric into active engagement, the track of influence in Laos need not all lead north to China. It could yet turn towards India.

(The writer is adjunct faculty, St. Joseph’s College – Pondicherry University MBA Twinning Programme)



# Once a model of reform, Karnataka’s politics drifts away from governance

**A RAVINDRA**

Karnataka has been witnessing a political drama, with the chief minister's *gaddi* as its central theme. Who will be the next CM? Will the present incumbent continue? Apart from the deputy chief minister — the original contender—other aspirants have thrown their hats into the ring.

The recently concluded caste census, meant to identify the more socially and economically deprived groups, seems instead to have reinforced the salience of caste in society and politics. This has been starkly reflected in different caste groups asserting their right to occupy the chief minister's chair.

With political leaders preoccupied with power struggles, governance has clearly taken a back seat. It is said that politics happens during elections and governance between elections. In Karnataka, that distinction seems lost. In

terestingly, the conflicts we see today are largely intra-party rather than between the ruling and opposition parties—the latter content with taking jibes at the former's inability to manage its internal battles.

Meanwhile, there is a flurry of activity in the state capital. The Bengaluru Development Minister is rushing through large infrastructure projects—tunnel roads and flyovers costing nearly Rs 20,000 crore, white-topping of roads and pothole filling —ignoring citizen's protests and expert opinions. However, the deputy chief minister undertakes walks interacting with people and later declares that no one can stop him from implementing any project, except God. One hopes the Hon'ble Judges take note. Either way, the people's voice clearly doesn't count.

The newly constituted Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), which has replaced the elected BBMP, has centralised all powers, flouting the constitutional

mandate to devolve authority to urban local bodies (ULBs) and vest planning authority in the Metropolitan Planning Committee. That this was done in the absence of an elected local body— and therefore without consulting grassroots representatives constituting the first tier of governance—undermines the very spirit of democracy.

It is claimed that the GBA is modelled on the Greater London Authority (LGA). There is, however, a fundamental difference between the two. The GLA is an elected body, headed by a mayor directly elected by the people. It functions democratically, presided over by the Greater London Assembly, which acts as a check on the Mayor, ensuring transparency and accountability. The GLA focuses on three key areas— strategic planning, transport, and policing. The policies of the mayor are detailed in the 'London Plan', which is regularly updated and published. The municipal and civic services in the Great-

er London area are delivered by the 32 London Borough Councils. The GBA, by contrast, is dominated by government nominees, with scant public oversight.

A recent *CIVIC Bengaluru Manifesto Report Card* paints a bleak picture. Of the 134 promises made by the ruling Congress Party in its manifesto, only 6.7% have been fulfilled. Excluding guarantees, the figure drops to a mere 3.1% across the seven key domains: education, health, mining, forests and environment protection, urban development, Namma Bengaluru, administration and governance. Appallingly, over half the promises (54.5%) show no work started, with the urban development sector faring worst — 70% of its commitments untouched— followed by health, administration and governance at 64.3%.

On Bengaluru, the report is damning: “Undemocratic, unplanned, unsustainable” governance — citing delayed municipal elections and the unconstitutional

GBA Act. The state is also staring at a fiscal crisis. For three consecutive years since the launch of guarantees, Karnataka has run a revenue deficit and is dangerously close to breaching the Fiscal Responsibility Act limit, with debt liabilities at 24.9% of GSDP against the prescribed limit of 25%. Unless remedial measures are taken, Karnataka's reputation for prudent financial management could be at risk.

Ironically, while Bihar — long seen as dominated by caste politics—in the ongoing election campaigns talks of *sushasan* (good governance) and *samajik nyay* (social justice), unemployment and debt traps, Karnataka seems to be regressing. In the 1970s and 1980s, leaders like Devaraj Urs and Ramakrishna Hegde championed social justice and decentralisation of power.

Today, those ideals appear to have been replaced by caste arithmetic and political expediency — a telling sign of deteriorat-

ing political and ethical standards.

Ethics and integrity are central to accountability and trust in governance. Yet, these values are increasingly absent from political discourse. The Second Administrative Commission, headed by Veerappa Moily, in its report, Ethics in Governance, had recommended an ethical framework for ministers, legislators and the judiciary, following which an Ethics Committee was constituted in the Lok Sabha in 2015 to formulate a code of conduct for its members. The code has yet to see the light of day.

To strengthen accountability and restore public confidence, the Commission's recommendation to set up Ethics Committees should be extended to the state level as well. Such committees can play a significant role in promoting transparency and reinforcing the foundations of good governance.

*(The writer is a former chief secretary, Government of Karnataka)*

## Meet your artificial intelligence matchmakers. These AI tools are changing dating apps, so users don’t have to swipe through an endless scroll of profiles

**ELI TAN**

After swiping aimlessly for years on dating apps like Hinge and Tinder, Emma Inge, a 25-year-old project manager in San Francisco, decided to try something different. In September, after following an ad to the website of a startup called Known, Inge spent 20 minutes confiding in an artificial intelligence matchmaker. The matchmaker — essentially an AI chatbot — asked her over a phone call what she was looking for in a partner, and she relayed her preferences (athletic) and red flags (codependent).

A week later, a notification popped up on her phone. She had a match, and for a one-time fee of \$25, she could meet him at a bar.

“With how dating is nowadays, I thought, ‘Oh, well, let’s try it,’” Inge said. “Let’s do it for the plot.”

Her experience is an example of how AI is transforming the dating app industry. As startups with AI matchmakers pop up, the biggest dating apps—Hinge, Tinder, Bumble and Grindr—are trying to harness the technology to reinvent themselves. They are ushering in a new era of online dating in which people pay for a few premium AI matches a week, instead of subscribing to an endless stream of profiles.



NYT

“AI is already playing a big role in our business, but I think it has the potential to be a step change — the next technological shift,” Hesam Hosseini, chief operating officer of Match Group, which owns Hinge and Tinder, said in an interview.

The change could not come at a better time for dating apps, many of which have been struggling. Most of the apps have let users create free accounts with the option to pay for perks like unlimited swipes. But satisfaction with the apps has sunk and so has the number of people willing to pay for them. (Most subscriptions cost around \$30 a month.)

Over the last year, Bumble lost 9% of its paid subscribers, while Match Group lost 5%, even as both grew their total number of users. While paying subscribers are a tiny slice of users, they generate a large portion of profits. The 20% of Match Group users that pay for features and subscriptions account for 97% of revenue.

Match Group's shares have plunged 80% from their 2021 high, while Bumble's stock is down 90% from its initial public offering that year. The two companies account for the majority of the dating app market.

The dating apps have run into a hurdle the industry calls “the cycle of despair.” That's when people download a dating app, get burned out from swiping or getting “ghosted,” and then delete it, only to re-download it months later.

A shift toward AI matchmakers, Hosseini said, would be reminiscent of the early days of online dating when websites like eHarmony asked users 80 questions about themselves to create a profile.

While many startups offer AI matchmakers, the larger apps are just beginning to unveil their own versions. Tinder is testing an AI matching service called Chemistry, which it plans to expand this month. Users would be able to give the app access to their camera roll, which the AI would scan to learn more about them. The service would initially be free, though Tinder

# No need to swipe right. AI is transforming dating apps

could begin charging for it later.

Grindr, a dating app for gay men, has also unveiled six AI features that it calls gAI (pronounced gay-eye). They include an AI “wingman” that gives advice about conversations, an AI tool that can reintroduce old matches and AI-generated summaries of people's profiles. Grindr plans to bundle the most popular features in a premium subscription tier, said George Arison, the CEO.

Hinge, with around 15 million users, uses an AI tool to give people feedback on their profiles. This year, the company reprogrammed its matching algorithm with generative AI to better learn about user preferences, which has raised the number of matches by 15%, Hosseini said.

Bumble said it planned to release an AI matchmaking app by the end of the year, adding that it hadn't finalised a business model yet but might charge per match.

The major dating app companies are internally testing other AI tools that may never be released, including dating coaches that can provide feedback and advice after each date and AI clones that can date each other and report the findings to their human makers. Facebook Dating, the dating service in the Facebook app, recently introduced an AI feature that lets users describe their ideal match — brunette, works in tech, lives in New York City — to connect them with real people who fit that description.

Facebook dating is a surprise hit for the social network. Facebook Dating, which debuted in 2019, has become a surprise hit for the company. It lets people create a

dating profile free in the app, where they can swipe and match with other eligible singles. It has more than 21 million daily users, quietly making it one of the most popular online dating services. Hinge, a leading dating app in the US, has around 15 million users. Facebook Dating's popularity is a sign of how Facebook has been reinventing itself. Its main social feed has become less popular over time than younger apps like Instagram and TikTok.

But the companies are also wrestling with a growing resistance to AI “slop” and unwanted automation. Hinge, for instance, does not brand its AI features as AI.

Many of the changes have come under new leadership. Last winter, Match Group hired Spencer Rascoff, a co-founder of Zillow, as its CEO. He promptly reorganised the company and personally oversees Tinder. Whitney Wolfe Herd, who founded Bumble in 2014 and left the company in 2024, returned as CEO in March.

“This is not a fad,” Wolfe Herd said of AI dating at a tech conference last year. “We're going to lean in fast and furiously.”

As dating app companies grapple with the changes, some investors see opportunity. Among other moves, Francisco Partners and Permira, two private equity firms, have reached out to dating apps including Bumble and Grindr about buying them, two people with knowledge of the matter said. They indicated that they wanted to build a portfolio of around six apps to rival Match Group, the people said.

Francisco Partners and Permira declined to comment.

Known, the startup with the AI match-

maker, was founded in May by Celeste Amadon, 22, and Asher Allen, 21, who dropped out of Stanford to start the company. They and a group of psychologists came up with the AI matchmaker's questions.

Paying per date rather than a monthly subscription was “more incentivising to actually get people out in the real world and on dates,” Amadon said, adding that Known has hosted 10 singles nights in San Francisco with more than 200 attendees each.

Inge, the project manager in San Francisco, said she had signed up for Hinge and Tinder in college but rarely found meaningful connections. She was now “generally anti-dating app,” she said, and has tried meeting people in the wild. She even signed up for a 6 am running club to socialise, which did not work. That led her to try Known.

For her blind AI-produced date last month, Inge said, she went to a San Francisco bar and was pleasantly surprised by the encounter. She and her date talked for two hours, bonding over a shared interest in public transportation and new restaurants. He worked for a robot taxi company, and was “the type of guy to sign up for an AI matchmaker,” she said.

They exchanged numbers to arrange a second date — which never happened. Inge said she was ghosted.

“That was the kick of it, that the AI actually did find compatibility,” she said. “It was the human part that didn't work out.”

The New York Times

## Taking the game beyond the boundary

**MOUSUMI ROY**

When India's women in blue lifted the ICC World Cup, the moment transcended sport. It was more than a trophy -- it was a generational triumph built on grit, grace, and perseverance. For decades, these athletes fought for space in a game that rarely made room for them. Their victory is a testament to endurance, belief, and the steady march towards gender equality in Indian sport.

For years, women's cricket in India existed on the periphery. Matches drew little media attention, sponsorships were scarce, and many players juggled jobs to afford travel and training. Pioneers like Diana Edulji, Shantha Rangaswamy, Mithali Raj and Jhulan Goswami carried the game through sheer conviction. They played with borrowed kits, often in near-empty stadiums, sustained only by passion and pride.

This World Cup win is the culmination of their legacy. It represents not only individual excellence but also institutional reform. The integration of women's cricket into the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the rise of the Women's Premier League, and increased investment in training and sports science have transformed the landscape. What was once a struggle for recognition is now a showcase of professionalism and precision.

The women in blue embody the four pillars that define modern sport: **grace** -- not a performance of elegance, but a display of composure under pressure; **grit** -- the unseen endurance behind long hours in the nets; power -- the audacity to hit over the boundary, defy expectations, and lead the charge; and **determination** -- the resolve to keep showing up even when the spotlight looked away. Their gameplay in this tournament was marked by tactical brilliance.

The captaincy was sharp, the fielding agile, and the batting fearless. Each boundary declared that women's cricket had moved beyond novelty -- it had become elite competition. Behind the flair lay months of disciplined training, fitness regimens and analytical preparation that matched the best in the world.

Every great sporting victory rewrites a piece of national identity, and this one reshapes how India imagines itself. Cricket has long mirrored India's hierarchies of class, region, and gender. For women to claim the sport's highest prize is an act of quiet revolution. It asserts that talent, not tradition, determines belonging.

This win resonates beyond stadiums. It will echo in classrooms, where girls now dream of bats as well as textbooks; in living rooms, where parents rethink ambition for their daughters; and in boardrooms and broadcast studios, where women's sport must be seen not as charity but as national investment.

India has long celebrated women's victories with surprise, as if they were exceptions to the rule. This triumph challenges that reflex. It insists that women's excellence is not miraculous but inevitable when given opportunity. The women in blue have shown that sporting success depends not on gender but on systems that allow skill to flourish.

Public discourse, too, is changing. Commentators now discuss technique, not tokenism. Crowds attend for the game, not the novelty. Young boys look up to women cricketers as role models. These subtle cultural shifts mark the real progress—less visible than trophies, but far more transformative.

Despite the celebrations, much work remains to be done. Pay disparities persist, infrastructure for women athletes outside cricket remains limited, and grassroots programmes often lack funding. The next challenge is to convert symbolic victory into structural parity, equal contracts, dedicated academies, and consistent media visibility.

True equality in sport will come when women's victories are covered not as “firsts” but as part of a continuum. This requires consistent policy support, corporate partnerships, and media responsibility. India's sporting institutions must ensure that this momentum becomes a legacy.

The World Cup will gleam in a cabinet, but its glow will last far longer in the minds of millions. Every young girl swinging a bat today is part of that continuum. Every parent who now sees sport as a viable future for their daughter contributes to that change. This victory redefines what it means to play for India. It's not only about competition but representation in claiming space in a field long fenced off.

The women in blue have expanded the meaning of national pride to encompass strength, empathy, and equality within a single frame. History has indeed been made, but the story is not over. The next chapter will be written on how India sustains this energy through equal pay, better facilities, and an inclusive sporting culture.

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

### OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: NOVEMBER 1975

Iran to give \$630-million loan for Kudremukh

Tehran, November 4  
Iran will extend a 630-million-dollar loan to India for the development of Kudremukh Iron ore mines under an agreement signed here last night by External Affairs Minister Y. B. Chavan and the Iranian Finance Minister Houshang Ansari. Under the agreement, Iran will also supply India with an additional two million tons of crude oil at preferential terms. The two countries agreed on joint development of the Kudremukh mines last April.

25 YEARS AGO: NOVEMBER 2000

Vajpayee under pressure to make Advani Dy PM

New Delhi, Nov 4  
Cabinet ministers with RSS background are believed to be lobbying for deputy prime ministership for Home Minister L.K Advani. They have reportedly urged Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to have Mr Advani as Number 2 in the cabinet to put an end to media speculation about the issue. When Mr Vajpayee went to Mumbai last month for his left knee operation, there was a debate in the media as to who was the number two or officiating prime minister.

## Creativity lies off the comfort zone

A comfort zone restricts one from taking the road less travelled. Divine powers want humans to live freely, in abundance. Behind landmark innovations were the persons who crossed the edge. A bird cannot spread its wings while bound in the cage, and an inhibiting mindset is anathema to a free soul. The 'safety first' tag impinges on the free play of verve and creativity. Staying embedded in the self-same territory disables one from partaking of the myriad beauties nature has to offer – exhilarating landscapes, the rustling of the trees, the unheard melodies, the tweeting of birds, et al. The box thinker has no idea about the customs, folkways, and stories that kept generations

kicking. Normative boundaries irk the creative folks determined to explore the unknown frontiers. Undeterred by the boycotting of sorts by the society for leaving others behind and perils at every stage, they keep heading towards the edge and beyond, relishing a broad, clearer and fulfilling view.

Norms, rules, precepts, and guidelines in all realms serve as a rule of thumb for the mediocre mindsets who can see reality only in terms of do or don't, black or white; they are rendered clueless when faced with a plethora of shades in-between.

It never occurs to them that with a critical patient on the operation table, the well-meaning surgeons may have divergent opinions. Knowing that all guidelines of all descriptions are at

best advisories with a postscript that necessary changes can always be made, the seeker with a mission shall bypass the rule without compunction if it is perceived as an encumbrance to the voice of conscience.

Appropos of a fully loaded donkey in the hills traversing a narrow pathway. Rather than the safer rocky side, it reflexively moves along the precarious cliff side. We do not know

why it is attracted to the edge; maybe the broad, intriguing expansive view of flora & fauna downhill satisfies its curiosity. We get scared that it may skid anytime.

Yet the confident, carefree donkey, with steadfast resolve and its hooves firmly grounded in the rugged terrain, keeps moving onwards. Mind that in the perilous hills, more people than donkeys slip into the ditch.

The line demarcating life and death is thin, and nothing can be taken for granted. Life on the edge has a message that without pondering over the past or future, both non-existent, each moment needs to be enjoyed till the sunset of life.

