



Falling short

India must ensure technology transfer in the EV segment

On June 2, India took a turn for the better in its transport electrification journey by offering a concessional import duty of 15% on completely built-up units. This is contingent on the EV manufacturer investing a minimum of about ₹4,150 crore over three years to localise manufacturing in India, with a base domestic value add of 25% in three years, going up to 50% in another two years. The notification, under the Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India (SPMEPCI) announced in March 2024, allows for a maximum import of 8,000 completely built units annually for each manufacturer for five years. The SPMEPCI adds to the bouquet of policies that attempts to boost EV adoption and manufacturing. However, these policies put together fall short of addressing a pressing issue in India's journey to decarbonise and transform mobility – technology transfer. India began this journey in 2015, about five years later than most large economies. An outlay of ₹895 crore for the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME) scheme, for five years, expanded to ₹10,000 crore in 2019. China announced its ambitious New Energy Vehicle subsidy programme in 2009, which, coupled with mandatory joint venture manufacturing of EVs until 2022, enabled technology transfer. In addition, a reduced import duty on EVs (25% in 2010 to 15% in 2018), and cumulative incentives of about \$230 billion in the past 15 years – the most by any country – enabled China to achieve the highest global EV adoption rate. This also supported rapid charging infrastructure deployment, making China the largest producer and consumer of EVs.

The U.S. began this journey in 2010 with an initial outlay of \$25 billion for its Advanced Technology Vehicles Manufacturing Loans Program. This was greatly expanded under the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act. But its EV adoption rate is much lower than China's. In 2024, out of 17 million global EV car sales, China alone accounted for 11.3 million, followed by Europe with 3.2 million, the U.S. with another 1.5 million, and the rest of the world accounting for the remainder. China's vertical integration of battery manufacturing, from mining, processing to assembling, has aided economies of scale with competitive pricing of EVs against conventional ICE vehicles. For now, the 25% DVA that India could aim for under the just announced scheme would be repurposing locally made auto components meant for ICE vehicles to EVs and layering it with Software-as-a-service. But to obtain the crucial technology for the heart of the EV – its battery – India must replicate its approach to localising ICE manufacturing, which is to mandate joint ventures with local ICE or EV makers, and gradually allow for a complete open market.

At long last

In IPL win, RCB finally laid old ghosts and recent memes to rest

Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) played the Indian Premier League's (IPL) inaugural game on April 18, 2008. It was a night that, however, belonged to rival Kolkata Knight Riders with Brendon McCullum's unbeaten 158 putting the match well beyond the host in its backyard at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium. In the subsequent editions, the franchise with a fiercely loyal fan base, promised much, delivered little and had three runner-up finishes to show. Finally, the ghosts of the past were laid to rest when Rajat Patidar's men claimed the title with a six-run victory over Punjab Kings in the summit clash at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium on Tuesday night. RCB's triumph in the IPL's 18th edition was also a tribute to Virat Kohli's longevity. He has been with the squad since its first game in 2008. In a unit that featured stars such as Rahul Dravid, AB de Villiers, Chris Gayle and Ross Taylor in the past, Kohli has been the forever spine. The young lad has grown into a patriarch, and he has achieved enough and more with the Indian team, both as player and captain, but a missing IPL trophy, always rankled him. Finally that aberration has been corrected and there was no mistaking the relief and joy that coursed through him on a surreal June night.

Patidar's assurance, Kohli's experience, spinner Krunal Pandya's choking spells, and Josh Hazlewood's sharp pace, all combined well while many others dished out cameos to keep RCB in the hunt through the latest IPL. Even if the cup proved elusive, Punjab Kings did remarkably well, especially its captain Shreyas Iyer; he will have a larger role with the Indian ODI team whenever Rohit Sharma and Kohli bid adieu to that format. Among the rest, Mumbai Indians, after a lukewarm start, surged back and found a berth in the play-offs, one that also featured Gujarat Titans. If the IPL was all about RCB's redemption song and Punjab Kings' chutzpah, equally, it mirrored the decline of a pedigreed outfit, the Chennai Super Kings (CSK), which finished last. An ageing M.S. Dhoni could not stem the rot and former champion CSK will have to rebuild afresh in the coming editions. Having commenced on March 22, the IPL stretched interminably and a break caused by the Pahalgam terror attack and the resultant Operation Sindoor, forced a change in schedule. The IPL also highlighted talented players such as young Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Sai Sudharsan. As a sporting brand, the league is formidable but, as Kohli said, Tests are five levels above in quality and, hopefully, modern players will respect this reality.

The focus for World Environment Day in 2025 (June 5) is on ending plastic pollution. Micro-plastics represent one of the many thousands of chemical, physical and biological hazards that lurk in the air, water and living spaces for which we have neither the sensory capabilities nor sensing technologies to measure exposure and assess health risks. Thus, reducing the environmental disease burden continues to be a daunting challenge for public health.

In India, rapid economic growth is increasing the scale and the complexity of environmental exposures and the interdependencies between the living environment and lifestyles. With India already accounting for nearly 25% of the global environmental disease burden, there is a need to develop newer paradigms for environmental management that rest on integrated health risk assessments.

These must include all environmental factors into the study of disease development. The piece-meal approaches that define our current framing on environment or health indicators are likely to exaggerate environmental health inequities and result in spiralling health costs. We must embrace new and cutting-edge scientific developments in the field of “exposomics” to gain a more complete picture of disease etiologies over the life course and develop holistic prevention strategies. Strategic investments in long-term environmental health surveillance that integrate novel environmental and biomonitoring efforts with digital health and data science platforms are critical.

Environmental disease burden

The World Health Organization (WHO) began estimating the environmental disease burden in 2000, which is the basis for the modern estimation approach being adopted in the Global Burden of Disease, Injuries, and Risk Factor (GBD) study. Each cycle of the GBD identifies risk factors with the greatest attributable health burden. In the latest cycle (2021) that included 88 risk factors, environmental and occupational (OEH) risk factors in the GBD were responsible for 18.9% (12.8 million) of global deaths and 14.4% of all disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), led by ambient PM_{2.5} air pollution (4.2% DALYs, 4.7 million deaths) and household air pollution from the use of solid fuels for cooking (3.9% DALYs, 3.1 million deaths).

In India, nearly three million deaths and 100 million deaths are attributable to occupational and environmental health (OEH) risks. OEH risk factors in India are also estimated to account for more than 50% of the attributable burden for non-communicable diseases including ischemic heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive lung disease, lung cancer, asthma and, more recently, diabetes and chronic kidney disease. Risk factors such as lead exposures can have grave developmental health impacts for children under five, with India accounting for up to 154 million or 20% of the total estimated IQ points lost globally in children under five.

What are we missing? The GBD results provide



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Scientific developments in the field of exposomics will also help get a better picture of disease etiologies and craft holistic prevention strategies

a strong and robust body of evidence to initiate actions for cleaner air, safer water and better sanitation. However, the current environmental burden of disease addresses only a limited number (around 11) of categories of environmental risk factors as there is a paucity of human exposure data. Several environmental risk factors that can contribute to significant health burdens are currently not included in the GBD. These include various chemical exposures, risks from complex mixtures such as micro-plastics and solid waste and physical hazards such as environmental noise.

More importantly, environmental risk factors interact in complex ways with metabolic (high blood pressure or high fasting plasma glucose) and behavioural risk factors (smoking and unhealthy diets) as well as underlying genetic susceptibility and upstream health determinants (such as socio-economic status) to produce a health impact within populations. Risk estimates are often derived for single risk factors; while confounding is often well adjusted in long-term cohort studies, complex mixtures and interactions over a life course have not been adequately explored.

Finally, climate change can magnify hazards posed by multiple environmental risk factors, such as heat, air pollution, vector-borne diseases, storms and flooding, and wildfires. Climate change may reduce crop yields, reduce agricultural worker productivity, disrupt food security and affect food supply chains. Depression, anxiety and other mental health outcomes, driven by both ecological concerns and direct health impacts of climate-sensitive environmental risk factors such as fine particulate matter, are also important to consider. Several of these risk factors can occur together, resulting in compound events and synergistic effects. These hazards can further amplify health impacts among populations with inadequate access to health systems or healthy food systems. Methods and data are not yet available to support inclusion of these important risk factors in the global burden of disease assessments.

Thus, the current environmental burden of disease estimates are not only a conservative underestimates but also do not provide an adequate means of prioritising against competing risk factors to develop holistic, scalable preventive health strategies.

The human exposome

The global human genome project (1990-2003) revolutionised our ability to explore the genetic origins of disease. However, it also revealed the limited predictive power of individual genetic variation for many common diseases. Genetic factors for example, contribute to less than half of the risk of heart disease, which is a leading source of mortality.

The success in mapping the human genome has fostered the complementary concept of the “exposome”. The exposome is defined as the measure of all the exposures of an individual in a

lifetime and how those exposures relate to health. Traditional environmental health studies include hypothesis-driven methods which have focused on one or a class of environmental exposures at a few time points. These fail to account for the complex interactions of exposures across the lifespan, on human health.

Exposomics aims to bridge this gap by understanding how external exposures from physical, chemical, biological and psycho-social environments interact with diet and lifestyle and internal individual characteristics such as genetics, physiology, and epigenetics to create health or disease. This would allow the generation of an atlas of exposure wide associations (EWAS) to complement genome-wide associations (GWAS) and enable discovery-based analysis of environmental influences on health. The exposome requires synchronisation of several inter-disciplinary technologies which



include real time sensor based personal exposure monitoring with wearables; untargeted chemical analyses on human biomonitoring samples; testing on human-relevant micro-physiological systems (also known as organs-on-a-chip)

wherein in vitro models replicate the structure and function of human organs or tissues to understand the mechanistic basis of biological response; and big data, and artificial intelligence (AI) to mine data and generate integrated pieces of evidence.

Given that capacities and resources to generate exposomics data are not widely available, an immediate need for the exposomic framework to become a reality is also the creation of a data ecosystem in which harmonised data can be found, accessed, and shared through sustained and interoperable data repositories.

Mainstream environment within health

Exposome frameworks may seem implausible or irrelevant in India where the implementation of environmental health management programmes faces numerous hurdles. But, leapfrogging to technology and data-driven approaches is not new to the health sector. Exposomics offers unprecedented potential to mainstream environmental risks within public health programmes by generating more accurate predictive models for many chronic diseases while also enabling precision medicine. Unbridled investments in capacity building and synchronising available analytical, environmental and public health infrastructure offer the promise of addressing the concerns of our populations with unprecedented cost-effectiveness. The time is ripe for the Indian environmental health community to engage and contribute to the global momentum on the science of exposomics.

Future celebrations of World Environment Day may soon focus on why the human exposome project can be the best prescription for holistic prevention efforts that preserve and promote health equity.

Aiming for an era of ‘biohappiness’ in India

Recently, on a trip to Arunachal Pradesh, we were amazed by the diversity of greens in the diet – all freshly plucked from the forest and fields. Similarly, across rural and tribal areas of our country, one can find many varieties of millets, beans, legumes, tubers, wild fruits and green leafy vegetables, which the urban Indian is hardly aware of. The Nyishi and Apatani tribal communities in the State are knowledgeable about the nutritional and medicinal properties of many of these local plants.

A senior government official however warned of the rapid rate at which agrobiodiversity was disappearing in northeast India, mirroring the global rise in the rate of species extinction. Traditional knowledge about the medicinal and nutritional properties of these foods, as well as the culinary practices of tribal communities are probably going extinct at the same pace.

India's biodiversity

India covers about 2% of global land area, but harbours nearly 8% of global biodiversity. It is ranked as one of 17 ‘megadiverse’ countries of the world; contains sections of four of the 36 global biodiversity ‘hotspots;’ and is one of just eight centres of global food-crop diversity. Natural services from India's diverse forests are valued at over ₹130 trillion a year, and local ecosystem services sustain livelihoods of a vast majority of the rural population.

However, continuous decline in our natural assets reduces India's GDP and hinders sustainable development. Yet, biodiversity and its potential to increase human well-being remain largely unexplored.

Global food systems are dominated by three crops – rice, wheat, and maize – which provide over 50% of the world's plant-based calories. This concentration and loss of biodiversity comes at a heavy price, causing nutritional imbalances, and vulnerability to climate shocks.



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Sustainable use of natural resources — which includes bringing forgotten foods back to the table — will lead to better well-being

Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and obesity are rising globally, and despite technological advances in agriculture that have enabled unprecedented gains in productivity, the benefits have not been equitably distributed, as the resilience of our food systems comes under threat.

For long we have ignored locally grown crops such as small millets, buckwheat, amaranth, jackfruit, yams and tubers, and indigenous legumes that remain classified as Neglected and Underutilized Species (NUS) in favour of popular commercial crops. The NUS, also known as orphan crops, are now being referred to as opportunity crops because they are nutritionally dense, climate-resilient, and adapted to local environments.

Crops and communities

Orphan (or Opportunity) crops have always been embedded in local culinary traditions, often linked with cultural identity and ecological knowledge. The community of Kolli hills (Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu) preferred growing locally adapted millets. Over three decades, farmers have moved to cultivating cash crops such as cassava, coffee, and pepper, resulting in a decline of agrobiodiversity. The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has been working with agricultural communities here for over 20 years, to prevent the erosion of millet crop diversity in the region through participatory research and empowering farmers' groups. These interventions have enabled a community of farmers, especially women, to document traditional knowledge and best practices, while improving the vitality of the soil, diversifying crop production, improving local processing and value addition, leading to increasing income.

India's action plan under the UN-declared International Year of Millets and Shree Anna Yojana was focused on strategies to enhance

production and productivity, consumption, export, strengthening value chains, branding, creating awareness for health benefits and more. Many States have their own Millet Missions. In the Koraput district of Odisha, we have worked closely with the Odisha Millet Mission in supporting community-led millet revival from seed to consumption. While the focus nationally has been on ragi, jowar and bajra, the next step should be to expand the State missions to cover a variety of minor millets and to include them in the Public Distribution System.

More than five decades ago, Professor M.S.



Swaminathan envisioned an Evergreen Revolution – that is rooted not in chemical intensification but in restoring ecological balance and nutrition security. The future of food is diverse and nutritious. To bring

these forgotten foods back to the table is also to put our cultural identity and ecological knowledge at the forefront of the climate crisis – for people, planet, and its posterity.

An interdisciplinary science

Today, a new biodiversity science is emerging across the globe, which India can leverage, given its human resources and scientific infrastructure. Furthermore, this interdisciplinary science will help us meet our most pressing challenges in sustainable use of India's unique biodiversity, for agriculture and food production, health and nutrition, climate change and disaster risk management, bio-economy, and providing a variety of jobs to meet the needs of 1.4 billion people.

India could become a global leader in conservation and sustainable use of natural resources leading to better health and human well-being. Could we aim for an era of “Biohappiness”, as presciently envisioned by M.S. Swaminathan?

prayer for the fans after the unfortunate incident.

Pavithra M.,
Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

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

BESS in India’s clean energy transition

The climate crisis has changed the idea of energy security. A country’s energy sources must stand firm on four planks: availability, accessibility, affordability, and environmental acceptability. Environmental acceptability focuses on the trade-offs policymakers and the public are willing to make in terms of pollution, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions. In this context, renewables have strengthened their position as an energy source that provides affordable power with lower emissions. They are important for the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goal 7, which focuses on access to clean energy.

The case for integrating green energy into power systems is further strengthened by looming climate risks and geopolitical tensions. However, increasing renewable energy capacity may not have the desired results due to the intermittent nature of the resource. Energy storage technologies, such as Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), offer a crucial solution to mitigate the variability of renewable energy while enhancing grid stability.

Why energy storage matters
With the potential to enhance grid operations, enable large-scale integration of renewables, and provide reliable power, energy storage systems are critical to the energy transition. Among the technologies available, BESS stands out for its affordability, scalability, rapid deployment, and geographical flexibility.

By stabilising the grid, balancing demand-supply fluctuations, and enabling peak load management, BESS plays a foundational role across all forms of energy storage. Integrating BESS into the grid with renewables can considerably reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector. Further, its ability to support decentralised energy solutions and microgrids ensures renewable energy reaches where it is needed most, making BESS a key enabler of a cleaner, more resilient, and equitable



Saurabh Kumar
Vice president, India, Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet



Harsh Shah
CEO & Executive Director, IndiGrid

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energy ecosystem. Declining costs and technological advancements lead to the accelerating expansion of BESS. Over the past 15 years, the average cost of batteries has fallen by nearly 90%. However, despite this progress, utilisation of its full potential is impeded by regulatory, technical, financial, and market barriers.

India’s BESS Landscape
Emerging economies such as India can lead by example in BESS deployment through a combination of financing and policy measures. India has set a target of 500 GW of installed power capacity from non-conventional fuels by 2030. As of January 2025, the country had already achieved 217.62 GW. To achieve full results, BESS deployment must be accelerated.

In this regard, the government has committed to installing 47 GW of BESS by 2032 to enable increased renewable deployment and its integration with the grid. Schemes such as Viability Gap Funding and waiver of interstate transmission system charges for BESS projects commissioned by June 2025 have been enacted to support BESS projects.

But progress has been slow. In the Economic Survey 2024-25, the Indian government highlighted the challenges associated with scaling up renewable energy and energy storage deployment – including the lack of investment for grid upgradation, speed of BESS deployment by large customers, access to critical minerals needed for indigenisation of storage technology, and delays in large-scale BESS agreements. The survey called for focusing on innovation and investment for resolving challenges in procuring battery storage, grid infrastructure, and critical minerals.

Innovative partnerships can help scale up BESS deployment. Using an alliance of public, private, and philanthropic entities can provide concessional funding

and technical assistance for BESS. Following the idea of leveraging collaboration to bring results, the BESS pilot project was initiated in Delhi by BSES Rajdhani Private Limited in partnership with IndiGrid Infrastructure Trust and Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP). The project marks a significant step forward toward India’s goal of 47 GW of energy storage by 2030, creating a technical playbook for BESS adoption, supporting regulatory reforms, and incentivising future BESS projects.

Facilitating more such initiatives will be key to increasing BESS deployment in India, fulfilling SDG 7 commitments, enhancing energy security, and improving grid stability.

Emerging as a leader
India has been emerging as a leader in renewable energy deployment. The reasons for increasing renewables in the energy supply are to reduce emissions and create independence from imports of conventional fuels. However, the full potential of renewable energy cannot be achieved without energy storage. To become energy secure, India must complement its renewable energy capacity with BESS.

With partnerships, expeditious large-scale BESS projects for central and State grids, concessional financing, technological aid, manufacturing localisation, and recycling opportunities, India can utilise BESS to its fullest extent. This can make India a leader among emerging economies in terms of BESS projects.

As a member of the BESS consortium, founded by GEAPP, India has been focusing on deploying energy storage to ensure any increase in renewable energy power capacity can be utilised to its full potential. With more alliances, India can emerge as an energy-secure nation with flexible grids and increased renewable deployment.



Empowering women in green business

Women-led green businesses are key to unlocking India’s sustainable future



Gunjan Jhunjhunwala
Programme Lead at the CEEW. Views are personal

Union Minister Piyush Goyal’s recent call for greater innovation among Indian start-ups highlights an important challenge – and opportunity – that often gets overlooked: the need to support green innovation and increase the number of women-led green businesses in a world with an increasingly erratic climate.

Green enterprises are rapidly becoming an economic force. A study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) shows that Odisha’s green economy alone has a market potential of \$23 billion. Imagine scaling that across India, not only in renewable energy but also in sectors such as circular economy, bio-packaging, engineered bamboo, e-waste recycling, and battery manufacturing. Yet, women currently lead just 18% of all start-ups in 2024, limiting the pace and scale at which India can realise this green potential. On this Environment Day, it is critical to recognise that empowering more women entrepreneurs in the green economy is not only a matter of equity but also essential for building a sustainable and prosperous India by 2047.

What needs to be done
First, finance needs to be unbiased. All start-ups need to solve the wicked problem of raising funds, but it is a tad bit tougher when the green technology is new and you are a woman. For Rashmi Gupta, the founder of Vision Mechatronics, which operates in lithium-ion batteries,

finance had been a bottleneck since 2015. “Banks would ask who is the man behind the scenes. But now I see more women in climate tech,” she said. While the situation has improved, financiers still perceive higher risks when investing in women. If a woman-owned business has a male co-founder, her ability to access credit significantly improves. This, despite global evidence that women make better borrowers.

A 2014 Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation report revealed that 79% of women entrepreneurs in India were self-financed, with only 1.1% borrowing from financial institutions. The government recognises this gap. The 2025



Budget announcement of term loans of up to ₹2 crore to first-time SC and ST women entrepreneurs sets a good precedent in its willingness to offer credit upwards of a crore. More schemes that offer credit or term loans upwards of ₹1 crore are needed.

Mahi Singh, the Jaipur-based co-founder of Cancrie that converts waste into advanced nano-material for battery efficiency, revealed that there is a need to demystify and simplify access to these schemes for women to consider the government as a lender. Enabling end-to-end online access is one way. For private lending, boards of banks and investment firms can earmark a percentage of their portfolio towards green innovations and must include reporting on the percentage of credit offered to women-run green businesses in their annual reviews.

Second, women in green businesses need better-quality mentorship tailored to their specific challenges. ‘Who do we look at as role models,’ asks Vanita Prasad of Revy Environmental Solutions. Women entrepreneurs highlighted initiatives such as the BRICS bootcamp, the Women Entrepreneurship Platform initiated by the NITI Aayog as useful mentorship platforms.

We also need more collaborations that offer management training, mentoring, networking, and access to capital for greater women’s contribution to a green economy.

Third, tip the poor ratio of women in engineering, currently at 19.2%, by updating the engineering curricula with significant automation advances and offering scholarships. Automation means more women can now train in erstwhile literal heavy-lifting engineering roles. Renewable energy, circular economy, and biotechnology, in particular, require technology-driven solutions, and more women engineers are the foundational step. ‘Women of Mettle’ by Tata Steel offers scholarships to women engineers in the manufacturing sector. Large manufacturing corporations and dedicated funds are required to provide such scholarships.

To unlock India’s green growth potential, we must address the barriers that women entrepreneurs face in the green economy. By fostering targeted mentorship, improving access to finance, and building trust in women-led businesses, we can ensure that more women take the lead in shaping a sustainable future. Empowering women is essential for achieving India’s vision of a sustainable, developed nation by 2047.

The seeds of sustainability for India’s textile leadership

Even as one of the world’s largest manufacturing hubs, the Indian textile industry faces challenges in sustaining its global presence due to geopolitical tensions, fragmented supply chains, and product price volatility. Climate change or evolving consumer demands are not the only causes, but also the fundamental values that influence business decisions.

In this evolving landscape, achieving a market competitive edge depends on long-term presence, and businesses should explore beyond financial goals, as adaptability, purpose-led innovation, and resilience are also essential. For India to establish its global trade authority, the cultivation, sourcing, and manufacturing practices must be re-examined with a sustainable lens.

Concepts such as regenerative farming, traceability solutions, and product circularity are becoming the operational standards and core manufacturing actions in the industry.

As the sixth-largest exporter of textiles globally, adopting these practices would help the textile industry in strengthening its leadership. We are presented with a growth opportunity to emerge as an important player in the China Plus One strategy, reducing dependence on China and unlocking India’s trade potential.

Regenerative farming
In India, regenerative (regen) farming is a viable model amidst concerns of raw material sourcing, climate change, land degradation, and soil erosion. Regen farming practices are already under way in India, with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare considering approximately over one million hectares of farmland for further pilot projects in the coming years. Farmers are equipped with digital



Dipali Goenka
CEO and MD, Welspun Living

Strategic decisions made today will help India’s global leadership for a sustainable, future-proof, and resilient textile economy

resource-based training on regen farming practices.

Real-time data sharing is enabled for growth tracking and transparency. This ecosystem leads to a business model where farmers remain connected with certification bodies, manufacturers, and global market brands.

In Aurangabad, Maharashtra, over 6,000 farmers have joined the Regenerative Cotton Program, which has already shown positive impacts – higher yields, improved climate resilience, reduced reliance on chemical fertilizers, and more cost-effective inputs – leading to better risk management and stable incomes.

Regen farming as a solution helps tackle multiple business concerns at once: rural engagement, improved yields, multi-stakeholder collaborations, and even breaking gender stereotypes in farming. It can also enhance traceability, sustainability compliance, and product quality assurance across

the supply chain. The regen farming model is potentially a strong solution to drive India’s leadership in the global textile market.

Traceability solutions
Traceable supply chains have a strong potential to ensure product credibility across all stages – sourcing, production, and distribution. Over 37% consumers in the 2023 Consumer Circularity Survey identified sustainability and traceability as important criteria in their purchases. Robust AI and tech-driven traceability solutions are the next big

strategies that the Indian textile sector can adopt. Traceability has already transformed from the logistical tracking of a product to delivering a narrative of authenticity and brand accountability.

India’s branding initiatives, such as Kasturi Cotton, strengthen the case of traceability, transparency, and quality benchmarking globally. Although currently in the final stages, the India-U.K. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) could amplify such advantages, since the U.K. has one of the world’s most environmentally conscious consumer bases.

The EU also emphasises transparency and traceability in the textile industry through international frameworks and DPPs, to protect consumer and environmental concerns.

With the concessions for textiles addressed by the India-U.K. FTA, traceability solutions can help industry players leverage sustainability stories and thereby expand their market presence.

Product circularity
India generates 8.5% of the world’s annual textile waste. To retain a competitive edge, the Indian textile industry’s vision is to

embrace product circularity and sustainability practices. Product designs must evolve from recyclability to also having a longer lifecycle. This means establishing a system at every stage of production – from fibre creation to product development, plastic-free packaging, and post-use consumer disposal – with circularity principles embedded throughout.

Factory waste can be reengineered for newer designs and eventually returned to the soil after a longer product lifecycle.

As endorsed by REIAI’s initiatives, a well-functioning circular economy can lead to product innovation, generating more jobs, and an economic competitive edge. India can therefore reduce its reliance on unused raw materials and build a better, self-reliant, and globally relevant system for generations – a vision that the Gol’s Viksit Bharat initiative also advocates.

The textile industry must commit to making in India for the world, but through circular, sustainable, and responsible means.

Growing towards
The textile industry is projected to grow to \$350 billion by 2030 and could add 35 million new jobs if we align with climate goals and tech-driven innovations. The industry can redefine its global trade leadership vision, with not just manufacturing in volumes, but also with its core business values. We must step ahead of tokenistic green messaging and adapt business models that prioritise regenerative farming practices, traceability solutions, and product circularity.

Strategic decisions made today will help India’s global leadership for a sustainable, future-proof, and resilient textile economy. The fabric of the economy’s future is dependent on what we envision today and the purposeful designs for the environment that we weave responsibly.



The textile industry is projected to grow to \$350 billion by 2030 and could add 35 million new jobs if we align with climate goals. REUTERS

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The  Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 5, 1975

U.S. may revive bid for W. Asia peace: Ford is back home

Washington, June 4: The U.S. President, Mr. Gerald Ford, returned home to-day after attending a meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation at Brussels and talks on the West Asia situation with President Anwar Sadat of Egypt at Salzburg.

Officials accompanying the President said Mr. Ford had returned with the feeling that his journey was a success.

Mr. Ford himself told a meeting here shortly after his arrival: “Our major alliances are firm and strong.” He was referring to his discussions with the heads of Government of the NATO nations.

On the West Asia problem which he discussed with Mr. Sadat, the President made no statement of a substantive kind. It was presumed he preferred to await his impending talks with the Israeli Prime Minister Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, scheduled here for next week.

While the officials travelling with Mr. Ford believed that the Ford-Sadat talks had opened the early possibility of a revival of U.S. diplomatic efforts by Dr. Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State himself took a cautious line. He said he was not saying there was progress in the talks between the two Presidents, but felt that conditions had been created under which “there could be progress.”

Officials here consider that the Israeli action, pulling back troops following the Egyptian decision to reopen the Suez Canal, is a goodwill gesture but no more than that. The number of troops involved is just nominal, about 3,500 soldiers, and some tanks, but it has added to the lessening of tension.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 5, 1925

A hospital for Europeans

A proposal has been made in the previous a separate hospital in the Presidency City for the treatment of European patients, staffed entirely by Europeans. It is believed that the Surgeon-General visited the Royapettah Hospital a couple of months ago in connection with that suggestion.

Politically speaking, the proposed step is bound to be considered by Indian public opinion to be very serious, one which is likely to create further embitterment of feeling between Indians and Europeans. All good Governments aim at removing all distinctions between the different communities, and judged from this standpoint, that system of Government must be condemned which aims at creating further opportunities to separate Europeans from Indians.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of disaster displacements in India in the last decade

3.2 In crore. The report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre said disasters triggered 264.8 million internal displacements or forced movements across 210 countries and territories during this period. East and South Asia were the most affected regions. PTI

Number of tourists stranded in Sikkim's Lachen village

113 Army personnel have established a walkway to Sikkim's Lachen village, which remained completely cut off due to multiple landslides triggered by rain in Mangan, and reached out to 113 stranded tourists there. Search operations are underway to trace six missing people. PTI

Smugglers held in Punjab's anti-drug drive since March 1

15,495 Sharing the outcome of the 'Yudh Nashian Virudh' drive, the DGP said the police have registered 9,087 FIRs and arrested 15,495 drug smugglers since March 1. Treatment for 5,786 addicts has been facilitated by the police. PTI

Number of Ukrainians registered as refugees across the EU

4.3 In million. The European Commission proposed that Ukrainian refugees be allowed to stay in the EU till March 2027 — stating clearly for the first time that their protected status will at some point end. Some 4.3 million Ukrainians are registered as refugees across the EU. AFP

Global defence exports of Israel reach all-time peak in 2024

14.7 In \$ billion. "Israel again reached an all-time peak in defence exports in 2024, marking the fourth consecutive record-breaking year in the scope of defence agreements," the country's defence ministry said in a statement. AFP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Is global warming becoming a distraction?

Why are climate models for the distant future unreliable? Does an inordinate focus on global mean warming levels take away importance from climate disasters and mitigation strategies? What are some of the immediate measures that one must focus on to tackle climate-related catastrophes?

EXPLAINER

Raghu Murtugudde

The story so far:

A global mean temperature rise of 2°C is enshrined in the Paris Agreement as a safe level of global warming by 2100 with respect to the pre-industrial baseline. This threshold was reduced further to 1.5°C due to the demand from the Alliance of Small Island and Developing States. The climate community has since been trying to quantify climate change and its consequences relative to these warming levels. Unfortunately, the models scientists use for climate projections aren't perfect, which affects the uncertainties in global mean temperature rise estimates. To make predictions for years far beyond 2050, the models need to know the greenhouse gas emissions at the time. Modellers create these figures by imagining energy sources of the future, population growth, and climate actions and policies by then. However, it is anything but easy to simulate societies of the distant future. Thus, projections of global warming in the distant future depend heavily on uncertainties inherent to these speculative scenarios.

Is global mean warming important?

After 2023 and 2024 turned out to be record warm years, the spectre of crossing the 1.5°C threshold looms large. However, the 2°C warming threshold emerged from a rather arbitrary assumption rooted in the work of economics Nobel laureate William Nordhaus in the 1970s.

There has been much debate since as to what this figure represents in real terms, because the two warming levels — 1.5°C and 2°C — aren't particularly special in climate science. In fact, there are uncertainties about the magnitude and/or duration of warming overshoot required for it to be catastrophic. The onslaught of climate-related disasters also makes it



Need to refocus: Residents clean up a mud-and-debris-covered street after flooding hit large parts of the country, in the Paiporta municipality of Valencia, Spain on October 31, 2024. GETTY IMAGES

clear that any additional warming should be avoided. The exact amount of warming, whether 1.5°C, 1.75°C or 2°C, hardly matters for disaster management and adaptations required today.

Did the world really cross 1.5°C?

Global temperature estimates are prepared by blending observations and models. Also, multiple groups produce multiple models, which produce multiple estimates — and they are not alike. Two such models of late have claimed the world exceeded 1.5°C of warming in late 2024 whereas one has estimated the world didn't. Be that as it may, the question remains as to whether 2025 will continue to warm or if the rate of warming will drop. Rapid warming events in the past suggest that the rate of warming after sudden jumps tends to decline after a few years. For example, 2024 started out warm following the

record warmth of 2023 before the rate of warming dropped. The rate in 2025 has already fallen below that seen in 2024 for the same months. Considering the uncertainties in warming plus irreducible uncertainties in estimating today's temperatures, it is confusing why global mean warming levels remain relevant.

Climate adaptation and resilience require large investments. We also need reliable local information to avoid maladapting. Thus, climate mitigation must continue, in fact even accelerate while global mean warming is a distraction we can do without. But with the back-peddalling on climate action in some countries, short-and medium-term predictions, from days to a decade or two, are most urgent now, especially at the hyperlocal scale.

What about climate disasters?

Climate disasters like heatwaves, floods,

and droughts are becoming more protracted, frequent, and intense. Insurance losses, number of lives, and number of livelihoods lost worldwide are rising year on year. These disasters are a reminder that unless researchers can pinpoint which disaster is likely to occur where and with sufficient actionable lead time — for example, a few days to few weeks for most extreme events — focusing on global mean warming can be wasteful, if not misguided.

Early-warning systems and disaster management are becoming better overall and global plans under the UN, such as Early Warnings for All, promise to ensure poorer countries are not left out. If we are to manage day-to-day crises better even as the risks of climate hazards increase, we also need predictions at the decadal timescale to allow countries to plan ahead for adaptation and resilience. This in turn demands that we focus on tracking disasters, preparedness, management and recovery.

The earth's tropics are a hotspot of climate change's consequences since they are warmer to begin with. So catastrophic floods outside the tropics, such as those in Valencia in 2024, are a stark reminder that good early warnings are worthless unless they are actionable up to the last mile. It has become common in the wake of disasters for some research groups to claim it was caused by global warming. However, we need to focus on more important questions: whether a given forecast was accurate and whether all disaster management agencies on the ground received it in time. If a forecast fails, they need to be recorded and documented as such; if a forecast was accurate but the government failed to prepare for it in time, the points of failure must be quickly identified and corrected.

This acknowledges that climate risk and uncertainties are never zero, that risks are not predestined, and that we have agency in mitigating them.

Raghu Murtugudde is retired professor, IIT Bombay, and emeritus professor, University of Maryland.

THE GIST

▼ After 2023 and 2024 turned out to be record warm years, the spectre of crossing the 1.5°C threshold looms large. However, the 2°C warming threshold emerged from a rather arbitrary assumption rooted in the work of economics Nobel laureate William Nordhaus in the 1970s.

▼ Global temperature estimates are prepared by blending observations and models. Also, multiple groups produce multiple models, which produce multiple estimates — and they are not alike.

▼ Climate disasters like heatwaves, floods, and droughts are becoming more protracted, frequent, and intense.

Has the environmental crisis in India exacerbated?

What are the major factors which contribute to the current environmental crisis?

Tikender Singh Panwar

The story so far:

As we observe June 5 as World Environment Day, one takes stock of how the previous decade has exacerbated/mitigated existing environmental crises.

What are main environmental crises?

The world is grappling with three deeply intertwined planetary crises: carbon emissions, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Over the last 10 years, these crises have deepened, despite growing awareness and international efforts.

Between 2015 and 2024, global CO₂ emissions rose from around 34.1 billion metric tonnes to 37.4 billion metric tonnes, a nearly 10% increase. In the same period, India's emissions surged from 2.33 billion to 3.12 billion metric tonnes, persistent dependence on coal

and oil. On the biodiversity front, mass extinctions and ecological disruptions are becoming the norm. India, with its mega-diverse ecosystems, faces growing threats from deforestation, wetland degradation, and monoculture agriculture. Meanwhile, pollution, particularly air pollution, has remained stubbornly high. India consistently ranks among the world's most polluted countries, with Delhi topping global lists.

What are the root causes?

There are myriad causative factors. First is fossil fuel dependency. Most global carbon emissions are driven by coal, oil, and gas consumption in power generation, transportation, and heavy industry. In India, coal still accounts for nearly 70% of electricity generation. Second, we have deforestation and land-use change. In India, forest clearances for roads, mining, and dams have increased, especially in

biodiversity-rich regions like the Western Ghats and the northeast. Third, agricultural intensification. High-input monocultures, especially driven by agribusinesses, destroy habitats and pollute water bodies with nitrates, pesticides, and plastics. Waste mismanagement and unchecked urbanisation is also a major factor causing environmental degradation. Unregulated landfills, untreated sewage, and industrial effluents have polluted rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna. India generates 62 million tonnes of waste annually, of which barely 20% is scientifically processed. And finally, overconsumption and industrialisation. The Global North's high consumption and global supply chains externalise pollution and ecological damage to the Global South.

How is India positioned?

As a developing economy, India has a smaller per capita carbon footprint (~1.9

tonnes/year vs. the U.S.'s 14.7 tonnes), yet its aggregate emissions are rising due to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. The poor bear the brunt of pollution and climate shocks — whether in Delhi's smog-choked slums or drought-stricken villages in Maharashtra. Yet India is also a victim of the environmental damage caused by global forces. Climate change, largely driven by the historical emissions of richer nations, has intensified India's monsoons, floods, and heatwaves, while biodiversity loss has weakened India's food systems and health infrastructure.

What needs to be done?

A meaningful response must include accountability from nations of the Global North. Wealthy nations must drastically cut emissions, provide climate finance, and stop outsourcing dirty industries. Large polluting corporations must also be held accountable through strict laws and carbon taxation. Moreover, the future of development must be based on ecological concerns. For example, corporations that do not adhere to the 'green policy' should not be allowed to trade in the market. Creating such protocols will pave way for systemic changes. Sustainable development should be encouraged with a shift toward low-carbon livelihoods, ecological agriculture, and community-led conservation.

Tikender Singh Panwar is former deputy mayor of Shimla, and member of the Kerala Urban Commission.

THE GIST

▼ The world is grappling with three deeply intertwined planetary crises: carbon emissions, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

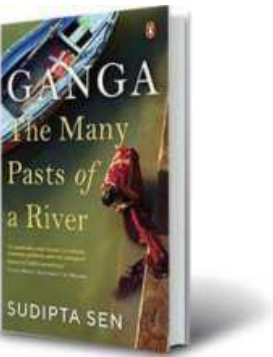
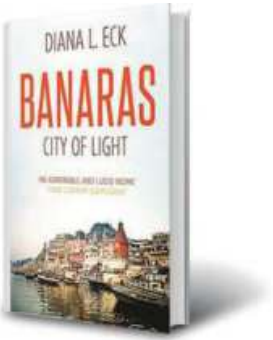
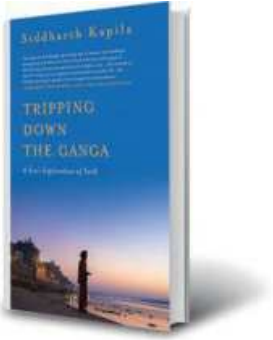
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▼ A meaningful response must include accountability from nations of the Global North.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Shining bright: Devotees light earthen lamps on the banks of the river Ganges in Varanasi on November 15, 2024. AFP



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

“Were you in time for the meeting yesterday?”
“No, I was late. So my boss had to clue me in.”
“Clue you in? I’ve never heard that expression before.”
“It’s an informal expression. When you clue someone in on something, ‘you inform someone of something’.”
“Most politicians need their assistants to clue them in on what’s happening around the world.”
“That’s true. Otherwise it’s difficult to keep track of what’s happening around the world.”
“Can I say, ‘I would like to clue you in on the party we are giving Rubina?’”
“You can. And I could reply by saying, ‘Please clue me in’.”
“I see. How long did your meeting last yesterday?”
“Oh, it went on till about ten in the night.”
“Good grief! You must have been exhaustive.”
“What do you mean by that?”
“I mean you must have been really tired. You know, exhaustive.”
“In that case, the word you are looking for is ‘exhausted’, ‘not exhaustive’. The word ‘exhausted’ means that someone is ‘so tired, either physically or mentally, that they have no energy left’. For example, Sampras was exhausted after his quarter final match at the U.S. Open.”
“I was exhausted after running a mile.”
“There was a good movie on TV. But I was too exhausted to watch it.”
“O.K., I think I know what ‘exhausted’ means, What does ‘exhaustive’ mean?”
“It means ‘thorough’, ‘complete’, ‘comprehensive’. The scientist studied the problem in exhaustive detail.”
“The groom’s family gave an exhaustive list of the things that they wanted.”
“That’s a good example. My cousin gave an exhaustive account of his trip to Russia.”
“Were you exhausted after listening to his exhaustive account?”
“Well, not really. He had some interesting things to say.”
“...that reminds me, is there a difference in meaning between ‘I was watching tennis from 6-00 to 7-00’ and ‘I watched tennis from 6-00 to 7-00?’”
“Hmm. Let me see now. The... “
“...both of them mean the same thing, right?”
“Not exactly! You see when you say, I watched tennis from 6 to 7, it means that you started watching the game at 6-00 and finished watching at 7-00.”
“I see. So, if I say I did my homework from 10 to 11, it means I started at 10 O’clock and finished at 11 O’clock?”
“Yes. that’s right.”
“What about ‘I was watching tennis from 6-00 to 7-00?’”
“In that sentence you are not really sure when the person actually started watching the game. The person could have started watching at 6-00 or he might have started watching earlier.”
“I see.”
Published in The Hindu on October 15, 1996.

Soma Basu

There is little denying that the world is divided between different ways of understanding and interacting with reality. Whether we think deeply about it or not, we end up siding either with tradition or modernity, science or religion, superstition or reason, rationality or empiricism, logic or faith. In the process, we create a dynamic landscape where different beliefs, practices and values compete for recognition and influence.

Perhaps one of the best ways to become more aware and be able to expand the definitions of our thoughts and to fathom self-realisation, is to travel.

A majority of the people travel for fun, adventure, and relaxation. Writers, researchers, and seekers travel for solitude, exploration, and to rediscover themselves.

When writers go on yatras to understand what lies at the core of beliefs and devotion, there emerges an interesting genre of books that explores themes of finding purpose, meaning, and connection in life.

For Siddharth Kapila, the decision to quit a career in law and undertake a journey to sites important to the Hindu faith was driven by passion and curiosity in equal measure. Between 2015 and 2022, he revisited seven pilgrimage sites

along the Ganges where he had been to as a reluctant adolescent with his devout mother in the 1990s.

Memoir of introspection
Meant to be a plain travel account, his notes seamlessly transition into an introspection and an interesting memoir. *Tripping Down The Ganga: A Son’s Exploration of Faith* (published by Speaking Tiger, 2025) is about India today, what Hinduism means to believers in general, and sceptics like him.

Kapila’s understanding of the Ganga tethered to the propaganda of religion today is not at loggerheads with the millions of superstitious, ritualistic and religious people including his mother, who worship the river. Faith is free and he does not criticise it. Rather, with a dash of humour he wonders about the contradictions that are visible in his journey from Kedarnath to Badrinath, Gangotri, Rishikesh, Allahabad, Banaras and Ganga Sagar and offers readers a relatable visual imagery through his words.

He talks about how rituals are used to manipulate people based on their class, status and caste. That a holy dip to purify the soul does not wash away discrimination, bigotry, patriarchy or orthodoxy. But more important how people who worship the river also make a mess of it. The author does not flaunt any specific idea but through anecdotes and

what he observes, he uncovers peoples’ attitudes on faith. He also throws light on the diversity of Hinduism and the resilience of people’s devotion. The sacred, complex and magnetic Ganga mirrors society, he says, carrying the weight of an entire civilisation.

An old, living city
In 1982, Diana L. Eck, American scholar of religious studies, captured the soul of one of the oldest living cities in her book *Banaras: City of Light*. Documenting a huge amount of history, she introduced readers to elaborate and thriving rituals and the significance they hold for pilgrims and seekers who throng the city. The detailed book is often cited as a critical introduction of Banaras and Hindu religious traditions for a generation of scholars on India.

There are few places as sacred as Banaras that symbolises the whole of Hindu culture and imagines god in a thousand ways. Introducing the concept of sacred geography, she celebrates the city as a living, breathing and transforming symbol in the Hindu religious context.

Nandini Majumdar also writes about the holy city in her book *Banaras: Walks Through India’s Sacred City* (Roli Books/2014). It is a captivating perspective of her walks around the city wherein she captures the essence and character of Banaras through its ghats and

the riot of colours and why it has become a major tourist attraction.

Another book, *A Pilgrimage to Kashi: Banaras, Varanasi, Kashi, History, Mythology and Culture of the Most Fascinating City in India*, by G. Gol published by Indica in 1999, is a fascinating depiction of Banaras in all its hues and imagery.

A river’s history
In *Ganga: The Many Pasts of a River* (Penguin/Viking), historian Sudipta Sen chronicles a fascinating story of the world’s third largest river from its first settlers, its myths of origin in Hinduism and its significance in Buddhism.

He traces the many Empires that shaped the river’s history and the merchants who navigated the waters in his lavishly illustrated volume of work. Stitching the geography, ecology and religious history of the sacred and beloved lifeline of Indians, he remarkably portrays how and why the Ganga enjoys a special place in the hearts of the people.

Even as our political leaders make it a habit to visit religious sites as part of their campaigns in today’s surcharged political atmosphere, for most people, religious travelogues are in pursuit of a meaningful life.

It is a philosophical debate as old as time and books lend a sense of wisdom and calm to the restless mind and the chaos outside.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on this year’s eventful IPL edition

Soorya Prakash. N

- QUESTION 1
Who won Player of the Match on his IPL debut in the 2025 edition?
- QUESTION 2
Who became the first captain in IPL history to pick up five wickets in an IPL match in 2025?
- QUESTION 3
Who was the only player to perform a hat trick in IPL 2025?
- QUESTION 4
Which player took the most number of catches in a match in

- IPL 2025?
- QUESTION 5
Who is the only player to win Man of the Match despite ending up on the losing side?
- QUESTION 6
The impact sub rule is in place since 2023. Who are the only two players to have become Man of the Match coming in as an impact sub in IPL 2025?
- QUESTION 7
Who hit six consecutive sixes, though not in the same over, in this year’s IPL edition?
- QUESTION 8
Who created a world record by scoring 25+ runs in each match that he played in IPL 2025 — 15 matches in a row?



Visual question:
This player became the first person in IPL history to have taken part as a player and as an umpire. FILE PHOTO

- Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. The reason why Pride Month is observed in June. **Ans: June became recognised as Pride Month in the U.S. to commemorate the Stonewall Uprising**
2. This day is observed on June 3 every year. **Ans: World Bicycle Day**
3. This is celebrated annually on June 5. **Ans: World Environment Day**
4. This language day is observed annually on June 6. **Ans: Russian Language Day**
5. This day was first observed in 2002 by the International Labour Organisation. **Ans: World Day against Child Labour**
- Visual: Identify the event annually observed on June 30. **Ans: International Asteroid Day; it is observed on June 30 on the anniversary of the Tunguska event in 1908**
- Early Birds:** K.N. Viswanathan| Parimal Das| Mohan Lal Patel| Tamanjit Bisla| Tito Shiladitya

Word of the day

Proscribe:
command against

Synonyms: disallow, forbid, interdict, nix, prohibit, veto

Usage: Such bullets are proscribed in most military camps.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/proscribepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈpɹɒsˌskɹʌɪb/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to **letters@thehindu.co.in** with the subject ‘Text & Context’

Tragedy in Bengaluru

Accountability has to be fixed for the stampede

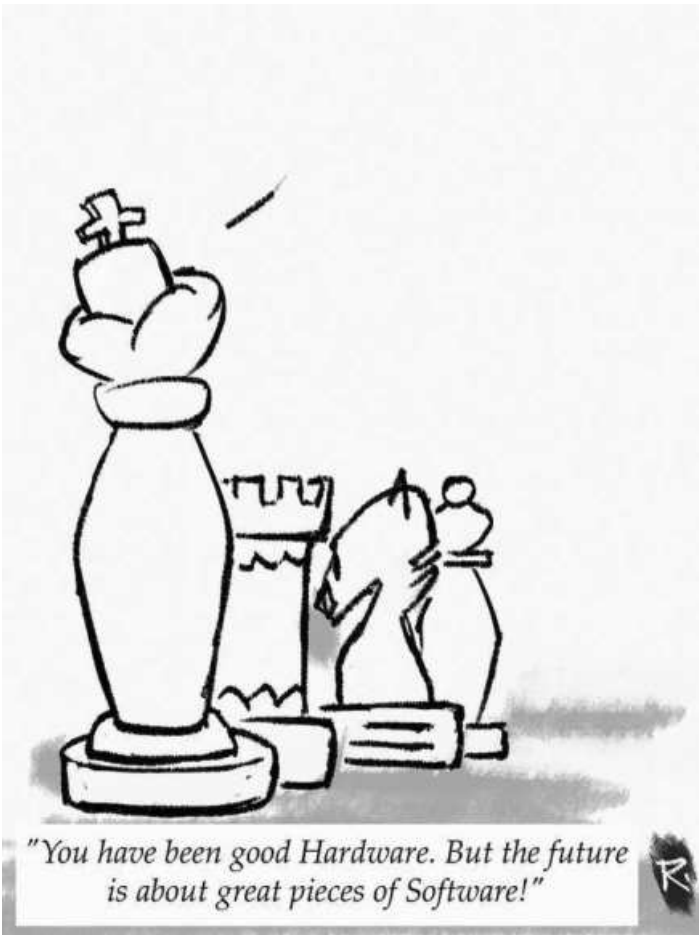
High joy turned into deep sorrow in Bengaluru on Wednesday as celebrations over Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) winning the Indian Premier League (IPL) title, turned into tragedy with at least 11 people, including a child, losing their lives and 33 left injured in a stampede. It is a no-brainer that a “celebration” organised with just a few hours of the victory could not have been well-planned. With RCB winning the title for the first time and given the large, passionate fan base that it has, a large turnout was inevitable. The authorities ought to have been inescapable of this and planned for it.

According to Karnataka’s Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, there were about 2-3 lakh people inside the Chinnaswamy Stadium which has a capacity of just 35,000. Television visuals show only a sprinkling of policemen in such a large crowd. It was a gross error of judgement to have organised a celebration in such haste without adequate preparations for crowd management. A magisterial enquiry has been ordered, which is just as well, because accountability has to be fixed for this calamitous lapse. The fact remains though that such a celebration could not have been organised without political clearance at the highest level. And it cannot be dismissed as a private celebration because both Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar were present inside the stadium and can even be seen holding the trophy. Clearly, there are uncomfortable questions for the government to answer. The buck should stop with it.

If it was passion for the game and adulation for the cricketers that led to the calamity in Bengaluru, it is the same passion, mixed with commerce, that ensured the success of IPL this year; even a war between India and Pakistan could not interrupt it for more than ten days. The brand value of IPL is a mammoth \$12 billion. Four franchises— Chennai Super Kings, Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders — are valued in excess of \$100 million each.

A noteworthy aspect of the latest edition was that the two teams that battled it out in the final had never won the trophy ever. And the usual favourites such as Chennai Super Kings, Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals failed to even make it to the playoffs. The rise of teams other than the usually fancied ones is good for IPL as it will widen the fan base. This IPL also saw a large number of debutants who were bought at low prices but who performed extraordinarily well. The services of the 14-year old Vaibhav Suryavanshi, for example, who stunned everyone with his batting prowess, were purchased for ₹1.4 crore. While cricket puritans will dismiss IPL as a circus, the fact remains that it has been extremely successful commercially and in unearthing talent from all corners of the country. But tragic events such as the one in Bengaluru on Wednesday certainly do not add to its image.

WAR & PIECES - III



Need for monetary, fiscal support

STIMULUS. In addition to general credit easing, there should be focus on specific sectors, matched by fiscal measures



SMITA ROY TRIVEDI
ABHIMANYU DAS

The conflict situation with Pakistan, perhaps marks the highest escalation since the Kargil conflict, given the violation of air space and attack on civilian assets. With the US tariff policies, and counter policies, global trade sees a disruption and uncertainty not faced since the Second World War.

What is the role of the MPC policy rate decision in these circumstances? For recovery (and reform) how much do we rely on the fiscal policy? What is needed to strengthen the monetary-fiscal coordination?

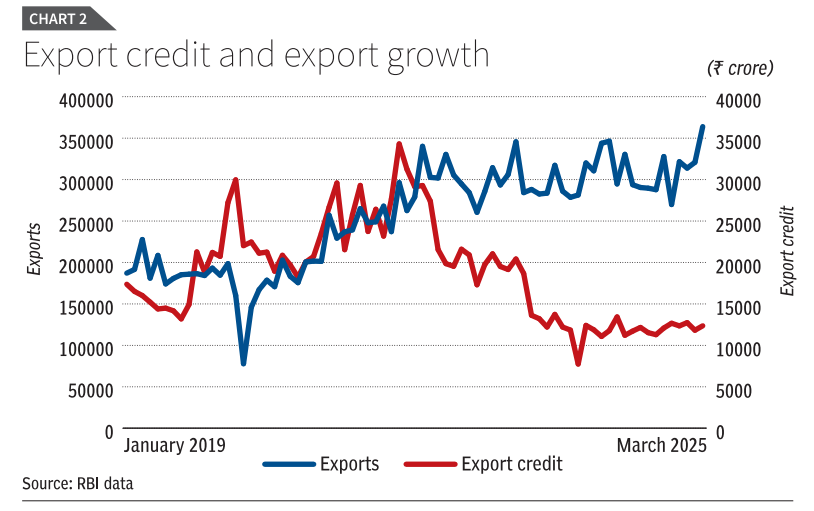
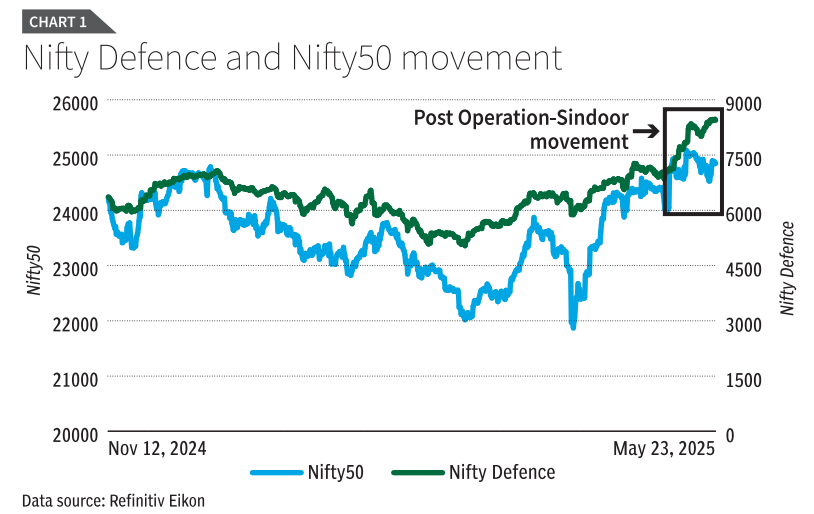
As India’s growth continues to remain below potential and inflation around 4 per cent, MPC’s decision becomes straight forward — lowering of interest rates — as the chances of policy misstep are less. The verdict is divided on the quantum of rate cut and balancing with the fiscal side.

Recent financial market developments also pose challenges to the MPC: given the Japanese yield spike and core inflation increasing in Japan, the rate cut will have to keep in mind the fear of yen carry-trade unwinding. We argue that in addition to the general credit easing, there should be focus on specific sectors, matched by fiscal measures to ensure its impact.

First, in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor, the government spending of defence and infrastructure will increase. Given the success and hence increased reliance on indigenous missiles and drones, the companies in this sector are likely to grow. Financial markets have pinned their expectations on these sectors.

ADVANTAGE DEFENCE COS
As Figure 1 shows Nifty India Defence Index have gone up by roughly 20 per cent in the last 20 days (much sharper than Nifty50), with companies like Cochin Shipyard, GRSE, Bharat Dynamics, and ideaForge leading the rally. A sector like this with strong domestic supply chain potential, can be the right wave to propel manufacturing

In a situation of conflict and its aftermath, neither monetary policy nor fiscal policy can be too constrained



capabilities forward. In addition to the bigger companies, the smaller ones in the domestic downstream supply chains need to be supported by adequate bank financing. Second, exporters and importers face an uncertain global demand scenario, where policy change is going back and forth and this is likely to reflect in

business decisions. Export credit growth has for long been subdued, even with a subsidised interest rate, probably reflecting demand side conditions with exports growth being majorly lacklustre (Chart 2). Moreover, exports need more than just credit: fiscal side measures that boost infrastructure, enhance

digitalisation of processes, and simplify trade financing process are crucial. In recent times, the Reserve Bank of India has been very successful in managing the untoward volatility of exchange rates and the rupee has been hovering in the zone of 85 to 86 (Chart 3). However, a market determined exchange rate under orderly market conditions is far more critical now. It will send a signal to firms to hedge exposures, or build in natural hedges, and free up monetary policy from external pressures. Third, price stability needs to remain in focus: with the MPC’s thrust on easing liquidity, the onus of price stability should be more on the supply-side measures. In a situation of conflict and its aftermath, neither monetary policy nor fiscal policy can be too constrained. Liquidity needs of financial institutions will be crucial and hence a benign liquidity condition is needed. Recent inflation prints of below 4 per cent are largely due to a substantial decline in food inflation alone.

INFLATION WORRIES
However, consumers still face much higher price pressures due to the prolonged high inflation cycle of recent years. Firms, particularly the FMCG firms, have resorted to “double-shrinkflation” strategies — reducing both the packet size as well as the product size, for example, and keeping the retail prices constant — leading to a significant welfare loss to the common people. Therefore, from improving storage and warehousing that prevent post-harvest losses, to streamlining domestic supply chain capabilities, to agricultural reforms focusing on diversification of cropping patterns, price supports and easing of input constraints, reforms are as much required as the recovery. Also, passing on the benefits to consumers of subdued global crude prices in recent years in a calibrated manner would provide more legroom to the MPC to cut interest rate further and support the domestic recovery faster. Finally, as the history suggests, conflicts and tariff wars create unexpected global alliances and open up newer business opportunities. Can India find newer connector countries and boost its global trade in these uncertain times? A true “India Advantage” story possibly lies there.

Roy Trivedi is Associate Professor, National Institute of Bank Management; Das is ICICI Bank Chair Professor of Finance and Strategy, IIM-Ahmedabad. Views expressed are personal

Chemical fertilizer savings scheme needs tweaks

PM-PRANAM grant must be used for developing organic/natural farming systems at district level

Kavitha Kuruganti
The PM-PRANAM scheme seems to be paying off slowly, in terms of savings on synthetic fertilizers for some States as per numbers put out by the government.

In Parliament, the Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers revealed that for 2023-24, a total fertilizer reduction of 15.14 lakh tonnes has been achieved under PM-PRANAM (Programme for Restoration, Awareness Generation, Nourishment and Amelioration of Mother-Earth).

It appears that this, in turn, resulted in a subsidy reduction of ₹3,156.92 crore, leading to total incentives to States amounting to ₹1,578.46 crore. After some adjustments as per the scheme guidelines, net payable amount to States comes to ₹1,241.28 crore.

Admittedly, subsidy reduction of ₹3,157 crore is nothing much compared to the Budget’s fertilizer expenditure of over ₹1.8 lakh crore in the last two fiscals. The PM-PRANAM aims at a ₹20,000 crore reduction in this spending.

Surprisingly, Karnataka topped the list of States which reduced their consumption, with 30 per cent of the savings in 2023-24 coming from this one State. Maharashtra, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh follow Karnataka, together contributing to another 58 per cent.

The reasons for this reduction could

have ranged from drought to better regulation that curbed diversion of urea to non-agricultural purposes, etc., and not necessarily a strategic roadmap to best utilise the opportunity of PM-PRANAM.

NEED FOR REVISED PM-PRANAM
The excessive use of synthetic fertilizers in India has become a major environmental concern. In June 2023, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs had approved PM-PRANAM scheme as an incentive to States/UTs to get as grants 50 per cent of the fertilizer subsidy saved by any State/UT in a particular financial year.

Any reduction in the consumption of subsidised synthetic fertilizers like urea, DAP, NPK, MOP is checked against the average consumption of the State/UT over the previous three years. The subsidy savings is calculated based on the data in the Integrated Fertilizer Management System (IFMS) portal, with the subsidy rates determined by the Department of Fertilizers for that particular assessment year.

Yet, there seem to be deep flaws in the design of the scheme.

First, the scheme is for three years ending FY26, and with an unambitious target of reduction of ₹20,000 crore in the fertilizer Budget. It needs to be extended. States need more room to warm up to the possibilities from the scheme.

Second, the guidelines indicate that the largest share of the grant from the



FERTILIZER SCHEME. Green options
SURESH ALLEPPEY

savings that any State receives (65 per cent) should be spent on capex projects, as share of State governments in schemes such as Jal Jeevan Mission, PM Krishi Sinchai Yojana, PM Ayushman Bharat. While some of these schemes might dovetail well in pursuit of the mandate of PM PRANAM itself, bringing in a health infrastructure scheme lacks basis. The grant should be fully used in natural and organic farming, because fertilizer consumption reduction should not be linked to “do-nothing farming”. It should lead to intensification of agro-ecology.

Third, the scheme should be re-designed to include focus on district achievement. At present, PM PRANAM scheme’s effectiveness is hindered by its State-level focus, failing to account for efforts made by districts, tehsils, or talukas.

Making PM-PRANAM applicable to district level reduction is one way

through which States can, in fact, carefully choose particular districts as their starting points for transitioning to natural farming. Such districts can then benefit from additional grants for fulfilling their roadmap for transformation.

Ninety per cent of the savings grant can be given to the district(s), with 5 per cent kept by State government and 5 per cent by the Union government in this new design.

The full grant should be directed towards promotion of natural farming, including intensive extension activities, information and educational materials, setting up of bio-input resource centres, local seed systems and creation of markets with appropriate quality assurance. An ecosystem will then fall in place.

Fourth, the scheme needs to find meaningful ways of applying itself to “default” organic areas, which are traditionally non-chemical. These areas need to be protected because they are often coterminous with *adivasi* communities with their own ethos of living which needs to be respected too. These are pockets where existing agro-ecological farming would be providing many ecosystem services. A part of the savings should be directly transferred to such pockets, to protect the ecosystem there.

The writer is a farmers’ rights activist associated with Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture (ASHA-Kisan Swaraj)

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

Global re-ordering
Apropos, ‘The great global unravelling’ (June 4). The US, once seen as the world’s stabilising force, has lost its grip. Europe is increasingly fragmented and falling behind, while China pushes ahead, challenging traditional power dynamics. Amid this power vacuum, no single nation or alliance appears to be in charge.

Ongoing conflicts — Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Gaza, and India-Pakistan — continue to simmer, with no credible global leadership stepping in to de-escalate tensions. As nations turn inward and alliances grow weaker, the world faces a future of unmanaged crises and deepening divides.
N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

Prudent norms
With reference to the Editorial ‘Golden Rules’. We have seen many loan segments turning into NPAs. So RBI’s guidelines with regard to Gold loans are prudent and much needed. Political interference is unwarranted. The political class must understand that the high gold prices are bound to fall, which will impact the lenders as the value of the gold pledged will fall. Some relaxation of documentation for borrowers could be considered by RBI.
Bal Govind
Noida

Industry pride
Reading ‘Tata Steel, Vedanta, Samvardhana led outward FDI flows in FY 25’ (June 4), shows that our country is capable of investing in foreign soil is testimony to the resilience and perseverance of the doyens of Indian industry. Tata Steel leading the pack in ODI deals in FY 25 is especially noteworthy. Toiling through turmoil, the Tata empire has come atop the cycle and sure is a role model for other homegrown enterprises.
Jose Abraham
Kottayam (Kerala)

MPC to focus on growth

With inflation outlook benign, rate cut may continue

Karthik Srinivasan

The 7.4 per cent year-on-year GDP growth in Q4FY25 and 6.5 per cent for FY25 as a whole came as a positive surprise. However, amid the heightened uncertainty around global trade policies, we at ICRA believe RBI’s MPC will remain focused on supporting domestic demand.

The outlook for some domestic drivers of growth, such as private consumption and government investment, appears largely intact. However, that for merchandise and IT exports, and private capex, especially in export-oriented sectors, is rather muted, although the relative tariff scenario will continue to evolve as the year progresses.

At present, ICRA forecasts GDP growth to dip slightly to 6.2 per cent in FY26. Retail inflation is expected to remain well within the tolerance band of the MPC, given an above-normal monsoon prediction by the India Meteorological Department. This shall support the timely kick-off of kharif sowing and reduce food inflation.

3 RATE CUTS LIKELY MPC’s recent statements reveal a tilt towards growth, which suggests the MPC will continue with its rate cut in the June meet as well, given the benign outlook on inflation.

Our base case view is for a 25-bps cut in each of the June, August and October 2025 policy meetings, taking the cumulative cut in this rate cut cycle to 125 bps, with terminal repo rate of 5.25 per cent.

To ensure faster transmission of policy rates, the RBI’s various liquidity infusion measures have already ensured that systemic liquidity is in surplus mode, which has led the overnight rates to remain at least 20-25 bps below the repo rate since the beginning of the financial year. Accordingly, the weighted average rate on fresh term deposits of banks declined by 35 bps to 6.30 per cent in April 2025 year-on-year.

While this may enable banks to lower their lending rates in the

High small savings rates may hamper the pace of accretion of deposits and transmission of repo cuts to bank deposit rates



RATE CUT. On the cards

future, given the existing deposit base will reprice downward with a lag of four to six quarters, the transmission in lending rates is expected to be gradual. Moreover, high small savings rates may hamper the pace of accretion of deposits and transmission of repo cuts to bank deposit rates. Accordingly, the lending rates on fresh rupee loans declined by just 10 bps to 9.26 per cent in April 2025 over March 2025.

The incremental bank credit flow remains weak as reflected in a decline in non-food bank credit outstanding on YTD basis for the fortnight ending May 16, 2025.

Accordingly, the YoY bank credit growth slowed to 9.6 per cent as on May 16, 2025, much lower than 16.3 per cent for FY24 and 10.9 per cent for FY25. While ICRA expects bank credit growth to remain moderate at 10.4-11.3 per cent for FY26, given the downward pricing on loans upon the repo rate cuts and asset quality pressures in retail and MSME segments, there can be downside risks to the credit growth.

Accordingly, there may be a case for up-fronting rate cuts as pickup in demand will remain key to spur growth.

While the last few months have been uncertain given the evolving policies related to tariffs on imports by the US, better clarity is expected to emerge over the next couple of months, which can have implications for trade and commodity prices, and growth. On the other hand, the rising bond yields in developed economies like the US, the UK and Japan could emerge as a challenge. With the yield of 4.40 per cent on 10-year US bonds and 6.25 per cent for the 10-year Indian bonds, the spread is at an all-time low.

While the softer commodity prices could support the current account deficit, forex reserves and the currency, capital flows will need to be monitored carefully.

The writer is the Group Head, Financial Sector Ratings, at ICRA Ltd., ICRA LimeWire Ltd



ABHINAV BANKA
PRADIPTARATHI PANDA

India’s aspiration to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070 is not a mere climate commitment but an economic transformation blueprint. This ambition will necessitate investments in trillions of dollars, as estimated by various studies, fundamentally reshaping critical sectors of the economy, including industrial, energy, agriculture and transportation, which are primary green house gases (GHG) emitting sectors.

Financing such a transition cannot rely on public spending alone — it requires deep, liquid, and diversified capital markets, which attract private capital. Transition bonds stand out as a pragmatic bridge between current economic realities and future ecological imperatives among the many global climate finance toolkit instruments. Globally, these bonds are gaining traction but are simultaneously lagging other green debt securities with clear investment roadmaps and sectoral key performing indicators (KPIs), e.g. green bonds and sustainability-linked bonds.

Green finance supports inherently sustainable projects with low uncertainty of outcomes — solar farms, wind parks, afforestation, etc. Transition finance, on the other hand, caters to industries in hard-to-abate sectors — steel, cement, chemicals, thermal power — that cannot become green overnight but are on a credible pathway to decarbonisation. The semantic distinction reflects a differentiated approach to capital allocation based on the timelines of targets to be achieved. In addition, the realised targets for transition finance move beyond developing green substitutes by encapsulating decent livelihoods and work opportunities.

Data from Environmental Finance Data since 2021 shows cumulative global issuance under green bonds surpassed \$2,909 billion, followed by sustainability bonds at \$904 billion and social bonds at \$871 billion, while transition bonds stayed much lower at \$37 billion. Out of this, \$20.57 billion was issued in 2024 as Japan issued its inaugural sovereign transition bond in February 2024. Before this, the private sector in Japan had been issuing transition bonds, thanks to its green transformation (GX) strategy which institutionalised transition finance as a national policy pillar, earmarking funds for clean hydrogen, synthetic fuels, and energy-efficiency



GREEN PATH. Transition finance, which caters to industries in hard-to-abate sectors that cannot become green overnight, is key to India achieving net-zero emissions by 2070

RITU RAJ KONWAR

upgrades in traditional industries. Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has set sector-specific technology roadmaps, rigorous eligibility criteria, and outcome-linked disclosures — offering investors clarity and confidence.

Coming to India, in early 2023, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) amended its framework for green debt securities to explicitly include transition bonds as a sub-category. This was a critical step, enabling financing for companies not yet “green” but actively reducing their environmental impact — the framework also requires issuers of transition bonds to disclose a ‘transition plan’ in their offer document.

SEBI has also mandated the ESG rating providers to provide a ‘transition’ or ‘Parivartan’ score that measures the velocity of investments in making the transition to net zero. While there is enough clarity on the procedure, no proceeds have been registered yet under transition bonds. On the contrary, India has already issued \$69.53 billion worth

India’s transition to net zero will not be a linear sprint. It will be a calibrated marathon — sector by sector, State by State

of green bonds, even at the municipal level.

SUPPORTING MECHANISMS India’s transition bond framework is undoubtedly relatively new, requiring some time to unfold. However, there are several mechanisms to support the issuance and adoption of transition bonds. First, transition finance is a dynamic concept requiring ongoing monitoring, unlike green bonds, which typically involve a one-time second-party opinion. Transition bonds must demonstrate how supported projects contribute to decarbonisation, with clear KPIs tracking carbon emission reductions over time.

Second, proceeds from transition bonds should prioritise research and development and adopt efficient decarbonisation technologies. For example, Japan’s Climate Transition Bond allocates 55.5 per cent of its proceeds to R&D for industrial and energy transition and 44.5 per cent to subsidy programmes supporting decarbonisation objectives.

Third, as transition finance is much more suited to support long-term India’s 2070 net zero target, the definition of transition bonds under the SEBI framework may be linked to 2070 goals. Transition bonds comprise “funds raised for transitioning to a more sustainable form of operations, in line

with India’s Intended Nationally Determined Contributions.” which ends in 2030.

Fourth, as different carbon-intensive sectors are concentrated in other States at various capacities, there is a need for all States to update their State Climate Action Plan with clear transition roadmaps.

Lastly, there is a need to set up a separate transition finance agency which sets up clear investment targets required over the next 45 years and handholds the industry in realising these investments, along with supporting operations such as debt guarantees and equity investments.

India’s transition to net zero will not be a linear sprint. It will be a calibrated marathon — sector by sector, State by State. India has already announced the rollout of the Climate Finance Taxonomy, which will further support investments in transition sectors. Given the uncertainties around the transmission of global climate financing to EMDEs (Emerging Market and Developing Economies), raising capital through domestic transition bonds for targeted sectors can ensure that the transition to the net zero goal is timely and inclusive.

Banka is an IES officer in the Ministry of Finance, and Panda is Assistant Professor at IIM Raipur. Views are personal

India’s path towards climate sovereignty

Tuhin A Sinha
Kaviraj Singh

As the world prepares for COP30 in Belém, Brazil, in 2025, the urgency of climate action has never been greater. COP30 represents not only a critical inflection point for global negotiations but also a pivotal opportunity for India to fast-track its climate ambition through robust carbon markets and the adoption of cutting-edge technologies such as digitally verified carbon offsets. This World Environment Day, as we reflect on environmental stewardship, it is essential to examine how India can shape and benefit from these evolving global mechanisms.

India remains one of the few major economies whose emissions trajectory is broadly aligned with its fair share under the Paris Agreement, despite its lower historical emissions and ongoing development needs.

In July 2023, India formally launched the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS). This compliance carbon market builds upon the successes of the Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme, but unlike PAT, the CCTS opens the door for trading emission

reduction certificates beyond the power and industrial sectors.

Experts estimate that India’s carbon market could unlock a \$200 billion opportunity by 2030, combining domestic growth with environmental integrity. Sectors like steel, cement, transport, and even agriculture are expected to come under its ambit, allowing Indian industries to earn credits by exceeding efficiency norms and trade them within a national or international carbon market.

While carbon pricing is still nascent in India, the International Carbon Action Partnership (ICAP) has acknowledged the country’s proactive steps as exemplary among developing nations.

The credibility of carbon markets hinges not merely on the volume of credits traded but on their integrity, traceability, and impact. Traditional Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) mechanisms are often paper-heavy, delayed, and susceptible to manipulation. In this context, Digitally Verified Carbon Offsets (DVCOs) are emerging as a transformative solution. DVCOs use blockchain, satellite imagery, remote sensing, and machine learning to



CLIMATE SOLUTIONS. India can lead

validate emissions reductions in real time.

CARBON GOVERNANCE The climate agenda at COP30 will largely hinge on the operationalisation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, particularly Article 6.2 and 6.4, which govern the framework for international carbon trading and the Sustainable Development Mechanism respectively.

India, as a major emitter and a developing economy, is expected to play a pivotal role in shaping these dialogues. Aligning India’s domestic carbon market with Article 6 mechanisms could unlock access to global finance, particularly through Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs). These allow countries or companies to buy

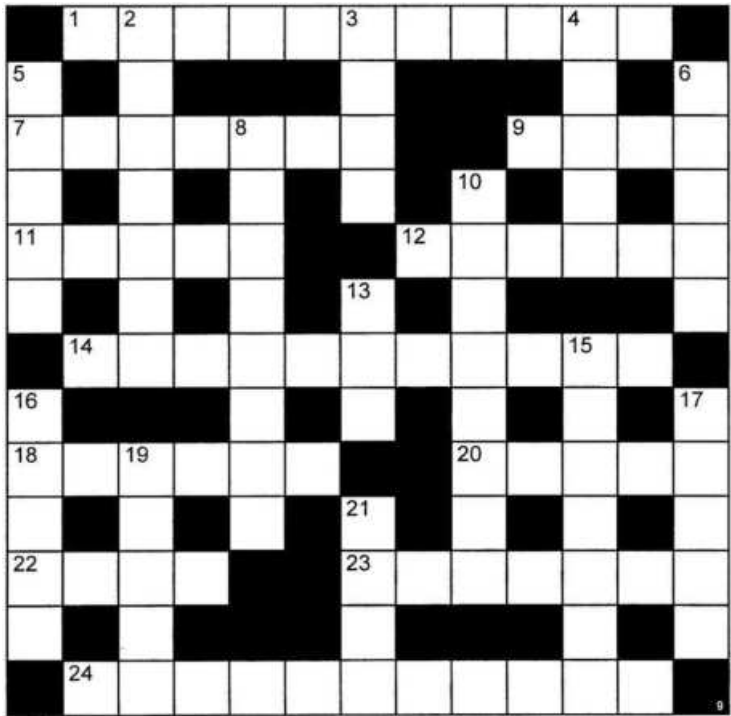
high-quality credits from India to offset their own emissions, thereby channelling funding into Indian climate projects, especially those involving rural communities, biodiversity preservation, or green infrastructure.

Moreover, India’s presidency of the G20 in 2023 and continued participation in coalitions such as the International Solar Alliance and the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT) underscore its diplomatic clout in climate matters.

India must also seize the opportunity to press for climate finance reform at COP30. While developed nations agreed to mobilise \$100 billion annually by 2020, the promise remains largely unmet — projections suggest that developing countries will need at least \$1.3 trillion annually by 2035 to meet their climate goals. India can lead the call for improved financial flows, concessional loans, and blended finance instruments, ensuring that carbon markets do not replicate historic inequities.

Tuhin is National Spokesperson, BJP, and Kaviraj is Executive Director and CEO, Earthood

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2711



EASY

ACROSS

- Scolds severely (7,4)
- Flame-producing device (7)
- Stooped (4)
- Worth (5)
- Usage; what one is wont to do (6)
- A part of speech (gram) (11)
- Strive against (6)
- Red cosmetic (5)
- Tardy (4)
- To stamp, print (7)
- Approaching correctness (11)

DOWN

- Like clockwork (7)
- Get money by effort (4)
- Cereal crop (5)
- Person held as property (5)
- Upright of wicket (5)
- Injury to another’s property; sin (8)
- To flatter (6,2)
- Powdery grey deposit from smoking (3)
- Wealthy (7)
- Squeeze together (5)
- Thick (5)
- One-masted cutter-rigged vessel (5)
- Unlucky influence (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Reprimands one if one clothes oneself informally (7,4)
- It isn’t as heavy as a large open boat (7)
- This grass is crooked (4)
- Think highly of Virginia, blue when topless (5)
- Company must thus produce regular trade (6)
- A word in grammar and in prose I point out (11)
- Don’t give in to protective coating (6)
- Jeweller’s polish may be applied to the cheeks (5)
- Is not quick to start sinking with depression (4)
- MP will almost 18 change to make his mark (7)
- Be roughly equivalent to mix, a paper might assume (11)

DOWN

- It’s uniform for a soldier such as this (7)
- Gain by Labour will, to some, appear natural (4)
- Hat we use to make flour from (5)
- A bondsman has to work so hard (5)
- It may floor one, or get one out (5)
- A sin that’s very French will get through (8)
- Flatter one one can put brute out (6,2)
- It’s the key tree for a Wednesday (3)
- No let-up possible if loaded with wealth (7)
- A press of people to have an infatuation with (5)
- Where the trees were close together in Arden, seemingly (5)
- A ship has given up gambling on football results (5)
- Do nothing less than join ten to be a bringer of misfortune (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2710

ACROSS 1. Suggest 5. Hunch 8. Lying-in 9. Seven 10. Competent 12. Lie 13. Clown 17. Lob 19. Storyline 21. Khaki 22. Thought 24. Singe 25. Retired
DOWN 1. Solace 2. Glimmer 3. Egg 4. Tense 5. Hesitancy 6. Novel 7. Hunger 11. Excessive 14. Swinger 15. Flakes 16. Seated 18. Brawn 20. Otter 23. Out

{ OUR TAKE }

After long delay, a new census

Transparency on the design of caste enumeration & a detailed timeline on data releases will be key

India will finally start its new census from March 2027, the ministry of home affairs announced on June 4. The announcement puts the reference date at March 1, 2027, except for high-altitude hilly areas where the reference date is October 1, 2026. To be sure, one has to wait for the detailed gazette notification to ascertain whether these reference dates are for population enumeration or house-listing. The latter has traditionally preceded the former by a few months in the conduct of the census in India.

The census is being conducted after a delay of six years. While the government has always maintained, including in the latest press release, that the delay was on account of the Covid-19 pandemic, the claim does not pass muster. India has conducted many statistical and mass exercises, including multiple surveys and elections since the pandemic, and some are not very different in scope from the census.

While the reasons for the delay — it could have been the dilemma on whether to enumerate caste or not — are best known to the government, what is important is that we will finally have a census. The census data is not just a headcount of the population. It is pretty much the lodestar for building many other databases in India. All of them have become obsolete because of the delayed census.

To be sure, it is important to sound a note of caution even as we welcome the announcement of a census date. One can flag at least two key concerns.

The census will enumerate caste in the entire country for the first time after 1931. This is easier said than done given the vast heterogeneity in India's social landscape and the political sensitivities while matching them with constitutionally mandated social categories for affirmative actions. It is important that the design for this enumeration is done transparently to avoid post-facto controversies. A similar consultative and transparent approach should be followed for other data collection heads as well. India has changed drastically since 2011 when the last census was carried out.

Given the fact that the census will be conducted on hand-held electronic devices — most government surveys are now conducted this way — the collection and publication of the data should not take as much time as its previous versions. A detailed timeline of data releases, beginning with the provisional numbers, should also be announced forthwith.

Transparency on both these counts will reduce controversies and facilitate this critical exercise.

A new framework to govern Ladakh

The regulations regarding Ladakh notified by the Centre on Tuesday are significant for multiple reasons. One, it suggests a direction for addressing governance concerns in the Union territory (UT), a first since 2019, when Article 370 was abrogated and Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into two UTs. Two, it provides partial redress to concerns that local communities highlighted in their 2023 protests — on safeguards for their unique regional identity, culture, and material resources. Three, a stable Ladakh with robust governance and infrastructure is essential since the UT shares a restive border with China: Indian and Chinese troops clashed in the Galwan Valley in 2020 and the stand-off continued till October last year.

The new rules address matters related to domicile status and job quotas (85% reservation for Ladakhis, excluding the EWS quota), which, hopefully, will allay fears about large-scale settlement of “outsiders” in this ecologically sensitive terrain. The rules concerning domicile status are similar to those in J&K, though Ladakh has no elected legislature. This means regulations governing Ladakh are executive decisions made by the Centre — in this case, in consultation with local representatives — and not the outcome of deliberations in an elected House. It would also mean these regulations can be withdrawn or amended through executive orders and without the approval of local stakeholders. Though such fears seem unwarranted, the Centre must have a conversation with the broader segment of Ladakhi voices if needed, and ensure that the regulations, say for the protection of local languages, become enabling provisions. After all, the call in Ladakh has been for statehood and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution that provides legislative, executive, judicial and financial powers, and the current initiative falls short of that demand.

Troubling gaps in coastal governance

A cargo ship capsizing off the Kerala coast has spotlighted India's regulatory complacency about maritime traffic

More than a week after a container ship with sensitive cargo sank off the Kerala coast, there are few indications of how the incident occurred, or of the full extent of environmental damage. While port authorities maintain there has been no significant oil spill, the discovery of floating nurdles along coastlines in Kerala and Tamil Nadu has raised red flags. The underlying regulatory questions remain unanswered.

The capsizing of the Liberia-flagged MSC ELSA 3, about 40 nautical miles off Kochi, has exposed troubling gaps in India's coastal governance. The vessel was carrying 643 containers, including a declared consignment of hazardous materials such as calcium carbide, a volatile chemical known to react explosively with seawater. It was also reportedly laden with furnace oil and diesel for propulsion. That such a ship — seemingly under opaque ownership and possibly flagged to a convenience registry — was allowed to transit between two Indian ports without closer scrutiny reveals a deeper malaise — a regulatory culture overly reliant on paperwork and cursory checks, rather than robust, ground-level enforcement.

India's maritime authorities, particularly the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), responded with commendable efficiency in the immediate aftermath of the capsizing. ICG swiftly deployed patrol vessels and aircraft to monitor the site and contain potential threats. Oil-spill dispersants were applied, and infrared sensors were used to track surface contamination. The tactical response was prompt and professionally executed.

Yet effective crisis management is no substitute for strong preventive oversight. ELSA 3's passage from Vizhinjam to Kochi, a short domestic leg possibly linked to cargo bound for a longer voyage, should have raised multiple red flags. The vessel was registered in Liberia — known for its open registry and lax regulatory controls. As one of the most prominent “flags of convenience” (FoC) States, Liberia is frequently used by shipowners seeking to avoid stricter labour, safety, and environmental standards. Tellingly, Liberia has reportedly declined to cooperate with any formal probe, forcing Indian authorities to confront the legal and regulatory fallout alone.

The vessel's crew composition and operational history only deepen concerns. Over the past two decades, ELSA 3 had reportedly changed names and flags multiple times — a practice known as flag hopping, often used to evade regulatory scrutiny. Its multinational crew, comprising Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, and Filipinos, is not unusual in global shipping, but

such combinations often signal low-cost, third-party management with diffuse lines of accountability.

These are not trivial procedural lapses. When hazardous cargo is transported through domestic waters, transparency of ownership, clarity on crew competence, and rigour in cargo verification are non-negotiable. Yet there is no evidence that authorities conducted meaningful checks before ELSA 3 sailed from Vizhinjam.

Equally troubling is the failure to translate technical risk into public safety measures. Fish-erfolk and environmental groups in Kerala have expressed frustration over the absence of timely advisories and delayed official communication. Even as coastal communities reported floating debris, tar balls, and chemical odours, official response remained muted.

India's legal frameworks for hazardous cargo management are comprehensive on paper. The Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Cargo) Rules, 1995, issued under the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, require detailed cargo manifests, safety protocols, and hazard disclosures. India is also a signatory to the MARPOL Convention, which sets international standards for oil-spill prevention and marine pollution control. Yet the gap between regulation and enforcement remains glaring. Inspections are often perfunctory, reduced to formalities on paper with little physical verification.

This is not an isolated incident. The



Abhijit Singh



India must fundamentally reconsider its engagement with vessels flagged to jurisdictions known for lax compliance.

2017 oil spill near Chennai and a chemical leak off Mumbai in 2010 exposed severe shortcomings in enforcement and emergency preparedness. The 2011 sinking of the MV Rak, a poorly maintained, Panama-flagged vessel off the Mumbai coast, revealed similar flaws. The ship had continued operating in Indian waters despite repeated warnings about its condition. Subsequent investigations pointed to inadequate port inspections and poor inter-agency coordination, failings that mirror many aspects of the MSC ELSA 3 episode.

A recurring theme in these incidents is the weakness of port State control — the mechanism by which countries inspect foreign-flagged vessels in their waters to ensure compliance with international standards. Indian authorities have long hesitated to strengthen this, allowing substandard ships to operate with impunity. ELSA 3, flagged for deficiencies in previous inspections — including one at Tuticorin last year — should have attracted greater scrutiny.

India's cargo carriage norms also deserve closer examination. While coastal trade is nominally reserved for Indian-flagged vessels, a 2018 exemption permits foreign ships to carry certain categories of EXIM and agricultural cargo without a DG Shipping licence. ELSA 3's voyage likely qualified under these rules, but its hazardous cargo

should have triggered a more rigorous inspection regime. At the very least, consignments involving reactive chemicals like calcium carbide must be publicly disclosed and centrally tracked.

Fixing this ecosystem will require more than bureaucratic tightening. India must fundamentally reconsider its engagement with vessels flagged to jurisdictions known for lax compliance. This means expanding satellite tracking and Automatic Identification System (AIS) coverage, joining international efforts to monitor shadow fleets, and advocating for reform within the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

As coastal states like Kerala contend with the fallout from the ELSA 3 incident, India cannot credibly claim maritime leadership in the Indo-Pacific while tolerating regulatory blind spots in its own backyard. Maritime power is not only about naval presence or port expansion, it is also about governance, oversight, and accountability at sea.

ELSA 3 capsizing may not have caused an immediate ecological catastrophe. But it has spotlighted India's chronic regulatory complacency. The next incident may not be so forgiving.

Abhijit Singh is the former head of the maritime policy initiative at ORF, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal

India's biodiversity is a strategic advantage

As India's geopolitical future sways with the swings of the global political pendulum, it is worth reflecting on the constant in the chaos, a North Star among spinning constellations. India's biodiversity can be that sanctuary, that bank which helps us remain *aatmanirbhar* (self-reliant). Natural wealth is immune to trade and tariff wars, a trump card in climate diplomacy. It is a sacred vault that can future-proof our ambitions to be a society of abundance by 2047.

India is one of the few countries with an unbroken culture of 5,000 years that is animated with the understanding that we are part of nature; that it is our privilege and duty to nurture and enrich all life on earth. That sacrality may be dimming in the face of a young population and polity demanding rapid, modern economic development. So, we must weave anew the stories, craft again the culture, the rituals, and behaviours that restore ecological belonging. Biodiversity is no longer a nice-to-have natural heritage. It could be a key differentiator in the global arena, as scarcity mindsets take over with the climate crisis. If we act now, if we protect now, societal gains and economic rewards will accrue over time.

Biodiversity markets are deepening, with a growing demand for high-quality carbon credits with biodiversity safeguards. There is a strong pushback from environmentalists. Yet, if done right, it could allow first-mile communities to be rewarded for conservation practices, to improve their lives and livelihoods.

The European Space Agency has launched a mission to map global biomass, penetrating dense forests to assess stored carbon. The Global Biodiversity Standard may push biodiversity monitoring further. This, in turn, will fuel the demand for verified ecosystem services provided by natural environments. The time is ripe to enhance our nation's biodiversity.

India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) commits us to 3 billion tonnes of CO2 sinks through additional forest cover by 2030. This is both a moral obligation and a strategic imperative for us. In 2023 alone, Earth lost 3.7 million hectares of tropical forest, which accounted for 6% of global CO2 emissions. By one estimate, in just one year, the climate crisis has led to population weighted GDP loss of 6.3%, disproportionately affecting Southeast Asia. If we do not take this seriously, our economic growth can stall, with cascading impacts on well-being. All economic activity stands on the foundation of ecological security. We have been, and will remain, a bio-mass-based society for a long time to come. Whether or not we participate in biodiversity markets, it is in our self-interest to regenerate this land.

Luckily, despite more than three decades of fast-tracked development — inevitably swallowing up natural capital — India retains high biodiversity. The Forest Rights Act recognises the critical role of indigenous communities in conservation. Centuries of stewardship ensured that only four mammals — the Asiatic cheetah, the Javan rhinoceros, Sumatran rhino and the Banteng — have become extinct in India, though many are now endangered.

India is still blessed with vast floral and faunal species. We boast 13% of global bird species, and a part of the world's largest mangrove forest. Though nearly half our land is under culti-

vation, there is significant co-existence with wildlife; 300 species were documented just in the agricultural lands of the Ganga basin. Outside our forests, pastoral lands, tea and coffee plantations and even urban parks hold untold biodiversity.

Protect our plants, and we protect critical water sources that can be an insurance against disrupted monsoon patterns. Forests slow down water, and they do it for free. The cost of man-made infrastructure for the same service has been prohibitive and repetitive — a Sisyphean task. Protect our animals, and we protect pharmaceutical innovation and health care of our citizens. The drugs of the future are waiting to be discovered in our biota.

Much has been newly understood about zoopharmacognosy — how animals use plants as natural medicine. Most primates, big cats and even domesticated cattle and dogs still have the nutritional wisdom to seek out worm-destroying shrubs and grasses. We can learn much from the animal world about protecting human health.

Biodiversity research also offers remediation against new pollutants. University of Wuhan researchers found that a sponge made of cotton and squid could absorb 99.9% of micro-plastics in water. Indian universities must urgently ramp up such research, leveraging the opportunity from fleeing global talent.

If forests are a storehouse for genetic resources, new materials, and biotechnology-based innovations, trees also create microclimates that mitigate the impact of extreme heat: 2024 was the hottest year on record. Churu, Rajasthan recorded a maximum of 50.5°C. At those temperatures, people can die. We need shady cover more than ever.

There is a price to be paid for inattention. Bees, essential for pollinating half of all food crops, are declining worldwide. Honeybee deaths have hit record highs around the globe, including in Punjab, India. Commercial beekeepers in the US have lost 60% of their colonies, valued conservatively at \$139 million this year. We are entangled with nature even as we drive species extinction. For today's generation, we need to spell out that entanglement. Can we go beyond GDP to better account for our natural capital?

Recently, the Indian Institute of Forest Management, in collaboration with the National Tiger Conservation Authority, conducted an economic valuation of India's tiger reserves, using Stanford University's open source InVest methodology. The study estimated that each of the 10 tiger reserves monitored generated about \$1.2 billion to \$4 billion in ecosystem services every year. Imagine what we will uncover about the inherent value of other ecological assets, by using indigenously refined models.

When we do, it will be easier to make better development trade-offs. A highway through a forest? A mega-dam across a life-generating river? Let's consider smarter alternatives.

Measuring biodiversity is only one way to enhance public appreciation of the ecological legacy we borrow from future generations. If we as shareholders are inspired to become trustees of India's natural capital, it will become a *kamadhenu* — a gift that keeps on giving.



Rohini Nilekani

Rohini Nilekani, chairperson, Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, is the author of *Samaaj, Sarkaar Bazaar – A citizen first approach.* The views expressed are personal

{ MAROS SEFCOVIC } EU TRADE COMMISSIONER

We can achieve positive results. But we are also ready to defend our interests

In the context of trade talks with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer

What needs to be done to end plastic pollution

Human appetite for plastics continues to grow at an alarming rate, as unsustainable as it is unnecessary. In 2025, the world is projected to consume 516 million tons of plastic — an alarming increase of 116 million tons in just one year. Yet only 21% is economically recyclable, and a mere 9% is actually recycled. Plastics have become omnipresent — from the peaks of remote mountains and depths of oceans to the tissues of human bodies and even unborn foetuses (as micro- and nano-

plastics transferred from the mother). What began as a revolutionary material for convenience and efficiency is now deeply entwined with one of the planet's most pressing environmental threats. This World Environment Day, there is an urgent need to come together and agree on ways to end plastic pollution including by phasing out single-use plastics. Our consumption patterns and dependence on plastics must change.

Some industries have found them particularly useful. Agriculture and its allied sectors, for example, have used plastics to deliver safe, fresh food to consumers. But plastic comes with growing concerns. Farmers frequently lack awareness and capacity for proper disposal, while inadequate infrastructure for collection, segregation, and recycling aggravates the problem. In many countries, including India, plastics are often burned, buried, or left in fields, which contaminates soil and water, eventually polluting oceans and degrading ecosystems. For example, phytoplanktons, which form the base of several aquatic food webs, harbour micro-plastics that end up in aquatic organisms such as fish, and ultimately humans.

Also, plastic production — an energy-hungry process — was responsible for more than 3% of greenhouse gas emissions in 2020, researchers estimate. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s landmark report, released in 2021, estimated 12.5 million tons of plastic products were used in agricultural value chains globally in 2019. Crop production and livestock were the largest users at 10 million tons annually, followed by fisheries and aquaculture with 2.1 million tons, and forestry with 0.2 million tons.

India updated its Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, with key amendments in 2021, 2022, and 2024. These include a ban on select single-use plastics, the introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging, and new provisions to address microplastics, biodegradable plastics, and to promote waste reduction through deposit and buy-back systems.

On top of such initiatives, there remains significant scope to strengthen and expand efforts further. Research and development will be a critical step. In February, FAO published a provisional Voluntary Code of Conduct outlining principles, actions, and measures that governments, plastic manufacturers, and agri-food stakeholders can adopt to promote sustainable management of plastics in agriculture. FAO's 2021 Assessment on Agricultural Plastics and their Sustainability advocated the so-called “6R model” — refuse, redesign, reduce, reuse, recycle and recover — for sustainable plastic management across the lifecycle, and recommended safe landfill disposal if 6R is unfeasible, while strictly avoiding open burning.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)'s Plastics Initiative adopts a programmatic approach, delivering projects at global, regional, and national levels across high-impact sectors and value chains. This ensures efforts are tailored to specific contexts while contributing to the overall goal of reducing plastic pollution. In India, the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge has brought together about 700,000 youth to encourage individual actions to end pollution. We need more citizen-led actions. The focus must be on changing consumer behaviour, looking beyond recycling, and finding ways to limit the environmental and health problems caused by plastic pollution. We need a life-cycle approach grounded in principles of circularity. This means looking at every stage of products' lives, from production, design, and consumption to disposal. Research suggests the life-cycle approach could save the world \$4.5 trillion in social and environmental costs through 2040.

Ending the use of single-use plastic products must be prioritised. It means redesigning plastic products so that they last longer, are less dangerous and can be reused and ultimately recycled. It means finding alternatives to plastics in a range of products. And it means preventing plastics from seeping into the environment. These need strong regulatory regimes, effective compliance, enhanced consumer awareness — all coupled with cost efficiency and reduced environmental impacts of alternatives that we are investing in.

Takayuki Hagiwara is FAO representative in India, Balakrishna Pisupati is head, UNEP India, and Shombi Sharp is UN resident coordinator, India. The authors are part of Team UN in India. The views expressed are personal



Takayuki Hagiwara



Balakrishna Pisupati



Shombi Sharp

Gold standard for trade

India must seek trade deals it can rely on

United States (US) Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick this week said that he was “very optimistic” that a trade deal with India could be agreed in an accelerated time-frame — before, in fact, the July deadline, which marks the end of the 90-day “pause” on the US’ high retributive tariffs. This sounds like excellent news, but should also be greeted with some scepticism. India’s negotiators have not made it a secret that they are not so certain that any initial deal can be comprehensive enough to satisfy stakeholders. It may be limited to certain sectors that are politically important to the current US administration. However, it may include certain agricultural sectors as well, which would be a significant concession from India.

While it is essential that the government do its best to avoid being hit with high tariffs, it should also keep in mind that any deal with the US is subject to the vagaries of its leadership and changes in the political and legal climate. Judicial challenges to various tariff decisions taken by US President Donald Trump are already evident. It is also not clear whether the US Congress, although dominated by his party, would support whatever Mr Trump finally decides — and, technically, trade deals are the province of the legislature and not the executive. The powers to assent might be retrieved by the legislature at any time. And, of course, there is Mr Trump’s impulsiveness, which too must be taken into account. There can be little doubt that any deal with India, if the popular response among his base is not entirely favourable, might well be unilaterally revoked at any time — regardless of the legal basis for such a revocation.

Given that the US is going through the sort of political turmoil that makes it an unreliable partner, India cannot afford to put all its eggs in one basket when it comes to trade. The fact is that, like everyone else in the world, it will find it necessary to identify other trading partners with which it can enter into rule-based, reliable agreements. Trading links cannot be built or sustained under the sort of volatile circumstances that currently exist in the US. Rules and reliability are required for the investment of time and capital that underlie strong trade links. India should thus maintain some firm lines while negotiating with the US, but lower its demands with those that demonstrate a willingness to follow such rules.

There are many such possibilities, some of which have a similarly short time horizon. The leaders of India and the European Union, for example, have also promised that a deal will be agreed upon by the end of the year. Given that this will certainly be rule-based and reliable, it should be a priority, and New Delhi must make the commitments required to get it over the finishing line. But it need not stop there. It must take a fresh look at various plurilateral blocs and re-evaluate their usefulness in this new age of trade. India might not have joined the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership for fear of joining a grouping that includes China, but times have clearly changed since then and the impossibility of cutting Chinese goods or investment completely out of value chains is now better understood. Higher-quality agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership should also be scrutinised once again, and regulatory changes put into motion that will allow India to approach candidate status. Rule-based arrangements remain the gold standard for trade.

The art of giving

Bill Gates has reset billionaire philanthropy standards

As one of the early generation of “nerd billionaires” who built personal fortunes on their computer skills, Microsoft founder Bill Gates has set standards in corporate philanthropy. Since it was set up in 2000, after Mr Gates stepped down as chief executive of Microsoft, the Gates Foundation has built itself a formidable reputation as a major player in global philanthropy, becoming the world’s third-largest charitable foundation with assets of \$77 billion. By announcing in Addis Ababa on Tuesday that he would give away 99 per cent of his vast fortune to Africa by 2045, he has raised the bar even higher. The timing of this announcement is significant: It comes soon after United States (US) President Donald Trump has chosen to drastically cut aid to Africa and end the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the iconic development agency founded by President John F Kennedy in 1961. It could be read as a message to his fellow philanthropists — nine of the world’s top 10 are from the US — to grab the baton of American soft power that the 47th President has chosen to drop.

The chosen year, 2045, is noteworthy. That is the year his foundation plans to end operations. It is also the year that Mr Gates will turn 90 and, by his own reckoning, his personal wealth is expected to touch \$200 billion. This is a substantial sum. Since its inception, the foundation has spent over \$100 billion, much of it on addressing the control of diseases such as malaria, polio, and AIDS, and on sanitation. Mr Gates’ role in the foundation and funding of the global network to make the Covid-19 vaccine accessible to developing nations offers the most recent example of impactful spending. In Africa, where the Gates Foundation has had a long association, the three priorities are to end maternal and infant mortality, ensure that the next generation is free from deadly infectious disease, and lift millions of people out of poverty. In and of themselves, these goals are unexceptionable and like the Buffet and Soros philanthropic ventures, the Gates Foundation has mastered the art of working constructively with local partners to drive his agenda. In India, for example, the foundation has worked closely with the governments of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh on improving health and education outcomes.

All told, the Gates Foundation has been an energetic institution in furthering its developmental agenda with budgets that occasionally outstrip the development spending of small states. This has given rise to concerns about the longer-term consequences of the aid-industry complex as bastions of unaccountable power and influence. To be sure, there is no direct evidence of this yet. More generally, as India is discovering with its mandate on corporate social responsibility spending by corporations of a certain size, ever larger sums of money being expended by corporate philanthropy cannot viably make a dent in the magnitude of global hunger or disease without concomitant sound political governance. Indeed, cynics claim that the expansion of billionaire philanthropy is driven more by the need to shield personal wealth from high federal and state death duties and build reputational capital in an age of rising inequality. Certainly, in giving away most of his future wealth, Mr Gates has achieved both objectives in the most constructive way possible.

Is RBI falling behind the curve again?

Given the long lags in monetary policy’s impact on the real economy, too much caution could prove unnecessarily costly



With consumer price index (CPI)-based inflation dropping to 3.16 per cent in April and likely to fall below 3 per cent in May, is the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) — through its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) — falling behind the curve again? The RBI has historically been a poor predictor of inflation. It was slow to reduce the repo rate from 6.5 per cent throughout 2024 and has only now started to ease it slowly, with 25 basis point cuts in both February and April. Meanwhile, the real repo rate now stands at an exceedingly high +2.84 percentage points.

This is the same mistake made between 2015 and 2019, when real rates were kept extremely high — averaging +2.2 percentage points — and hurt economic growth (*see table*). At that time, the RBI’s inflation expectations were seriously flawed and consistently higher than actual inflation. This persistent error kept real repo rates too high for a prolonged period. The RBI (and the MPC) became what economic literature refers to as “inflation nutters” — that is, they focused solely on inflation and not on their dual mandate of growth and inflation.

Subsequently, under a new team, the RBI deftly helped India navigate the Covid crisis. As I argued in this paper in March 2024¹, the mandarins on Mint Street not only kept monetary policy loose (but not too loose) from 2020 to 2022 to address the pandemic-induced crisis, but also began tightening by August 2022 to rein in inflation, which had reached 6.7 per cent that year. This was more than 2 percentage points above the 4 per cent inflation target, breaching the upper limit of the tolerance band under India’s flexible inflation targeting (FIT) regime. (*see table*)

To its credit, the RBI avoided the mistakes made in the period after the global financial crisis of 2008/9, when it kept repo rates too low for too long. Com-

bined with a very loose fiscal policy, this set off a period of high inflation, averaging above 10 per cent from 2009-2013. This prolonged period of high inflation contributed significantly to the United Progressive Alliance’s election loss in 2014.

By 2014, the RBI was forced to raise the repo rate to 8 per cent to bring inflation down. Inflation eventually fell to 4.9 per cent by 2015, aided by tighter monetary policy and a sharp decline in oil prices. Crude oil prices dropped from \$108.56 per barrel in 2013 to \$98.47 in 2014, then fell sharply to \$52.32 in 2015 and further to \$43.67 by 2016.

Many experts attribute the subsequent period of low inflation to the introduction of the FIT regime, but that is not true. By the time India adopted FIT in 2015, inflation had already fallen. It remained low all the way to 2019 due to excessively tight monetary policy and low oil prices. My own analysis shows that once you factor in the effects of monetary policy and imported inflation, targeting per se had no additional contribution to lowering inflation. Economists Surjit Bhalla, Karan Bhasin, and Prakash Loungani² show more widely across countries that the benefits of targeting inflation are hugely exaggerated.

Given the long lags before monetary policy’s impact on growth and inflation becomes visible, the main problem now, in my view, lies in inflation forecasting, where the RBI needs considerable improvement. The RBI is currently predicting inflation at 4 per cent for FY26, but inflation may turn out to be much lower, especially with the prospect of lower global oil prices and stronger agricultural growth in India. Earlier in the year, there was a risk that rupee depreciation would contribute to inflation, but with a weakening US dollar that risk has diminished.

The RBI needs to act more swiftly and boldly to



IF TRUTH BE TOLD
AJAY CHHIBBER

Consequences of rising US debt

Jamie Dimon, chief executive officer of JPMorgan Chase, the world’s largest bank by market capitalisation, recently warned that a crack in the US bond market was imminent. Undoubtedly, the prediction is dire, and if it comes true, the consequences for financial markets and the global economy could be severe. The US has the largest and most liquid government debt market in the world. Since global financial markets are deeply interconnected and interdependent, a dislocation in the US debt market can impact practically every financial asset across the world, with significant implications for the real economy.

The yield on the 30-year US government bond recently crossed the psychological 5 per cent mark. The yield on 10-year US government bonds has also inched up, underscoring that investors now expect higher compensation for holding US government bonds due to a perceived increase in risk. Rating agency Moody’s recently downgraded US debt. Given that the other two major rating agencies had already done so, it is for the first time in over a century that the world’s largest debt market doesn’t have a triple-A rating.

The obvious reason for rising nervousness among investors is the expected increase in US government debt. The decline in the dollar is also raising questions. According to estimates, the Bill to extend tax cuts, among other things, which has been passed by the House of Representatives and awaits Senate approval, will alone add about \$4 trillion to the federal debt stock over the next decade. That’s not all. According to the Congressional Budget Office’s extended baseline projections, the federal debt stock held by the public is expected to increase from approximately 100 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2025 to over 156 per cent by 2055. Slower economic growth will lead to a significantly faster increase in debt. The US budget deficit has moved to a structurally higher level. It is running a

budget deficit worth over 6 per cent of GDP, compared to the past 50-year average of 3.8 per cent. Notably, the US is running a higher deficit despite favourable labour market conditions. Given the expected surge in debt stock, a significantly higher proportion of expenditure will go towards interest payments (*see chart*).

Net interest payment has increased from about 1.3 per cent of GDP in 2015 to an estimated 3.2 per cent in 2025. This is likely to go up substantially in the coming years and would top 5 per cent of GDP. Such an outlook for the US government’s finances will have at least three potential outcomes. First, a rising interest burden will alter the composition of government spending and potentially impact growth outcomes. Second, higher demand for funds by the US government to finance its budget deficit will crowd out private investment. It will push up the cost of capital and keep interest rates elevated for much longer than most anticipated, if not permanently. Some commentators have argued that the era of low interest rates is over. Trade-related uncertainties and the impact of higher tariffs on inflation will also limit the scope of policy accommodation by the Federal Reserve.

As a result, low investment would hamper productivity and diminish the long-term growth prospects of the US, with direct implications for global growth potential. Third, higher financing requirements of the US government and expected higher interest rates will tighten global financial conditions, making life difficult for countries dependent on external financing. Bond yields have also increased in other developed markets. Although investors are more worried about the US market for valid reasons, debt is rising in other parts of the world as well. According to an International Monetary Fund study covering 175 countries, more than two-thirds now have a higher debt stock than before the pandemic.



REAL TERMS
RAJESH KUMAR

RBI’s repo-inflation reality — 2009-2025

Year	Repo rate	CPI inflation	Real repo rate
2009	4.9	10.9	-6.0
2010	5.8	12.0	-6.2
2011	6.7	8.9	-2.2
2012	6.8	9.5	-2.7
2013	7.8	10.0	-2.2
2014	8.0	6.7	-1.3
2015	7.3	4.9	+2.4
2016	6.5	4.9	+1.6
2017	6.2	3.3	+2.9
2018	6.4	3.9	+2.5
2019	5.3	3.7	+1.6
2020	4.35	6.6	-2.25
2021	4.0	5.1	-1.1
2022	4.9	6.7	-1.8
2023	6.45	5.6	+0.85
2024	6.5	5.0	+1.50
April 2025	6.0	3.16	+2.84

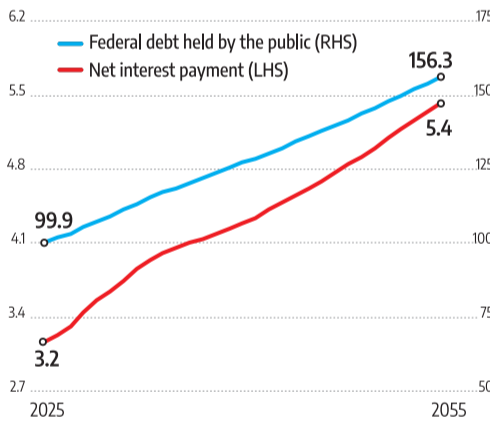
lower the repo rate to avoid the mistakes made during the period 2015-2019. The current set of technocrats leading the RBI are not “inflation nutters” — at least I do not think they are — and pride themselves on following the data. But they are behind the curve in lowering rates. Even with the RBI’s inflation expectations for the year at 4 per cent, which I have already explained is too high, the repo rate could be reduced rapidly to 5 per cent, 100 basis points lower than where it is today. With the European Central Bank cutting rates rapidly and the United States Federal Reserve likely to do so later in the year, the RBI can cut rates more aggressively to help bolster India’s growth and reinvigorate domestic demand, especially in the face of a much tougher external environment, where global growth is likely to decline due to tariff wars and a huge spike in global uncertainty.

Even with Q4 FY25 gross domestic product growth jumping to 7.4 per cent, the RBI must not feel complacent on the growth front. The monetary stance in the last meeting had already shifted to accommodative towards growth. Many experts and even some MPC members will argue for a calibrated and cautious approach and vote for a 25 bps cut in the repo rate. But given the long lags in the effects of monetary policy on the real economy, too much caution could prove unnecessarily costly. Bolder action is needed from the current set of mandarins on Mint Street. The data indicates that a larger cut of 50 basis points in the repo rate in June would be warranted, especially now, when India needs to rely even more on domestic demand to keep the growth momentum.

The author is distinguished fellow, Isaac Center of Public Policy, Ashoka University, and co-author *Unshackling India*, Harper-Collins 2021, *Financial Times* Best New Book in Economics, 2022.

1. <https://shorturl.at/pM8qu>
2. *An assessment of the performance of inflation targeting* / CEPR

Increasing debt burden (Percentage of GDP)



Source: Congressional Budget Office’s extended baseline projections

In advanced economies, the level of debt stock is expected to be at 113.3 per cent of GDP in 2030, about 10 percentage points higher than in 2019. The debt stock in the US is expected to increase by about 20 percentage points during the same period.

Nevertheless, it is hard to argue that the projected US government debt position will force investors to dump Treasuries en masse in the near to medium term, partly because there aren’t too many alternatives. However, sustained higher issuance of government bonds will keep the market on edge. Thus, occasional sharp spikes in yields because of large-scale selling should not be ruled out.

A clear takeaway for a country like India, which has growth ambitions and depends on foreign capital to fund its savings-investment gap, is that it needs to prepare for slow global growth and higher financial market volatility, including in the currency market.

Plastic persuasions



CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

The annual observance of World Environment Day on June 5 goes back to 1973. Led by the United Nations Environment Programme, it is a major occasion for governments and corporations to renew their commitment to environmental causes, take meaningful action and bring new people into the ambit of outreach. It is hosted by a different country each year. In 2025, the Republic of Korea will have that honour. This year’s theme is #BeatPlasticPollution.

In this context, journalist Saabira Chaudhuri’s book *Consumed: How Big Brands Got Us Hooked on Plastic* assumes tremendous significance, more so because we are just two months away from a meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee in Geneva, where a global treaty will be negotiated to end plastic pollution. An international, legally binding instrument of this kind seems like an ambitious undertaking but it is the need of the hour.

The author grew up in Bengaluru, obtained an MA in business and economic reporting from New York University, and now lives in London. The book focuses mostly on the United States and India while discussing the history of how plastic became an indispensable part of human life. This historical lens that she adopts is important so that environmental advocacy is grounded in solid facts and not based only on ideology and

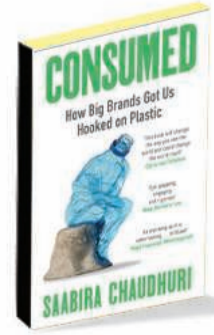
emotion. We need to have a clear grasp of why plastics became so popular across geographies. They did not emerge out of thin air.

Ms Chaudhuri writes, for instance, “The Second World War had seen the largest influx of women into the American workforce on record. While many stopped working initially after men returned from the frontlines, a war-born desire for convenient weeknight meals, easy-to-clean surfaces and wrinkle-free clothes did not disappear.” The author’s intention here is not to pin the blame for plastic pollution on women. Since the burden of housework was shouldered largely by women, the promise of more time for rest and leisure was understandably quite attractive. Plastic offered them a way out of monotony and drudgery.

In the Indian scenario, Manmohan Singh’s decision as finance minister to slash excise duties on shampoo in 1993 put it within the reach of people who could not afford it earlier. Ms Chaudhuri writes, “Taxes dropped from 120.75 per

cent to 70 per cent, making sachets way more profitable.” She also points out that sachets were also appealing to women “who typically were in charge of buying household essentials” because they “offered built-in portion control — precluding wayward children or careless husbands from using too much, the way they might from a bottle”. These well-researched culturally specific insights from the author help us look at plastic not as a monster but as a material that has both pros and cons.

This book also helps us make sense of how and why businesses engage in greenwashing, which is a widespread practice of making false, deceptive and unsubstantiated claims of having a positive impact on the environment. Greenwashing is often a tactic used to appear environmentally friendly so as to win over



Consumed: How Big Brands Got Us Hooked on Plastic
by Saabira Chaudhuri
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368 pages ₹599

new customers or retain existing ones.

The author examines in detail how in the United States recycling became a “get-out-of-jail-free card in a situation otherwise riddled with reputational risk”. Instead of any real impact in terms of reducing pollution, it became a marketing campaign to manage public perception. By emphasising this, the author cautions us against being taken for a ride by businesses that are looking to make a quick buck out of our sensitivities that favour being eco-friendly.

Ms Chaudhuri’s training as a journalist ensures that she stays cool-headed instead of peddling doomsday predictions. She reminds us that different kinds of plastic melt at different temperatures. “Even today, mixed plastics recycling is plagued by

collection and sorting problems; the resulting park benches and picnic tables have never commanded a high-enough price to justify collecting and cleaning big volumes of often highly contaminated plastics,” she adds. These are realities that people need to know as they grapple with systems that seem outside their control, and also make small changes in their own lives.

The book ends with a useful section titled FAQs, where the author addresses basic but important questions that many do not have reliable answers to. Some of the questions are: Why are plastics recycling rates so slow? What’s greener: Cloth diapers or disposables? How can I protect myself against greenwashing? Isn’t paper better than plastic? Are bio-based plastics a good alternative to fossil-fuel-based ones? The author offers explanations that are accessible but not simplistic. This book is not the last word on the subject but it is a good start.

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The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

FIRST STEPS IN LADAKH

Centre's notifications go a long way towards addressing demands of people. Task ahead is to deepen representative democracy

SINCE 2019 AND the bifurcation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, the leaders from the Union Territory of Ladakh have demanded constitutional protections for land ownership, economic opportunities, preserving tribal cultures and languages, and a more representative government. Each of these clusters of demands is rooted in the unique historical and demographic profile of the region, and the promise — both explicit and implicit — at the time of the abrogation of Article 370 was that they would be addressed. Earlier this week, a slew of notifications by the central government moved the needle significantly on many of the demands from Ladakh, especially around domicile-based government jobs, protection and promotion of languages and quotas. Welcome as they are, these orders should be followed in due course by measures that ensure a deepening of representative democracy in Ladakh and assuage some of the anxieties around land rights.

The Ladakh Civil Services Decentralisation and Recruitment (Amendment) Regulation introduces a domicile requirement for government jobs: To be eligible, a person must have resided in Ladakh for 15 years or appeared in Class X or Class XII examinations in the UT. The Union Territory of Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation has placed a cap of 85 per cent on reservation, excluding the EWS quota. This, in effect, provides nearly blanket reservation for local people (the UT has a 90 per cent Scheduled Tribe population). The Centre has also recognised English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti and Purgi as official languages of the Union Territory, in addition to facilitating other mechanisms for promoting and protecting the region's culture and heritage. Bhoti and Purgi are spoken by a majority of the population, and their long-delayed recognition has been a demand for many years.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Centre and the armed forces have — and will continue to have — a deep interest and presence in Ladakh. The UT borders both Pakistan and China and has been a military flashpoint with both countries — in Kargil with Pakistan in 1999, and the border clashes with China from 2020 to 2024. In addition, vast swathes of land in the region are important for the country's renewable energy goals. These imperatives, however, cannot negate the underlying principles of democracy. The demand from many in Ladakh was the area's inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution — like parts of the Northeast — which allows for significant autonomy. The Centre, on its part, has sought to provide protections through its orders. But it does not seem to have engaged with the demand for restrictions on people from outside owning land. Even more glaring in its absence is a greater devolution of powers to the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs). Currently, these local elected bodies have no legislative powers and few administrative ones. Ladakh, like the rest of the erstwhile state of J&K, deserves some form of representative government. As the Centre and the local leadership negotiate the next steps on the political architecture for the UT, giving its people a voice should be paramount.

FOOD FOR TIGER

With prey base declining, the animal can stray out of reserves. People-centric conservation can reduce conflict

CONSERVATIONISTS WERE JOLTED in 2006 when the country's tiger population plummeted to an all-time low of about 1,400. Course corrections in wildlife management have led to the majestic animal staging a remarkable recovery since that crisis. The country's protected areas have more than 3,600 tigers according to the latest enumeration of the animal in 2023. That Tiger Census also underlined areas of concern. The data revealed a dip in tiger numbers in Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha. Now, another national assessment by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has flagged an emerging conservation challenge in the protected areas of these states. It has revealed that the prey that sustains these big cats — chital, sambal and the Indian bison — are declining. A sufficient prey base is not just elemental for the nutritional needs of the big cat, it's also necessary to obviate human-wildlife conflict. With enough herbivores within the protected areas, the tigers are less likely to stray out in search of alternative sources of food.

A study published in the journal *Science* earlier this year also joined the dots between tiger population and the animal's declining prey base. The reserves where tiger populations have come down — Guru Ghasidas, Indravati, and Udanti-Sitanadi in Chhattisgarh, Simlipal and Satkosia in Odisha, and Palamau in Jharkhand — are situated in some of the poorest districts in the country. The study linked poverty with the poaching of ungulates. "These reserves are known to have high incidences of bush meat consumption, often with the use of traps and snares that are usually indiscriminate in killing prey and predators," the study found and made a strong case for linking "biodiversity recovery" with socioeconomic improvements. It drew a contrast with tiger habitats in proximity to relatively prosperous areas, where people have received the benefits of conservation-related tourism.

To revive the prey base, the WII and NTCA study recommends on-site breeding of ungulates in enclosures designed to keep predators away. This should, at best, be seen as a short-term measure. Herbivores raised in a protected environment are known to have a weak anti-predatory response. They cannot provide a sustainable prey base for the tiger in the long-run. More critical for the tiger's recovery is improving the quality of the animal's habitat. The good news is that some of the areas where the tiger and its prey are on the wane — in Chhattisgarh, for example — still have good-quality forests. Left-wing extremism is also on the decline in these areas. More needs to be done to make people partners in sustainable conservation.

A TASTE OF JOY

Kerala anganwadis will now serve biryani, thanks to a young boy. The real nourishment is the side of dignity it comes with

IT BEGAN WITH a bowl of upma — plain, filling, but nutritious — and ended in what few grown-ups would ask of a welfare meal: Biryani and chicken fry. The request of three-year-old Trijal "Shanku" from Alappuzha district, captured by his mother in a video that went viral in January, has led to the revision of anganwadi menus in Kerala to include egg biryani, pulao, and a promise of variety, nutrition, and dignity.

In a society where everyone but the child herself is involved in the decision of what she can, and should, eat, Shanku's request has cut through the bureaucratic noise and touched something essential: The idea that joy and nourishment shouldn't be luxuries but rights even in the most modest state-run centres. There is, indeed, a lesson in how the Kerala government has managed to honour the wishes of a child while balancing it with nutritional recommendations at a time when the question of what food should be allowed in government schemes remains fraught, not least because of its connection to questions of caste, religion and privilege. In February, Maharashtra decided to stop serving eggs or sweets in mid-day meals. Madhya Pradesh and Goa, too, have dropped them from the menu. This, when malnutrition remains a challenge, especially among marginalised communities.

Eggs are one of the most accessible sources of nutrition. But the real nourishment in Shanku's story lies in what this moment has fed — hope and a model of governance that is grounded not merely in data, but in empathy. When his mother informed him about his wish being fulfilled, the boy responded with a delighted "Thank you, Minister aunty" to state health, women and child welfare minister Veena George, who took heed of his request. In that note of gratitude was an acknowledgement of what it means to be counted in a system that so often glides over the needs of its youngest and most vulnerable.



SANJIB BARUAH

UNTIL A FEW months ago, it seemed as if the goodwill commanded by the interim government of Bangladesh headed by Muhammad Yunus — the product of an agreement between the major political parties, the army, and student leaders — would be enough for it to carry out its ambitious reform agenda. But while the reform efforts are still on, the banning of the Awami League and the onset of the absentee trial of the ousted leader, Sheikh Hasina, have produced an unsettling sense that we are witnessing what commentator Taqbir Huda calls "the perverse circularity of revenge politics in Bangladesh". This is not the best of circumstances for external players to actively support the accountability and reform objectives of the interim government.

In February 2025, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released a fact-finding report on the purported abuses and violations of human rights that took place during the massive protests in Bangladesh from July 1 to August 15, 2024. In the team's assessment, up to 1,400 people could have died during the protests, with military rifles and shotguns loaded with deadly metal pellets — common weapons used by Bangladesh's security forces — killing the majority of them. The UN human rights office, says the report, "has reasonable grounds to believe that these violations were carried out with the knowledge, coordination and direction of the political leadership and senior security sector officials, in pursuance of a strategy to suppress the protests and related expressions of dissent".

Despite its name, the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), which is holding Hasina's absentee trial, is a domestic court. It will be an understatement to say that the conduct of a legal proceeding in absentia is controversial under most circumstances (including in the case of India's foreigners' tribunals). Article 63 of the Rome Statute that set up the International Criminal Court — of which Bangladesh is a state party — states quite unambiguously that "the accused shall be present during the trial". But

What Dhaka needs

To break with the past, Bangladesh must create institutions — not pursue vendetta

While there is a lot to be said for the adage that justice delayed is justice denied, there are situations when new opportunities for justice become available with the passage of time. For instance, it is not unusual for familiar barriers to justice, such as the power and influence of people committing breaches, to weaken and disappear over time. There are good reasons for why war crimes, and crimes against humanity — whether committed in time of war or in time of peace — are not subject to any statutory limitation.

the fact that Hasina's trial would be in her absence doesn't seem to greatly concern its backers. In response to a reporter's queries, as far back as December 2024, the special adviser to the tribunal's chief prosecutor said, rather nonchalantly, "I don't know what India will do about Sheikh Hasina's return to Bangladesh. But if India does not have her return here, her trial will continue in her absence."

The UN fact-finding report notes that the interim government is committed to holding those responsible for the serious violations accountable, and that it has concentrated its resources on bringing criminal cases before the ICT as quickly as possible. But it says that several interlocutors, including some human rights defenders and public interest attorneys, have voiced concerns about the ICT's contentious history and its legal structure, and are sceptical of its ability to conduct truly independent, fair, and effective proceedings. The interim government has since approved amendments to the ICT Act to address several issues regarding due process and fair trials raised by the UN human rights office and others. However, the revisions, says the UN report, addressed some but not all those issues. It specifically notes the continued absence of the fair trial protections required for proceedings in absentia. The banning of the Awami League, which happened after the UN report was released, raises additional issues about Sheikh Hasina's right to due process and a fair trial.

In view of the speed with which the interim government is proceeding to try Bangladesh's ousted leader, it may be worth reflecting on the question of time and the pursuit of justice. While there is a lot to be said for the adage that justice delayed is justice denied, there are situations when new opportunities for justice become available with the passage of time. For instance, it is not unusual for familiar barriers to justice, such as the power and influence of people committing breaches, to weaken and disappear over time. There are good reasons for why war crimes, and crimes against humanity — whether com-

mitted in time of war or in time of peace — are not subject to any statutory limitation. The Nazi war criminal John Demjanjuk, who worked as a Nazi camp-guard and immigrated to the United States in 1952, was finally convicted and sentenced to five years in prison by a Munich court in 2011 — nearly eight decades after the Holocaust.

The UN fact-finding report includes an important observation about Bangladeshi politics, that its "political parties have been historically dominated by individual leaders who pursued politics of patronage and sought to weaponise the political system against their opponents". The adverse effects of such practices, however, were tempered so long as people were able to regularly vote the ruling party out of power. This was possible because of "a constitutional system of temporary caretaker governments that would seek to level the playing field before a new round of elections". Unfortunately, following its victory in the 2008 election, the Awami League eliminated this institution. Many observers of Bangladeshi politics recognise the caretaker arrangement as an important institutional innovation in the country's constitutional history. Thankfully, the report of the constitution reform commission appointed by the interim government includes the recommendation of "the appointment of an election-time interim government after the end of the term of the Parliament or, if the Parliament is dissolved, until the next elected government is sworn in".

There is no denying that many of Bangladesh's institutions require reforms. But there are valid concerns about whether an unelected interim government has the authority to carry out all the reforms that Yunus and his colleagues would like to make. Reinstating the institution of the caretaker government, and establishing robust constitutional safeguards for it, could serve as a significant legacy for Yunus and the government he heads.

The writer is professor emeritus of Political Studies at Bard College, New York



ASHWINI VAISHNAW

ON THE GREEN TRACK

Indian Railways is helping the country move closer to its net zero goal

EVERY TIME YOU choose to travel by train, you are not just choosing comfort or convenience — you are choosing a cleaner, greener Bharat. More than 700 crore people chose to travel in Indian Railways last year. It's our lifeline, and a green promise for tomorrow.

Indian Railways is helping the country move closer to the Panchamrit goals set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi — net zero by 2070. It is enabling this through a multi-pronged approach: By shifting traffic from road to rail and powering operations with cleaner, greener energy sources. Together, these moves are helping India decarbonise its economy at scale.

In 2013-14, Indian Railways carried about 1,055 million tonnes of cargo. This has increased to 1,617 million tonnes in 2024-25, making our railway the second-largest cargo-carrying railway in the world. Using the computations done by experts, this shift of cargo from road to rail has helped our country save over 143 million tonnes of CO2 emissions. That's like planting 121 crore trees.

Transporting goods by rail costs nearly half of what it does by road. This means big savings, not just for businesses, but for the entire economy. This shift has helped save Rs 3.2 lakh crore in logistics costs over

Railways are also much cleaner, releasing 90 per cent less carbon dioxide than trucks. That's less smoke in our skies and cleaner air for us. This road-to-rail transition has saved us 2,857 crore litres of diesel, roughly translating to savings of Rs 2 lakh crore in fuel costs.

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India imports oil. Therefore, it makes strategic sense to electrify our transportation sector so that our dependence on imports is reduced. In the 60 years before 2014, Indian Railways electrified 21,000 km of track. And in the past 11 years, we have electrified 47,000 km. Today, 99 per cent of our broad-gauge network is electrified.

Indian Railways is increasingly using green energy for stations, factories and workshops. Now, it is working with states to get more green energy for running the trains. This will all lead to India achieving its net zero goal.

Building on this momentum, dedicated freight corridors (DFCs) are electrified, high-capacity railway lines designed exclusively for goods transport. With 2,741 km operational, DFCs have eased congestion on roads and significantly reduced diesel consumption and carbon emissions.

India is also embracing modern, zero-emission technology like the hydrogen-powered train. The first train will run be-

tween Jind and Sonapat in Haryana and carry up to 2,600 passengers. It will be the most powerful and longest hydrogen train in the world.

India is proving that economic growth and ecological responsibility can, and must, go hand in hand. According to the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index 2023, India now ranks 38 out of 139 countries, a jump of 16 places since 2014. The expansion of railway electrification has reduced costs and emissions. It has also increased speed and capacity, helping India move closer to world-class logistics standards.

PM Modi set 2030 as the year to achieve net zero for Indian Railways. Due to the accelerated electrification and large-scale shifting of cargo from road to rail, Indian Railways is on track to achieve net zero (scope 1) within 2025.

On this World Environment Day, Indian Railways reaffirms its commitment to sustainable development. Every electrified track, every solar panel placed, and every freight container off the road is a promise — to our people and our planet.

The writer is Minister of Railways, Electronics and Information Technology, and Information and Broadcasting, Government of India



JUNE 5, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

DHAKA TALKS FAIL

INDIA AND BANGLADESH failed to reach an agreement on sharing their common river, the Ganga, despite three days of talks in Dhaka, officials said. The talks had been called to work out an agreement on sharing the Ganga's waters and augmenting the river's flow during the lean season. Bangladesh foreign affairs adviser Humayun Rashid Choudhury termed the talks "inconclusive".

VIOLENCE UNABATED

POLICE BURST TEAR gas shells to quell violent mobs in areas of north Mehsana and

south Surat, which witnessed unabated violence during the last 24 hours. An abortive attempt was made to set on fire a coach of the Ahmedabad-Kalol shuttle. A state transport bus was set ablaze and the police also seized 900 litres of acid in Nadiad in Kheda district.

PM's 5-NATION TOUR

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi leaves New Delhi tomorrow on a five-nation fortnight-long tour, aimed primarily at establishing contacts at the highest level and evolving the ties between India and these countries. Considerable importance is being attached to his visits to France and the United States,

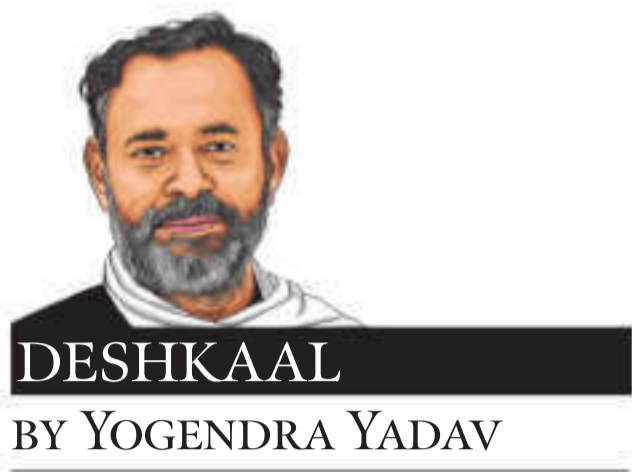
where tremendous interest has been generated about India, thanks to the coming Festival of India in these two countries. The festivals, the first of their kind to be held outside the United Kingdom, are on a scale never attempted before.

BLASTS IN GURDASPUR

THE UNEASY CALM during the initial days of the "Operation Bluestar week" was broken by two bomb blasts in Gurdaspur district. Three terrorists lobbed a country-made explosive device in front of the public cloth house at about 9.30 p.m. One of the terrorists was overpowered by the people.

The rediscovery of India

When a nation’s idea of itself is stolen, what follows must be more than recovery — it must be the re-imagination of a rich, rooted, plural and non-jingoistic nationalism



HOW SHOULD YOU react when something you value is stolen? Once you overcome the initial bewilderment (Where is it?), curiosity (Who stole it? How?) and guilt (Was I careless?), you arrive at the all-important question: How do I reclaim it so as to not lose it again?

That is the question I would like to take away from the thoughtful response (‘Who stole my nationalism?’, IE, May 31) to my article (‘The nationalism we forgot’, IE, May 27) by Suhas Palshikar — my colleague, co-author and friend for three decades. His disagreements are constructive, as our starting point is the same. Suhas *bhai* puts it better than I did: It’s not just the backsliding of Indian nationalism, but the delegitimisation and resolute replacement by a phoney version based on the “narrow, vicious, macho and exclusionary European duplication of nationalism”. Therefore, reclaiming Indian nationalism is arguably the most critical priority for political action today.

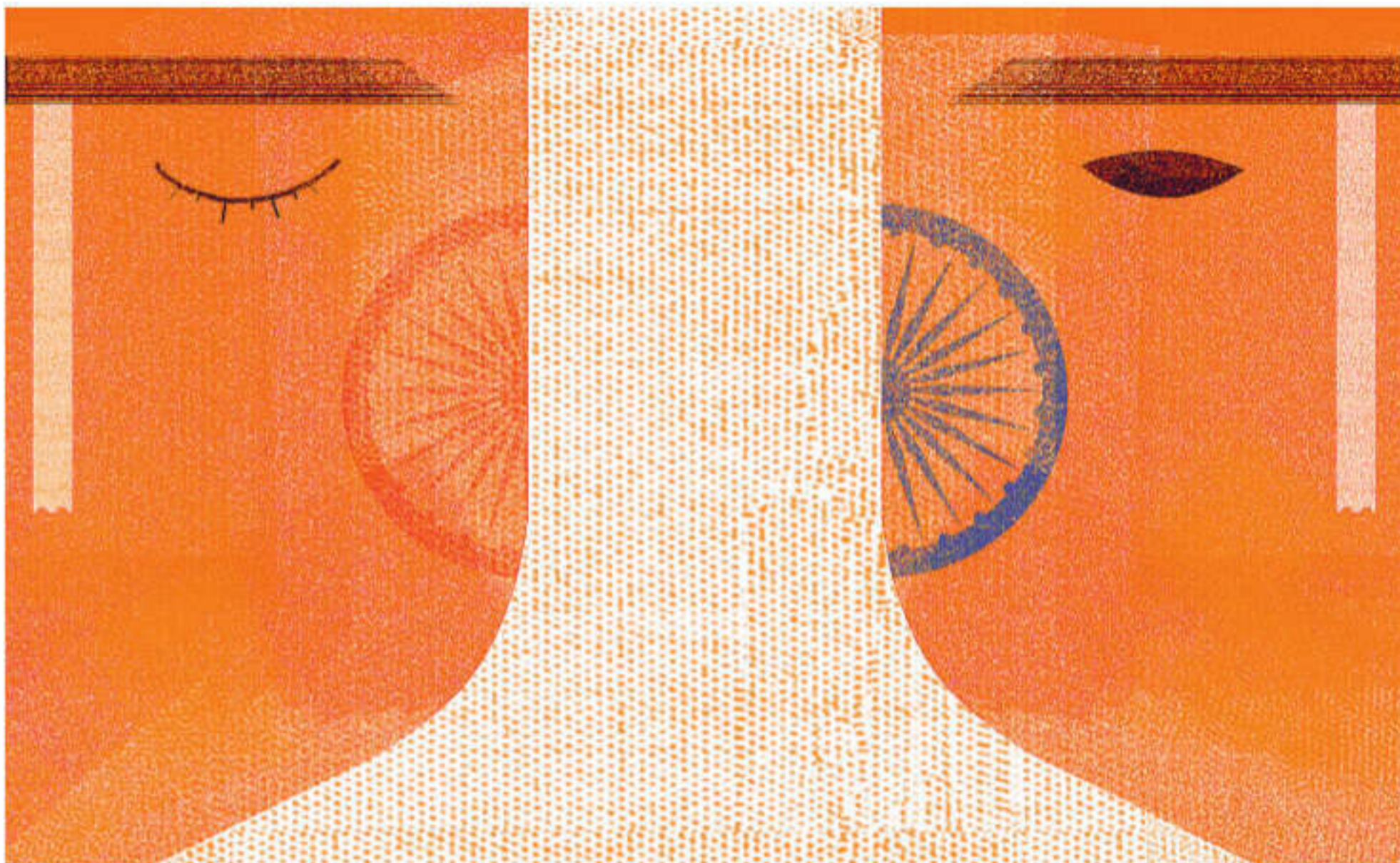
Let me begin by accepting all the corrections that Suhas *bhai* suggests to my initial outline. Indeed, Indian nationalism was an audacious project, difficult to realise and even more difficult to sustain. Yes, the uniquely Indian version of “belonging without othering” always had its communal rivals in the Hindu and Muslim versions that copied the European models of national belonging via the “othering” of religious communities. Of course, we have not just forgotten our nationalism; it has been stolen by the RSS version of pseudo-nationalism.

That leaves only one serious disagreement. Suhas *bhai* thinks that I exaggerate the role of the tiny English speaking and deracinated elite in squandering the rich legacy of Indian nationalism. I still believe that the ruling class is always tiny, yet its ideas become the ruling ideas with lasting consequences. But this is a dispute the two of us can continue over a cup of tea (with bakarwadi from Chitale Bandhu) in Pune.

Let me focus on the more pressing question of the here and now: What is to be done? How do we regain Indian nationalism in a way that we do not lose it again? This is not a simple political question of how to take on the BJP. This is also not a simple ideological question of how to combat the RSS’s Hindutva with our received liberal progressive ideology. This is a serious intellectual and cultural question. I suspect that critics of today’s phoney nationalism underestimate how serious this intellectual challenge is.

Let me list three uncomfortable questions that we need to address head-on before we begin the project of the recovery of Indian nationalism.

First of all, what is India? Is this a cultural-civilisational entity or just a political unit with boundaries defined by accidents of history? The pseudo-nationalist version offers a narrow yet thick notion of Indianness, of Bharatvarsha, a Sanatan and Akhand Bharat, that may be rescued from 1,000 years of Muslim and British colonial history. The response of the progressive critics is to fall back upon a liberal yet thin version of Indianness, which views India only in modern, political



C R Sasikumar

and constitutional terms, as a political community of people brought together by accidents of history.

The uncomfortable question that we need to ask is this: Is the modern Indian state a successor to the civilisation called India? If so, what are its defining cultural features? Answering this question, without falling into dominant majoritarian myths, was never easy. In a sense, Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* was an attempt to do exactly that. The task has got more difficult today after Partition and with deeper awareness of the multiple histories and geographies that the Indian state is heir to. Yet, this is a question we cannot evade any more. We need a thick yet liberal notion of Indianness, a notion that has cultural resonance with the people of India.

Second, should we be proud of being Indian? Here again we confront two bad answers. The dominant answer is jingoistic, the political equivalent of football club loyalty. Every Indian must, at all times, be proud of everything Indian as it is our “motherland”. This powerful sentiment then drums up all kinds of reasons for this pride: India as the *vishwaguru*, India as the mother of democracies, India as the fountain of ancient wisdom, and so on. The critics of this narrative of national pride demand good reasons for such an assertion. Accident of birth is no proof of excellence; if anything, this conflict of interest calls for extra care in judging our own country. They find it difficult to take pride in a country full of class inequality, caste oppression, gender injustice and what not. They respond with guilt, if not shame, about being an Indian.

So, the difficult question is: Can we address the deep sense of cultural inferiority that Indians have inherited from their colonial past? Can we do so without inventing ridiculous lies about plastic surgery in ancient India? Can we do so without brushing under the carpet the ugly truths about our country, our society, our civilisation? Can we come up with ways of self-affirmation that inculcate pride without asserting superiority over others?

Finally, what do we owe this entity called India? Here again, the dominant answer is simple and powerful, if totalitarian. In this

The uncomfortable question that we need to ask is this: Is the modern Indian state a successor to the civilisation called India? If so, what are its defining cultural features? Answering this question, without falling into dominant majoritarian myths, was never easy. In a sense, Jawaharlal Nehru’s ‘The Discovery of India’ was an attempt to do exactly that. The task has got more difficult today after Partition and with deeper awareness of the multiple histories and geographies that the Indian state is heir to. Yet, this is a question we cannot evade any more.

version of nation-comes-first, we owe everything, unlimited and unquestioning loyalty, even our lives, to our country. This requires suppressing any competing demand from a lower or higher unit: From attachment to any region, religion or language or from considerations of internationalism etc. The critics of jingoistic nationalism are more circumspect about what and how much they owe to one of the many entities that demand our affection. They want a space to assert other identities, from regional to global. Faced with aggressive nationalism, their loyalty appears shallow. They look non-aligned and can be dubbed anti-national. So the challenge is: How do we define deep loyalty to the nation in a way that does not preclude other equally legitimate commitments? I suspect that the progressive and liberal critics of the RSS-BJP do not have good answers to this or the other two questions.

In sum: Our challenge is to reimagine a deep and non-jingoistic nationalism, at once culturally rooted in the plural heritage of our civilisation and open to claiming the heritage of humankind. That is what the nationalism of our freedom struggle was. Yet we cannot simply go back to that nationalism now. As Suhas *bhai* reminds us, it was a rather precarious achievement in its own times. Besides, a lot of water and blood has flowed in the Ganga since then. So we have no option but to recreate, rearticulate and then regain the nationalism that we lost.

Suhas *bhai* is right: Creating a deep sense of “belonging without othering” was and remains an “audacious project” always exposed to external challenges and internal hiccups. This is infinitely more difficult than the jingoistic political project of finding external and internal enemies to forge a unity based on hatred. But I am sure he does not believe that in this audacity lies its impossibility, that this is a good reason to give up on this project. The project of reclaiming Indian nationalism is not an optional project for some Indians of a particular ideological orientation. The success of this project is the precondition for the very survival of India.

The writer is member, Swaraj India, and national convener of Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Mr Nawrocki’s improbable rise — from relative obscurity to the presidency — signals the unfortunate entrenchment of nationalist grievance in Polish politics.” — THE GUARDIAN

CUET, a barricade

To restore their national character and order in their functioning, central universities need to recover their autonomous practices



ABHA DEV HABIB AND SAIKAT GHOSH

A FEW YEARS ago, summers at Delhi University (DU) would witness a festive clamour of students and parents visiting colleges to check out the infrastructure, meet faculty members, and submit their applications for admission to undergraduate courses. The demand was such that in many popular courses, despite the soaring cut-offs, admissions would close with the first list.

How things have changed. Now it takes multiple “mop-up” rounds to complete admissions and the process goes on months after the start of classes. An RTI response shows that on average, 5,000 seats have remained vacant in every admission year since the introduction of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) in 2022.

Admissions to undergraduate courses offered by central universities (CUs) through CUET were first announced in March 2022 while Class XII students were still struggling with Covid. Invoking the National Education Policy 2020, an overnight change in the admission policy was pushed despite educators having forewarned that CUET would downgrade the importance of Class XII board exams while encouraging a mushrooming of the private coaching industry and proxy schools. The CBSE-based CUET also disregarded the importance of state boards and the federal character.

Three years since, has CUET meant anything besides “mop-up” rounds for DU?

A few days back, the National Testing Agency (NTA) declared that it would start the CUET-UG 2025 exams from May 13 rather than May 8. Lack of preparedness was reportedly the reason.

Delays and ineptitude have consistently been part of the CUET-UG story, throwing teaching-learning processes out of gear. DU’s perpetually staggered academic calendar is testimony to this chaos, while the inordinate hold-ups in its UG admissions are the principal reason behind seats remaining vacant. Uncertainties have pushed many students to prefer private universities. Seats in several courses remain vacant despite multiple rounds of admissions including embarrassing “mop-up” rounds based on Class XII scores.

Science streams, which have to compete with medicine, engineering and other technical courses, are the most affected. Even slight delays precipitate anxiety in students and parents and indeed, convince them about the futility of taking admissions if students want to reappear for JEE and NEET.

In a knee-jerk response to this issue, the university declared that all courses across colleges would take 20 per cent extra students. While this scheme failed to address the real problem, it resulted in over-admission in some disciplines across certain colleges, thereby skewing the normative student-teacher ratio.

Delayed admissions also mean that the university is forced to function with a different academic calendar for the freshly admitted batch of students as classes in other semesters begin even as the admission process is held to ransom by the CUET results.

Staggered calendars have increased the stress on the system. Universities are designed to operate well within synchronised teaching-examination calendars for all years of students. A large system like DU shifts gears from teaching to examinations, dedicating its resources to one activity at a time.

Staggered calendars result in administrative chaos and cause further delays. When senior batches are appearing for their end-semester exams, the first-year classes are still going on. Teachers are expected to combine teaching with invigilation and evaluation duties. Timetables are disrupted, allotted classrooms are taken up for the conduct of examinations and some colleges even shift their classes online. The results of all batches are delayed as teachers are unable to travel to central evaluation facilities from their respective colleges, where teaching and invigilation take up all their duty hours.

Beyond classrooms, co-curricular activities and student societies have been adversely affected as students of various years are in different phases of their studies and are unable to interact much. Caught in examinations for one batch or the other, colleges find it difficult to schedule their cultural fests.

Post-CUET, admissions to DU have reported an alarming decline in the regional diversity of students and an even more steep fall in the relative number of female students. Conventionally, DU admissions based on Class XII scores assumed a parity between marks awarded by various state and central boards, thereby enabling students from far-flung states and regions of India to seek admission. A student’s journey from a small village to Delhi would start once she scored well.

The CBSE-centric CUET insidiously favours only a privileged section of aspirants. Others are expected to spend on private coaching to be on par with students from CBSE schools. Inadequate test centres, frequent paper leaks, lack of evenly laid-out digital infrastructure and the myopic switch to a purely computer-based test have destroyed many dreams of students who are from the hinterland or economically distressed communities. The rising cost of admissions and the attendant uncertainties have also discouraged parents from encouraging girls from remote areas to apply.

Admissions to central universities through CUET-UG are a case of over-centralisation. While top private universities continue to run their admissions-related processes and schedules independent of NTA functioning, the hands of public-funded CUs are tied. In the case of DU, which offers close to 79,000 seats out of a total of 1.5 lakh seats available across CUs, this means an adverse impact on admissions and the teaching-examination cycle. For DU colleges and many other, newer central universities that cater to local populations, CUET is an unnecessary barricade that has demotivated students.

Paper leaks and delays have put an indelible question mark on the NTA’s credibility. It is important to review CUET-UG-based admissions. To restore their national character and a modicum of order in their functioning, CUs need to recover their autonomous practices, including admissions. The normalisation of Class XII board results is a possible solution to the problem of disparate marking across boards.

Habib is associate professor, Physics Department, Miranda House and Ghosh is assistant professor, English Department, SGTB Khalsa College



PHILIPP ACKERMANN

Our open society’s offer

Germany’s universities and research ecosystem have — and want — Indian talent

FROM A GERMAN point of view, the Indian diaspora seems to have a magic formula for success. They climb to the highest ranks around the world, particularly in Europe and North America. They succeed in the economy, in education, and in research. What do they bring to the table? A culture where education and learning are highly regarded, where grit and determination are a necessity, and where being adaptable and nifty is a way of life.

What is it that we offer? An open society, an internationalised economy and education landscape, and a framework where hard work and skill are rewarded. When smart and well-educated Indians plan parts of their career outside India, they usually think of the English-speaking world first. But I think that the smartest Indians should actually start thinking about Germany. Why? Let me give you a few reasons.

Germany is built on a tradition of science and education. Compulsory education was a German invention, and the modern university was shaped in 19th-century Germany. German scientists dominated the Nobel Prize during the first 50 years of its existence. For the longest time, the tiny university town of Göttingen had the highest

Nobel Prize rate per capita. Almost 50 Nobel Prizes are linked to its university.

The beauty of this story is that it would not have been possible without the minds of those who were also shaped outside of Germany. For excellent science, brilliant ideas need to travel freely, and so do brilliant people. Many of our world-famous scientific organisations are built on this principle — be it the Humboldt Foundation, the Max Planck Society, the Helmholtz Institutes, the DFG, or Fraunhofer. Thirty-one researchers of the Max Planck Society have won Nobel Prizes in natural sciences. If you go through the list, you will find a lot of names that do not sound very German. It is an open, internationalised organisation, and that is why it is so strong.

One of the most inspiring stories written by our accessible and welcoming scientific landscape is that of the pharmaceutical company BioNTech. Founded less than 20 years ago, it is now valued at almost \$30 billion. With its groundbreaking mRNA technology, it helped address the global Covid pandemic. Its founders? One was born in Turkey; the other is a second-generation migrant from Turkey. Who knows from which country the founders of the next

BioNTech will come to Germany?

German educational institutions do not select their students and scientists based on economic criteria. We are not looking for the richest minds in the world but for the smartest. You will find that German institutions offer world-class education and research facilities while being very affordable. German science is so accessible because there is a lot of money in it. We are not setting up high economic walls around our research and education institutions. To a large extent, the German education and research ecosystem is financed by taxpayers’ money to make it as accessible as possible. Excellent quality, excellent equipment, excellent researchers — all backed by public spending. The private sector adds to this — it opens the way for applied research, for large interdisciplinary teams, and for bringing your ideas to the market. Some German companies have annual research budgets that only a few national research budgets around the world can actually match.

It is no secret anymore that Germany is a very interesting destination for Indian students. There are 50,000 already in Germany. State universities have had excellent experiences with students from India. And up to

18 months after graduation, they can look for a job in Germany. Right now they will find many job offers, particularly in the STEM field. Germany, an engineering nation, is offering a lot of opportunities.

There is, of course, the question of the language barrier. Be assured, English is the language of science — and Germany is no exception to this. If you want to buy freshly baked bread rolls on your way to your lab, you might have to master the intricacies of the German language. But if you want to run one of the state-of-the-art particle accelerators in Germany or crack the riddles of quantum physics in one of our beautiful university towns, English will do the trick. We believe that we should select international students based on their talents and their dedication, and not based on what they say on social media. Of course, you will have to prove that you are smart, ambitious, dedicated, and industrious — that is important for us. Indians have an excellent reputation in our science landscape — and we want to invite more brilliant Indians to come to Germany. You are very *willkommen*!

The writer is Germany’s Ambassador to India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LANGUAGE ROW

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Out of a molehill’ (IE, June 4). Kamal Haasan’s statement that “Kannada was born out of Tamil” was taken out of context and blown out of all proportion. The Karnataka High Court’s remark, “you may be Kamal Haasan or anybody”, was unfair. His point was that they are not disparate languages. If the “descendant” analogy is unacceptable, the two can be called cousins with Proto-Dravidian ancestry. It can be left to the experts to authenticate or debunk his understanding that Kannada developed from Tamil.

G David Milton, Maruthancode

INFORMATION WAR

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘The great churn in Asia’ (IE, June 4). The happenings in East Asia in the past few weeks have the potential to rebalance the larger Asia-Pacific region. The Shangri-La Dialogue is the forum the strategic community looks to for the “battle of narratives”. Moreover, its location in the heart of the Indo-Pacific region makes this dialogue all the more crucial.

Devang Ganesh Thosar, New Delhi

HOCKEY INSPIRATION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘A grass-roots teacher’ (IE, June 4). Pratima Barwa was an inspiring figure. She started to play hockey as a Class 5 student at her village school and went on to play for Jharkhand for 20 years. A knee injury ruined her dreams of playing for India. However, she did not let it dishearten her. She chose to nurture Adivasi players. She deserves credit for the promotion of hockey among girls from underprivileged backgrounds.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

SPIDER’S WEB

This refers to the editorial, ‘Drones vs diplomacy’ (IE, June 3). Three years into a full-scale war and dependent on day-to-day external armament supplies, the massive drone attack by Ukraine deep into Russia has made it clear that Kyiv is not going to surrender any time soon. The West has to decide whether it will continue to provide assistance to Ukraine and seek the active involvement of Donald Trump, who is increasingly disillusioned with Putin’s intransigence.

Janaki Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

Opinion

THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 2025



● **TRADE TALKS**
Union commerce & industry minister Piyush Goyal

Challenges will come and situations will arise, we have to address such challenges, face these situations and within the ambit of the WTO framework

Cart before the horse

The new EV policy is bound to be a non-starter as it falls short on both need and timing

THE GOVERNMENT HAS rolled out a new electric vehicle (EV) policy that aims to lure global automakers into making cars in India. But it is evident that while framing the detailed guidelines, which were notified on Monday, the ministry of heavy industries has misused the two foundational pillars for any policy's success: need and timing. Therefore, the policy seems destined to become a non-starter. Ironically, this is not because it lacks structure or seriousness, but because it is a classic case of putting the cart before the horse. Let's start with timing. Announcing the detailed guidelines now, amid ongoing trade negotiations with the US and following the India-UK free trade agreement (FTA), sends mixed signals to both industry and potential investors. The UK FTA, in particular, slashes import duties for a fixed number of premium vehicles, from over 100% to just 10%. British brands like Jaguar Land Rover, Aston Martin, and Rolls-Royce will surely exploit this window, which may bring down car prices by up to 40%. In contrast, the EV policy requires global firms to invest a minimum of \$500 million (₹4,150 crore), meet stringent localisation targets, and places a hefty bank guarantee to import vehicles at 15% import duty. Naturally, if manufacturers are able to get a favourable import duty regime through trade pacts, why would they bother with bureaucratic hurdles? The lack of public endorsement by any industry body or global manufacturer following the policy's notification tells its own story. Despite minister HD Kumaraswamy naming companies like Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen, Škoda, Hyundai, and Kia as participants in the consultation process, none has confirmed their intent to apply so far.

Now, let's address the question of need. From the outset, it was clear that the policy was structured with Tesla in mind. Tesla's repeated calls for import duty cuts led the government to look at policy balancing concessions with investment mandates. Yet, the company's subsequent disinterest, and now the minister confirming Tesla has no intention to manufacture in India, render the entire exercise superfluous. If the policy's primary catalyst has opted out, what exactly is the rationale to push forward with it? Tesla's case makes the dilemma plain. The policy asks companies to commit a massive investment and submit a \$500-million bank guarantee, knowing that if local production does not start within three years or localisation targets are not met, the guarantee will be encashed. But if the purpose is to test the market, as Tesla presumably wanted to, then such financial and legal liability makes participation unattractive.

This is the reason why even companies with existing manufacturing in India, such as JLR and Mercedes-Benz, see little reason to opt in. JLR is already manufacturing Range Rovers in India without government mandates or duty-linked guarantees. Mercedes-Benz has been in India for 30 years and invested ₹2,800 crore at its own pace, far short of the ₹4,150 crore this policy demands. It already assembles three of its EV models here. Any ambition that is not aligned with timing and real need leads to a mismatch that even a good design can't overcome. The EV policy, then, seems a solution in search of a problem. With Tesla out and no real incentive for others to jump in, it has lost its central proposition. Unless sentiment shifts or the policy is recalibrated, it's hard to see it achieving its intended outcomes.

Apple can't leave China, with or without tariffs

DURING PRESIDENT DONALD Trump's first term, he famously toured a Texas factory and claimed credit for bringing Apple production back to America. Except the plant had been running long before he took office. And it was an "unmitigated fiasco". Workers in China had to be flown in to help fix the mounting manufacturing issues encountered in the US heartland.

This telling anecdote from Apple in China, a gripping read by former *Financial Times* journalist Patrick McGee, shows how the tech giant became beholden to America's biggest geopolitical adversary. Up until this point, the book recounts how Apple flew engineers from California to China to train and collaborate with local workers to create its most iconic products. Now, it seems, the tables have irreversibly turned.

McGee argues that the technology transfer facilitated by Apple to China, via small decisions compounding over decades, ultimately made it the biggest corporate investor into Made in China 2025, President Xi Jinping's bold plan to end reliance on Western technology. "Here was America's most famous tech giant volunteering to play the role of Prometheus, handing the Chinese the gift of fire," McGee writes.

Yet the overarching argument of the book — that the US company made China into the tech behemoth it is today — begs the question of why Apple didn't make the same kind of investment in the US. And amid Trump's second term, when he has repeatedly threatened tariffs on the company if it doesn't onshore manufacturing, this query has new urgency.

But the reality is that Trump's nagging will never be able to recreate the ecosystem that local governments in China, with the help of Taiwanese suppliers such as Hon Hai Precision Industry, created to lure Apple. A simplistic answer from a scholar early in the book is that China was a "low wages, low welfare and low human rights" nation. Suppliers could exploit a massive underclass of migrant workers, and local authorities could quickly suppress any labour unrest or media reports of it.

If there were any voices I wanted to hear more of in the book, it wasn't the dozens of Cupertino engineers but these Chinese workers who turned Apple into the \$3-trillion-dollar company it is today. (Apple has publicly called claims in the book untrue.)

But if there's a lesson for Trump — or US consumers — here, it is that electronics manufacturing jobs can come at a high cost for workers. It's hard to imagine that these are the kinds of positions Trump's base is hoping for, in an area where automation would be welcome.

China is hardly a low-wage manufacturing base anymore. Apple CEO Tim Cook acknowledged this before, saying that his company produces in the country not due to labour costs but because of its legions of skilled workers. McGee argues this upskilling is now being used to fuel innovation at home-grown tech giants like Huawei Technologies, and a direct result of Apple's investments.

Terry Gou, the founder of Hon Hai (better known as Foxconn), was the hyper-efficient manufacturing genius who brought the iPhone to the masses. Gou was described as obsessed with cutting costs — even if that meant diluting hand soap in factories with increasing amounts of water. One source in the book described him as worth billions in "nickels and dimes". But Gou recognised the value of working with Apple wasn't just profits: It was the tacit knowledge that he and his team would receive from the engineers shipped over from California to help set up and run the factories. This learning was invaluable and made even losing money to get Apple orders worth it.

Ultimately, the high-tech manufacturing ecosystem built up in China took decades, marked not just by the factories but by the creation of sub-suppliers nearby and an army of skilled engineers. It will be near impossible for Trump to try to recreate this during his term. The US could start by focusing investments in vocational education and engineering, but policymakers should recognise that catching up now requires a strategic long game. And all the years it took to develop a reliance on China means it's not Trump's tariff threats that pose the biggest existential threat to Apple. It's Beijing. Uncoupling too fast risks angering local authorities, but not doing so quickly enough makes it even harder for it to inevitably be done. As this book convincingly argues, Apple can inch toward India and Vietnam, but it can't leave China anytime soon.



CATHERINE THORBECKE

Bloomberg

● CASE STUDY

DESPITE ADVANCED OUTWARD APPEARANCES, CHINA'S WEAPONS HAVE PERFORMED POORLY IN BATTLE

Chinese credibility deficit

HARSH V PANT
ATUL KUMAR

Respectively vice president and fellow, China Studies, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi



Pakistan relied on its air force for air defence, with ground-based systems playing a secondary role. China helped build the Comprehensive Layered Integrated Air Defence (CLIAD) and expand the Air Defence Ground Environment System (ADGES) into central components of Pakistan's posture. The JY-27 Aradar at Mianwali operated in the very-high frequency (VHF) band and tracked stealth aircraft up to 500 km. China's YLC series radars, deployed across key installations, formed the core of Pakistan's CLIAD was built almost entirely with Chinese hardware: HQ-9Ps and HQ-16s for high- and medium-altitude coverage, HQ-17s, FM-90s, and FN-6s for short-range protection.

During Operation Sindoor, Chinese support even extended into space and signals. Beijing provided satellite reconnaissance, real-time targeting data, and secure ultra sets for satellite-based communications. Some of this intelligence, routed through the Pakistan Army, has reportedly reached even terrorists.

However, when the real tests came, Chinese weapon systems failed across domains. Drones were jammed, radars neutralised, and missile batteries underperformed. The much-touted ADGES and CLIAD crumbled in real combat. Pakistan's deep military reliance on China-produced integration, not superiority, and for Islamabad, the cost of dependence

became visible as the strategic alignment delivered hardware, not success.

China's security apprehensions

Although Chinese internet commentators blamed Pakistan's poor training and limited personnel competence for the underperformance of Chinese weapons during Operation Sindoor, the outcome revealed deeper flaws in China's defence manufacturing. The operation exposed serious gaps in the capability and combat reliability of Chinese-made systems.

China's state-dominated military-industrial complex has, since long, produced weapons that outwardly match Western or American systems in appearance and advertised specifications. Yet, most of these systems have never been battle-tested. Without real combat data, their actual performance remains speculative. Moreover, corruption in China's defence sector is a well-known issue, raising doubts about the quality and integrity of production. The risk of compromised and underperforming systems remains high.

Still, this hasn't stopped Beijing from inducting these weapons into its People's Liberation Army (PLA) or exporting them to friendly regimes or those with funds. Most of the surface-to-air missile systems and radars used in the May clashes form a central part of China's own air-defence network. The JY-27A radar is deployed

India must intensify local weapons development while selectively pursuing foreign collaboration

Since India is still building its clean energy manufacturing base, the country has a unique opportunity to embed circularity from the start

A circular clean-tech manufacturing



RISHABH JAIN
AKANKSHA TYAGI

Respectively senior programme lead and programme lead, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

THIS WORLD ENVIRONMENT Day, India stands at a pivotal moment. As a populous, fast-growing, and climate-vulnerable nation we must find ways to meet soaring energy demand, reduce emissions, and secure economic future — all at once. A rapid transition to clean energy is non-negotiable if we are to meet our 2030 climate targets and achieve net-zero by 2070. Yet, our clean energy ambitions currently depend heavily on imported raw materials and components for solar panels, wind turbines, batteries, and electric vehicles.

By 2047, India can aspire to be the largest green economy — market-driven, job-rich, and low-carbon — by scaling up clean-tech manufacturing and raising its GDP share from 14% to 22-25%. But this growth must be environmentally sustainable. Localising clean energy manufacturing with a circular economy offers a powerful opportunity: to reduce supply chain risks and environmental impact, create green jobs, and build resilience. A green, circular "Make in India" is not just an industrial imperative, it is a climate and development strategy fit for the 21st century.

Since the supply chain disruptions during Covid-19, the government has taken several initiatives to support domestic manufacturing of clean energy technologies. These include production-linked incentives, making adjustments to tariff and non-tariff barriers, and expansion of the offtake market for clean-tech products. For example, flagship schemes such as PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana and PM Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Uththan Mahabhiyan mandate using Made in India solar cells

and modules. These efforts have spurred domestic manufacturing; solar module capacity is now three-four times India's annual requirement. Yet, despite rapid growth and awareness of limited lifespans — 25-30 years for solar modules and wind turbines, 10-12 years for batteries — end-of-life waste remains a sidelined issue.

Estimations by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) show India could generate about 600 kilotonnes of solar waste by 2030, over 56% of which will come from capacities already deployed till 2023.

This Budget outlined circular economy as a key enabler in strategically and sustainably scaling our manufacturing capabilities. Currently, companies struggle to collect clean energy waste from diverse and remote sources. Without clear incentives and defined responsibilities, waste management remains a "nice-to-have" rather than a necessity. Products end up in landfills, harming the environment. We also lose out on critical minerals that could be reused for manufacturing. In contrast, designing for circularity promotes value chain-wide practices that curb environmental impact and support material recovery.

Product design should involve key considerations: use of materials (mixed or single), assembly methods (glued or screwed), availability of components for repair, and durability. This is where strategic circular design comes in. For instance, lead-acid

A green, circular "Make in India" is a climate and development strategy fit for the 21st century

batteries are designed for efficient recycling, with components like lead, lead paste, and plastics easily separable and recoverable through established techniques. India's mature lead-acid battery sector offers valuable lessons for designing products with circularity in mind.

First, circularity must be mainstreamed. While India's Extended Producer Responsibility guidelines already have provisions to include recovered materials in new products, it should also nudge businesses to adopt sustainable design choices. Large Indian manufacturers should embed circular economy principles into their decision-making — from sourcing raw materials to designing products for repair, reuse, and recycling. This approach not only reduces waste but also strengthens India's control over technology development. The government can support this shift by promoting transparency around product recyclability, helping consumers make informed choices. The European Commission has introduced the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation that requires manufacturers to maintain a digital product passport that will disclose information on lifecycle impacts, recycled content, reparability, and material composition. Encouragingly, the National Critical Mineral Mission has allocated ₹1,650 crore for recycling efforts which could improve domestic access to key minerals and allow

manufacturers to increase the content of recycled materials in their products.

Second, create domestic demand for clean-tech products that follow circular manufacturing through blended mandates in public contracts. For example, the Solar Energy Corporation of India can require a minimum percentage of solar modules produced through circular methods in large-scale public projects, starting from 1% and increasing gradually. Criteria for such offtakes should evolve and change based on tech advances. This should eventually phase out as the market matures and economies of scale are achieved.

Third, adopt circular designs to stay competitive in global markets. Countries like the US, Australia, Japan, Korea, and those in Europe already have circularity targets in place. By learning from and partnering with them, Indian firms and start-ups can accelerate progress and drive innovation through R&D. More importantly, it will help avoid trade restrictions like product standards — crucial for growing our clean-tech manufacturing market.

Unfortunately, circular economy efforts are often seen as fixes to broken linear systems. But since India is still building its clean energy manufacturing base, we have a unique opportunity to embed circularity from the start. Doing so won't just cut waste and emissions; it can give India a manufacturing edge and improve long-term profitability by reducing input costs, enhancing supply chain resilience, and meeting global market expectations.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

New monetary policy

Apropos of "RBI's monetary trade-offs" (*FE*, June 4), compared to the approach on monetary policy by central banks across the globe, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) strategy in proposing new policies, changes in key rates, and other measures to control major economic indices look robust, evident in how the economy recovered to pre-Covid levels in the shortest possible time. Delays by

banks and financial institutions in passing on rate cuts to borrowers is no doubt a cause of concern. Perhaps they need to remove the procedural bottlenecks in getting mandatory approval from their boards for seamless, faster flow of rate changes. While the benefits of unconventional monetary policies like lowering cost of funds with liberal injection of funds are appreciable, the risks involved in financing assets need to be checked. —RV Baskaran, Chennai

Early forecast

Apropos of "Trump tariffs forecast to hurt global growth" (*FE*, June 4), global organisations are abuzz with reports, research, and forecasts on the impact of the US President Donald Trump's tariff gamble. In one stroke, Trump hit several targets by announcing the exorbitant and disproportional tariff regime, and then enforcing a hiatus without achieving anything for the US whose growth

rate may slip 0.25% with manufacturing neither shifting to America nor picking up. The tariff hike appears to be aimed at political rather than economic gains, betraying the US. It threatened the world order fleetingly. Various countries are settling down after tariff tremors, so not rushing to make any forecast is imperative. —Vinod Johri, Delhi

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

EUPHORIA FOR RCB TURNS INTO TRAGEDY FOR BENGALURU

ON Tuesday night, 18 years of heartbreak, despair and harrowing memories had finally given way to an indescribable euphoria. Royal Challengers Bengaluru, an Indian Premier League (IPL) outfit with one of the biggest fanbases, had finally scaled the peak it had promised to so often, only flattering to deceive. Tears of joy flowed from that indomitable cricketer, Virat Kohli. With the IPL crown too on his mantelpiece, he has won almost everything the world of cricket could offer. Naturally, the euphoria would spill out of the stadium in Ahmedabad. As soon as the Rajat Patidar-led side had beaten Punjab Kings in the final, people in Bengaluru had started one giant party. They were entitled to do so. That's the moment fans wait for in near-religious penance — the day when the tears of a 100 lonely nights are washed away by the magic of one trophy-laden celebration.

On Wednesday afternoon, though, scenes of utter joy gave way to an utterly avoidable tragedy as at least 11 fans died while wanting to catch a glimpse of their team and their favourite stars with the trophy. Imagine that for a second. People leaving their homes hoping to get their own pictures of Virat Kohli. At least 11 of them will go back in coffins. Those tragic scenes at the Chinnaswamy Stadium would haunt the franchise forever. This points towards lack of basic planning. Victory parades and fandom are an integral part of club culture abroad. The European football landscape is replete with such events. Of course, not always without incident, but such stampede-like situations would be hard to imagine. Italy's Napoli had a season to remember: the celebrations were wild but without incident.

Club culture surrounding cricket teams have grown. Mumbai Indians have done such parades before, without much logistical nightmare. Yet last year when India won the T20 World Cup, the victory parade in Mumbai was not too smooth, with people getting caught in chaos. Signs were vividly visible to the authorities. Yet nothing remedial seems to have been done. What looked a bit off was that in the middle of it all, the franchise continued with its celebratory social media posts and followed with only a late word of condolence for the dead. But that's a different track.

NHAI DELAYS CAUSING ODISHA ECONOMIC LOSS

HOP-AND-CHANGE is perhaps the best way to describe the National Highway Authority of India's approach in Odisha. Its latest casualty is the coastal highway project under the ambitious Bharatmala Pariyojna. After years of delay, the key economic corridor has again suffered a setback with the agency cancelling its tender last week. In January, the NHAI invited bids for a 346-km, four-lane stretch to be executed in four phases at an estimated cost of ₹7,040 crore. Four months later, it has decided to revisit the plan. Unviable traffic volume seems to have become the trigger for the change of mind after all these years—the NHAI is now considering a two-lane, access-controlled carriageway.

The 451-km coastal highway was approved in 2018 and sent for the Odisha government's approval. The state suggested that Chilika lagoon be kept out of the alignment. The next year, more protected areas along the route were excluded and the length was revised to 377 km. Local resistance and other challenges prompted further changes and, finally, a 346-km project was finalised, requiring yet another detailed project report. So the state is assured of more delays and higher costs as statutory clearances will have to be secured.

The NHAI has been at the centre of controversy for dragging its feet on some major projects in the state. The much-awaited four-lane expansion of NH-55, that connects Cuttack to Sambalpur via Angul, is of critical importance for economic development of the region, but has taken years with half a dozen deadlines breached. The 263-km highway suffered delays for several reasons—from the lead contractor going bankrupt to not planning animal underpasses along crucial wildlife habitats. A review last year showed that out of the authority's 20 ongoing projects, at least 13 were bogged down by delays ranging between one and more than three years. Of the 776 km of projects, at least 364 km have been delayed for more than three years. The NHAI has been scrutinised for its lackadaisical approach and poor quality of work. Meanwhile, Odisha has been a major loser because of the delays in delivering high-impact economic corridors. It's time for the Odisha government to escalate the matter with the Union road transport and highways ministry and the NHAI is held accountable for bleeding the state.

QUICK TAKE

DODGING DOGE DOGMA

SOON after quitting his White House role, Elon Musk has acquired an aftertaste of sour grapes. The former efficiency tsar at the Trump administration has called its omnibus budget proposal "massive, outrageous, pork-filled" and a "disgusting abomination". Though Musk blames the US Congress, the punch lands squarely on Trump, who lobbied for his 'one big, beautiful bill'. Therein lies a generational tussle between the old-style conservatism that embraced lean government and the new populist right that pares spending from one end to make space for more at another. The lesson from the tussle is that, when it comes to governments, neither big nor small is to be dogmatically desired. It's what fits the purpose that matters.

LET me start on a deeply personal note. My father, the late V N Tewari, was a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha. A professor of comparative modern Indian literature, a poet and an author; he conceptualised and vigorously espoused the concept of Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiya—the syncretic ethos of Hindus and Sikhs living together in harmony.

This was a direct philosophical, ideological and conceptual challenge to Pakistan, that by the 1980s had made Punjab the first frontier in its strategy of bleeding India with a thousand cuts by trying to create communal discord between Hindus and Sikhs.

My father was assassinated on April 3, 1984 at our home in Chandigarh. My mother, a Jat Sikh, would have died with him that fateful morning as she grappled with his assassins, except for the fact that my father's killers had run out of bullets. They had expended all of them on him. Faith-based executions such as his started in Punjab way back in the 1980s—from the standard playbook of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence.

Conceived on January 24, 1972 at the Multan Conference convened by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the strategy to bleed India with attrition was the *modus vivendi* Pakistan adopted to avenge the humiliation meted out by India to the West Pakistan Army in Bangladesh. Pakistan wanted nuclear weapons at any cost in order to use them as a shield while it operationalised the proxy war it had envisioned against India.

As a victim of Pakistan-sponsored terror, it was but a *sequitur* that I would step up and do my bit in exposing Pakistan-incubated, -resourced and -sponsored state terror on the global stage as a part of the parliamentary delegations that recently travelled to different parts of the world.

For the past three and a half decades, I have used every international platform available to understand, analyse and expose Pakistan's perfidy to get it to change its noxious behaviour, so that an environment of peace, progress and prosperity could be created in South Asia to unleash the creative potential of the billions who call it home.

Like a jackal that can't change its pelt, Pakistan seems incapable of changing its DNA of seeking retribution for the creation of Bangladesh by waging a low-intensity conflict against India even four and a half decades down the road. The cold-blooded executions carried out in Baisaran on April 22 was another portentous sequel in the long and bloody saga of Pakistan us-

The parliamentary delegations impressed upon thought leaders abroad the rationale behind India's response to the latest Pak-backed terror strike. The nations now know what to expect if it recurs

PAKISTAN'S PERFDY FRONT & CENTRE IN FOREIGN CAPITALS

MANISH TEWARI

Lawyer, third-term MP, former Union minister and member of a parliamentary delegation recently sent abroad



SOURAV ROY

ing terror as an instrument of state policy to undermine the social cohesion and civilisational ethos of India.

The fact that it came a week after General Asim Munir's rant dredging up the aspiration of the discredited two-nation theory out of some dark closet of the army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, giving it a fresh airing in a speech to Pakistani expatriates on April 16 in the presence of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, was no coincidence.

India's response to these 'faith-based' executions, which followed during May 7-10, was warranted. How far it would prevent the next terror attack perhaps underscores the limitations of conventional power in proscribing asymmetric warfare. However, the message to Pakistan was clear—if it hits, India reprisals would follow; the next

time they may not be as precise, calibrated and narrowly-targeted.

The objective of the parliamentary missions was threefold. First, to underscore that punitive payback against terror infrastructure in Pakistan would be the natural order of things every time there is a terror attack in India whose strings are traceable across India's western border. Second, there is enough space beneath the nuclear overhang for a full-spectrum response by conventional means that would be energised to the fullest. And third, the distinction between Pakistan, its deep state and the terror infrastructure it spawns is an artificial difference that would not be factored in while initialising punitive means.

Our delegation, which travelled to Qatar, South Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt, de-

WHEN ONE IS NOT FOR ALL

DEBARSHI CHAKRABORTY

Advocate, Delhi High Court

ate, or an economic cluster.

Of course, the notion that each company is a sealed legal island has its exceptions. Courts in India and abroad have occasionally 'pierced' the corporate veil—especially when the structure is used to commit fraud or evade the law. As early as 1933, Lord Denning remarked that courts could "pull aside the corporate veil" to see the true actors behind it (*Gilford Motor Co vs Horne*). Indian courts have likewise reaffirmed that corporate identity is not a shield for misconduct. But these are the exceptions to the rule, triggered by fact-specific abuse, not tools for convenience or policy innovation.



PEKELS

Videocon's chaotic insolvency proceedings highlighted the need for a group insolvency framework. But there must be checks to ensure that solvent firms avoid scrutiny when their debt-ridden siblings go under. Otherwise, group insolvency could morph into group liability

The call for a group insolvency framework stems from real-world frictions, not just theory. Consider the Srei Group, where both the parent and its subsidiary were forced into parallel insolvency proceedings, despite shared cash flows, cross-guarantees, and overlapping liabilities. This created a procedural quagmire: creditors filed claims in both forums, there was confusion over ownership of assets, and value was steadily lost. The Videocon case posed an even starker dilemma. Thirteen compa-

nies, all functionally run as one business, were admitted into distinct CIRPs—only to be later resolved collectively by judicial innovation, not legislative design.

What these cases expose is the tension between economic substance and legal form. In practice, many companies operate as part of an integrated group. But in law, they remain separate entities. Bridging this gap is tempting—but doing so through regulatory back channels is problematic.

Section 240 of the IBC allows the IBBI to frame regulations, but only insofar as those regulations are consistent with the parent statute. That is not a technicality; it is a constitutional check. It is a settled principle of administrative law that while regulators may fill in the details, they cannot redraw the legislative map. Moving from individual debtors to group-wide proceedings would mark a fundamental shift in the IBC's structure—a change that demands parliamentary scrutiny.

A more appropriate route would be introducing a dedicated chapter in the IBC entitled 'Group Corporate Insolvency'. This could clearly define what constitutes a 'group'—based on factors like common control, shared financial reporting, or cross-holdings. It could empower the Adjudicating Authority (NCLT) to permit coordination processes, such as appointing a common resolution professional or joint hearings, but with safeguards.

These safeguards should include opt-outs for loosely integrated entities, rights for dissenting creditors, and protections to ensure that group treatment does not trample legitimate claims or override priority rankings. Without such checks, group insolvency could morph into group liability. Imagine a solvent logistics firm dragged into insolvency because its debt-ridden real estate sibling shares a promoter and a logo.

That kind of 'guilt by association' would deter investment and destroy value, much like what economist George Akerlof warned of in the 'market of lemons' theory. When markets cannot tell sound businesses from shaky ones, they discount all alike. While group insolvency may well be necessary, the route it takes matters just as much as the destination.

(Views are personal)

livered the above message to our interlocutors purposefully and pointedly, albeit politely. We interacted with government ministers, parliamentarians, political parties, strategic experts, think tanks, academia, media and civil society leaders in most of these countries, depending upon the nature of the state and the form of government we were dealing with.

Given that in South Asia's complex geopolitical theatre, few relationships have been as historically fraught or as internationally scrutinised as that between India and Pakistan, there was a keen interest among our interlocutors to understand from us the facts around the Pahalgam outrage and the imperatives of India's response.

There was not even an iota of sympathy for Pakistan in any of the myriad interactions we had. On the contrary, our conversers themselves pointed out more than once the manifest chicanery of Pakistan that while it voraciously vacuumed up monies from the US and its allies, it was concurrently sheltering dreaded terrorists such as Osama bin Laden and others belonging to Al Qaeda and ISIS.

It was not lost on our discussions that even the Taliban leadership, which had been hosted by Pakistan in Quetta and other places after they left Afghanistan post Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, had turned on their erstwhile hosts for their insidious attempts to undermine Afghanistan's territorial sovereignty.

A lot of questions also centred on the missile exchange between Pakistan and Iran in January 2024. In essence, everyone understood that Pakistan was the epicentre of regional instability and terrorism.

One interesting conundrum that came up was that when some discussers counselled for negotiations between India and Pakistan to resolve ostensibly outstanding issues, it had to be pointed out that the export of terror by Pakistan was not because of any outstanding issues, but blind hatred among card-carrying members of its deep state.

While a nation-state can deal with the grievances of its neighbours, even if they are extreme, it is not possible to address institutional scars and sleights that drive the Pakistani deep state as a consequence of the perceived humiliation experienced by its armed forces when 91,000 of their soldiers and officers surrendered in East Pakistan.

Therefore, the missile delivered was clear—in the case of any future misadventure by Pakistan, India's response would be even more blunt and straight.

(Views are personal)
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MAIL BAG

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Challengers' triumph

Ref: *Waiting ends* @18 (June 4). Kudos to Royal Challengers Bengaluru for lifting their maiden IPL trophy, fulfilling the long-held ambitions of players like Virat Kohli. His impact was evident throughout the season. Despite the loss in the finals, there are many takeaways for Punjab Kings this season, with many young talented players like Priyansh Arya coming up.

S Sankaranarayanan, Chennai

Track development

Ref: *GST collection high a result of maturing system* (June 4). Undeniably, every citizen of the country, engaged in every sector has made an invaluable contribution to this feat. Efforts are needed to increase per capita GDP, labour productivity and reach a better Human Development Index ranking.

Nabnit Panigrahi, Rayagada

Swift justice

Ref: *Speedy justice in rape case* (June 4). The speedy justice in the Anna University sexual assault case must serve as an example. The police and the judiciary deserve compliments for fast-track filing of the report, arrests, conviction and judgement. This gives hope to many victims.

Jayaprakash Reddy, Nalgonda

Immigrants' nightmare

Ref: *American dream stolen long before Trump* (June 4). America is a country of immigrants. But the American dream isn't for them. It has already gone with the wind. President Donald Trump might have conveniently forgotten that his grandparents were immigrants too. His present policy is, "After me, the deluge."

CG Kuriakose, Ernakulam

Expensive comment

Ref: *Thug Life won't be released in K'taka on June 5* (June 4). This meaningless controversy was ignited by Kamal Haasan. His statements on Kannada were outrageous, and being adamantly unapologetic is living up to his film's title. He should be meaningful in his comments, or give up some of the film's revenue prospects.

Parthasarathy Mandadi, Tirupati

Quiet corrections

Ref: *16 parties press PM* (June 4). The opposition is attempting to remain relevant and occupy the headlines. The nature of the military attacks is sensitive and not for the public domain. Transparency is not currently in the country's interests. Course corrections can be proposed without any hubbub.

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

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T&M™ Expires, Musk Goes Back to Day Job

Being buddies helped neither biz nor gov

Elon Musk is back to his day job helming his tech empire, after a longish stint as Trump's axeman for government spending. The world's richest person lost no time in criticising Trump's big tax break bill — 'This massive, outrageous, pork-filled Congressional spending bill is a disgusting abomination' — that seems set for approval by US lawmakers with some tweaks. He also said that it would add to the US budget deficit and saddle Americans with 'crushing' debt. Tesla sales have fallen during Musk's absence. Now, Trump's tax bill proposes to trim subsidies for EVs. Chinese EV-makers have made the tech commercially viable and are capturing Tesla's overseas markets with inexpensive models. Tesla's stock has taken a knock, and Musk now plans to speed up plans to make smarter and less expensive cars. That could be a problem thanks to Trump-tariffs and Chinese advancements in AI.



Musk's businesses have an unusually close relationship with the US government, which should have benefited him. But that didn't happen. SpaceX persists with its redoubtable record of launch failures, while Starlink is facing competition from its European rival. The Trump admin is betting big on OpenAI, a competitor to Musk's xAI that bought X while he was in Washington. Musk has no tangible benefits to show for his time in Washington except his comfort level with bringing kids at work and 45° salutes. It works both ways. The federal government doesn't seem to have benefited from Musk's attempts to cut flab either: The spending reductions achieved were a fraction of those promised before the government machinery pushed back over fears of coming unstuck.

Trump and Musk are putting a brave face on their brief tango. But the effects haven't been good on business or government. Unlike lateral-entry business leaders who work within a structured government role, Musk's relationship was way more experimental. Maybe a pair of personalities less mercurial than T&M™ could have made it work. For now, this will remain an audacious piece of government reengineering.

Language Lineage is Not About Hierarchy

As the (not-too-unexpected) shower of brickbats on Kamal Haasan implies, linguistic elitism can take on novel, more convoluted routes than the old chestnut of 'Hindi hegemony'. Haasan's contention that the Kannada language is derived from Tamil has been hijacked by cherry-pickers to mean that the latter, because of its pedigree, is somehow 'better' than the former. This notion — older the language, greater its wisdom — taken to its elitist extreme, is the source of the latest language row that multilingual India has somehow found time to indulge in. In the hierarchy of language elitism, Sanskrit sits atop the linguistic slopes, staring down at, say, Hindi and Bengali, even as the former's Urdu and the latter's Portuguese imports remain *sotto voce* ('under the voice' in older-than-English Italian). But parenthood doesn't confer linguistic superiority. If that was the case, Prakrit or Latin would have been a better — and more popular — language than its miscegenated descendants like Marathi and English.



Older languages often bask in the glory of their elaborate grammar, their poetic cadence, their perceived intellectual richness. Sanskrit's complex phonetics, Tamil's ancient literature, Kannada's sophisticated script — these are marvels. But does complexity make a language 'better'? Hindi and English, with their simpler structure and widespread usage, thrive the way Sanskrit and Latin no longer do. Modernised Hindi or Bengali shed unnecessary burdens, and expanded beyond rigidity. Tamil evolved across centuries, shaping its practicality alongside its sophistication. Languages survive not because of their ancestry but because of their adaptability. The non-'shudh' English in which this column is being read should be small proof of that.

JUST IN JEST

We believe the non-Bradman Don's role in RCB becoming champs

Trump's Surprise IPL Intervention

After 17 excruciating seasons of heartbreak, Royal Challengers Bengaluru are IPL champs. Credit must go to... the team? Coach Andy Flower? Virat Kohli? RCB's unwavering fans? No, no, no, and no. Credit must go to Donald Trump. POTUS humbly shared the fact that, despite pronouncing the sport as 'cree-ke-t', it was he who had suggested that the other teams ensure RCB wins this time, because 'they've been losers for so long'. He elaborated his intervention: 'I know cricket, probably better than anyone. Many people are saying, I got this done for Kohli. Great guy. Beautiful player. He was suffering, folks. Seventeen seasons. Sad. Even Biden won once, so what if by stealing the vote. So, I made some calls, some very important calls. Now, look at him — my good friend Virat, he's IPL world champion.'

Sure, there have been some denials about Trump's latest claim. But truth and/or politeness are making these refutations evaporate. There is talk that Don (unrelated to Bradman) is preparing an executive order that will ban the LBW appeal. 'Enough pandering has been done to the LBWGBT+ community in our institutions, IPL included. This will stop,' said the man. Meanwhile, Kohli & Co. have, since their victory, been spotted making celebratory gestures resembling the umpire's sign for 'wide ball' while exclaiming 'Beautiful. Beautiful. We're so beautiful.'

How Indians engage with environment and its protection is best typified by this bizarre example

Absolutely EnvironMental



KumKum Dasgupta

Leading up to World Environment Day today, the air has been thick with talk of everything environment and environmental. There are seminars, interviews, panel discussions, school drives, awareness walks and ubiquitous #GreenPledge selfies. It's all very commendable; at times, even inspiring. Until you zoom out and take a wider look. Because despite all the noise, genuine environmental awareness in India still feels like a bit of a stretch. You can talk about climate change, air pollution and the need to save our rivers till you're blue in the face. But the truth is, vast sections of the population haven't even opened the metaphorical pamphlet. The crisis isn't just environmental — it's a communication breakdown, a disconnect between policy and practice, between slogans and understanding, between lip service and lived reality.

'Snow Yard' is one striking illustration of this 'conundrum'. Located just off Kishangarh, a town renowned for its exquisite miniature paintings and known as Asia's largest marble hub, 'Rajasthan's Switzerland' is no Jungfrau. It's a massive dumping ground for marble slurry — a thick, pasty by-product created when marble is



Hold that pose, greenwashing just got a whitewash

cut and polished. This slurry is a grim cocktail: fine marble dust, water, and often chemicals used during processing. Each year, the marble industry in this region produces nearly 30 mn tonnes of this waste. And much of it ends up right here, dumped in the open. In 2008, Rajasthan allotted a large area to Kishangarh Marble Association (KMA) for slurry dumping. For the first few years, it remained a desolate, chalky wasteland. Craters and pits dotted the surface. During monsoon, these would fill with rainwater, giving the area a strange, otherworldly look. Then came the turning point. In 2014, a pre-wedding photoshoot took place on this surreal terrain — and it went viral. The pristine white backdrop, with its rounded contours and snow-like gleam, made for dreamy, cinematic images, for some. People were enchanted. And Snow Yard became

an unexpected star: It transformed from an industrial dumping yard into a full-blown 'aesthetic destination', if bloggers are to be believed. It soon turned into a magnet for film shoots, music videos, TV serials, influencer reels and destination weddings. KMA started charging fees for access, and local entrepreneurs jumped in. Food stalls and play areas popped up. The dumping ground became an event venue. Today, if you carry a DSLR, you pay ₹500 for a day's visit. A pre-wedding shoot costs ₹5,100 a day: Commercial shoot prices get even higher — ₹21,000 a day is charged for music videos. Nora Fatehi shot 'Chhor Denge' here. Honey Singh and Nushratt Bharucha filmed the 'Saiyaan Ji' music video. Tiger Shroff and Shraddha Kapoor performed atop the slurry mounds for 'Dus Bahane 2.0' in Baaghi 3.

But under the gloss lies something toxic. Numerous studies have pointed to the environmental fallout of improper slurry disposal. Water channels have been disrupted, groundwater contaminated, and the air, particularly on dry windy days, turns thick with fine

Each year, some 30 mn tonnes of marble slurry — fine marble dust, water, and often chemicals used during processing — is dumped in the open here. Dried slurry, once airborne, becomes a serious health hazard

particulate matter: Dried slurry, once airborne, becomes a serious health hazard. Locals — especially workers in the marble industry — are vulnerable. A Central University of Rajasthan study found that 84% of marble workers reported throat problems, and 70% suffered from breathing difficulties. Silicosis, a slow-killing, incurable lung disease caused by inhaling fine silica particles, is rampant. This is not just an eyesore — it's an ongoing public health emergency. Efforts have been made to reuse slurry waste. For every 10 trucks that arrive at the dumping yard, one reportedly leaves for Morbi in Gujarat with a load of waste.

Snow Yard sits right under the nose of the administration, while Insta reels and wedding blogs hail it as a 'hidden gem'. It captures the national approach to environment: spectacle over science, zero accountability

te. And, yet, Snow Yard continues to thrive. Families come for weekend outings, children play in areas set up just metres from toxic waste, and couples strike cinematic poses — the famous SRK arms-wide-open stance being a crowd favourite. Not a single face mask in sight. Not one official sign warning of health hazards. Snow Yard isn't just environmental destruction. It's a celebration of ignorance. A disaster dressed up as social media backdrop. The site sits right under the nose of the administration — unbothered, expanding and silently hazardous — while Instagram reels and wedding blogs hail it as a 'hidden gem'. This charade must end. In a way, Snow Yard perfectly captures the national approach to the environment: spectacle over science, zero accountability. This is where we are — grinning through the haze, camera-ready, as if the apocalypse were just another filter.

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It's Not RBI's Job to Please All



Srinath Sridharan

In 'Land of the Free, Conditions Apply' (ET Edit, June 3), Ateesh Tankha and Syagnik Banerjee dramatise RBI as a contemporary 'ancient Rome', issuing edicts with the flourish of a censor, revoking licences like tributes unpaid, and imposing deadlines as if chasing gladiators out of the Colosseum. The allusion is charming. But it's misleading. Modern-day policymaking, unlike politics or prose, does not reward theatre. In what is often a thankless vocation, RBI has displayed more institutional maturity than its critics seem willing to acknowledge. No institution is perfect. Certainly not a central bank tasked with navigating turbulent crosswinds of economic aspiration, financial innovation, systemic risk and political expectation — all while remaining outwardly unflappable. But to consistently caricature every move of RBI borders on convenient fiction. And fiction, as it turns out, is often more profitable than fact. There is a well-monetised industry built around regulatory foreboding. For every regulation that induces participant discomfort, there are self-appointed oracles

who promise clarity and solution — for a fee, of course. For every directional shift by RBI, whisper campaigns assure that 'a workaround is in the works'. The new SaaS — Solace as a Service — is one that one can subscribe to. No regulator is immune to occasional overcorrection. Retraction, when warranted, is not a sign of institutional weakness, or that of an industrial win. Discussion papers, feedback loops, closed-door dialogues, informal expert conversations, including with media editors, advisory committees — these have all been part of RBI's ecosystem for years. What has changed is the codification of that listening as a process. The market notion that regulation must emerge from consensus risks recasting prudential judgement as a democratic vote — an idea incompatible with the function of a central bank. While the original critique invoking the Roman censor may have intended to offer little more than a wry historical metaphor, one suspects it was also guided by a cleaner logic — the kind that aligns with Occam's razor: where the simplest explanation is often the most reliable. But the regulatory environment today cannot afford such parsimony. The backroom is crowded — with geopolitical expectations, domestic fiscal compulsions, global market volatility, lobbying by regulated entities and, yes, political winds that shift not by policy cycles but by election calendars. To expect a central bank to function in antiseptic detachment, while the world around it is in a state of flux, is a tall order.



All you need is guv

ment from such realities is to ask of it a purity no modern state can afford. Indeed, political pressure — of the visible and invisible kind — is not an intrusion into RBI's role. It is, in some sense, embedded in its existence. The RBI, like all regulators, ultimately derives its authority from the sovereign. It would be naive to presume that regulators can be immune to political dynamics when their legitimacy itself flows from the political architecture of the state. The point is to navigate it with integrity and institutional ballast. Which RBI has often demonstrated. In recent years, it has managed liquidity swings, calmed currency markets, enabled digital finance, handled sectoral crises, protected retail investors and regulated a diverse financial ecosystem from banks to fintechs. That India's financial system has stayed fundamentally stable through it all speaks to quiet but significant regulatory depth. Financial regulation is not a customer service function but a systemic responsibility, and a public good. Many industry actors expect to be consulted as clients, not as constituents of a financial order. Part of the challenge is that good regulation is invisible by design. Financial stability is a negative outcome space. A crisis that never occurred is work well done. India does not operate in a textbook financial architecture. Our credit ecosystems are simultaneously formal and informal. Our capital markets are growing but not yet deep. Our digital infrastructure is far ahead of our enforcement capacity. But to ignore the necessity of strong, even pre-emptive regulation in such an environment is reckless. RBI moderates a sandbox, a living laboratory of scale, chaos, ambition and ingenuity. And it must do so while absorbing shocks, forecasting risks, managing moral hazard and stewarding trust. That does not mean RBI should be immune from critique. Far from it. All institutions benefit from external scrutiny, especially those that wield such far-reaching influence — especially when it does not have an appellate authority. 'Fiat justitia ruat caelum' (Let justice be done though the heavens fall). RBI may not always please the forum, but its job is to do what is right for the system — even if the heavens protest. At the end of the day, RBI provides credibility, a far rarer commodity. Even it cannot mint it. And it continues to earn it.

The writer is a corporate adviser

Fudging Facts, It Just Got Academic



Atanu Biswas

While Harvard is making headlines for its battle with 'Trump University' to effectively emerge as America's de facto opposition party, the Ivy League college has made news for another reason. It recently stripped behavioural scientist and till recently Harvard Business School professor Francesca Gino of her tenure. The charge: fabricating research data. The irony of ironies being that her research topic was 'Honesty and ethical behaviour'. It all began with the blog, 'Data Colada', an academic research watchdog since 2013 that carefully reanalyzes published data to identify irregularities or potential fraud. Data Colada released claims in 2021 of extensive evidence of alleged fraud in four scholarly articles that Gino had co-authored. The blog had expressed their worries to HBS four years ago, adding that none of Gino's co-authors were involved in fraud. After concluding that the 47-year-old academic had committed 'research misconduct intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly', Harvard initiated an internal inquiry, placing her on unpaid ad-

ministrative leave in 2023. While examining version control in Microsoft Excel, it appeared that different rows inside a spreadsheet had been altered. According to experts, data before the suspected manipulation didn't reveal the effect the researchers wanted to observe. But data after the purported modification did seem to indicate it. Also, participants were asked to complete insurance and tax forms in a study. It was discovered that people who were asked to sign declarations of truthfulness at the top of the page were more truthful than people who were asked to sign statements at the bottom. Gino, however, sued the university and her accusers for \$25 mn, alleging defamation, gender discrimination and invasion of privacy. She claimed the accusations damaged her reputation. But last September, a federal judge in Boston rejected her defamation lawsuit, stating that, as a public figure, she was subject to scrutiny protected by the First Amendment. Since the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) established regulations regarding firings in the 1940s, Gino has now become the first Harvard professor to lose tenure. This is hardly the first instance of academic misconduct involving data. A scandal involving Harvard Medical School's John Darsee shook the academic world in the 1980s. Darsee had published a significant number of papers in prestigious journals. However, by May 1981, his colleagues accused him of systematic and frequent fabrication. Investigators claimed that Darsee had presented data from experiments that were never conducted, and had 'expanded' other data to produce more significant results. Eventually, he had more than 80 papers removed from the literature. He was relieved of his posts at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital. Academic data manipulation is likely to be rampant today. An average of 2% of scientists admitted at least one instance of fabricating, falsifying or altering data, according to a 2009 paper published in PLoS One, 'How Many Scientists Fabricate and Falsify Research? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Survey Data'.



'But do you have to be ethical to know ethics?'

Gino's — and Harvard's action against her — is a landmark case that could well serve as a model for how other academic institutions respond to allegations of academic dishonesty. On the flip side, excessively stringent enforcement could stifle creativity and run the risk of drawing unfavourable attention to organisations, thereby disincentivising them from taking action against unethical faculty members. Why is Gino's case, in particular, receiving so much public attention? She was one of Harvard's highest-paid professors, earning over \$1 mn in 2018 and 2019. So, is it because the scam involves a star academic? Or is it due to the nature of the accusation — data manipulation? Does it have to do with data sanctity, integrity, dependability and trustworthiness? Does society care so much about data integrity? Apparently not. Falsifying data evidence is nothing new to people in other professions. However, very few of them have jobs taken away from them for falsifying. The academic community has certainly become stricter about research misconduct involving data, and Gino was undoubtedly punished because academicians are subject to more stringent codes of conduct and constant scrutiny from peers than in other professions. In a sense, a watchdog got bit by watchdogs.

The writer is professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata



THE SPEAKING TREE

Trees are Mahayogis

MEENA OM

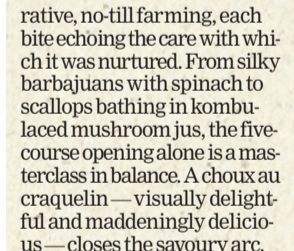
Krishn states in the Bhagwad Gita, 'I am Peepal among trees.' Trees are mahayogis. As an evolved human spreads divine aura, joy and peace, so do trees. The moment it sprouts from earth, it spreads its arms — branches — towards the sky to receive all energies, head held high to get connected to universal life force for growth, yet rooted on earth. It flows with natural forces, making itself stronger, taller and beautiful. Trees always give just like the rest of Nature, teaching and reminding us that giving is the law of nature. If we imbibe this, it will make the atmosphere pleasant and congenial for growth. Tree is a guru and reflection of the Supreme Provider. It is the provider of bounties that are required for our healthy and natural survival. That is why a tree is never ugly; it reflects what it is to be alive, without enforcing anything or being a doer. It is alive till the last moment; and even when it perishes, every part of the tree is of great value. A tree imparts manure to earth and its roots provide shelter to underground insects that nourish the soil. No matter how much a person plucks its leaves and scratches its bark, the tree never retaliates. It continues to be patient and does its karm. Trees are a source of livelihood to so many, those who are involved in planting and nurturing of orchards and farmlands, taking care of the creepers, fruit and vegetables, transporting and selling them. This inspires us to serve Nature, which, in turn, will enhance the whole environment.

World Environment Day is on June 5, 2025



Le Doyenné Saint-Vrain, Paris

Le Doyenné is not just a restaurant — it's an ode to nature, precision and time. Nestled in the grounds of the 18th-c. Château de Saint-Vrain, this farmhouse dining experience by chefs James Henry and Shaun Kelly delivers a meal that feels like a deeply personal conversation between land and plate. Grown within a stone's throw of the tables set inside an elegantly restored barn with soaring timber beams, the vegetables tell a story of regenerative, no-till farming, each bite echoing the care with which it was nurtured. From silky barbaquans with spinach to scallops bathing in kombu-laced mushroom jus, the five-course opening alone is a masterpiece in balance. A choux au craquelin — visually delightful and maddeningly delicious — closes the savoury arc. Wine pairings are impeccable, dancing between cult natural producers and classic French terroirs. Service, led by Fanny Subileau, is warm yet precise. Everything about Le Doyenné — its food, its philosophy, its mid-century elegance, and Miles Davis soundscape — makes the place feel alive. A meal here isn't just eaten. It's experienced, remembered and, if you're lucky, photographed before it melts.



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Chat Room

Royal Challengers Wins Gold Label

Apropos the news report, 'Royalty at 18' (Jun 4), thrice in the past, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) had entered the IPL finals but had to be content with remaining as the bridesmaid and not the bride as their opponents got the better of them. But the long wait of 18 years has paid off finally and, in a cliffhanger of a final, they beat a spirited Punjab Kings by a narrow margin of six runs. The man of the moment, however, was Virat Kohli, who had worn the RCB's colours since IPL's inception, as this was his moment of glory. RCB clicked as a team under Rajat Patidar's captaincy, and all the players contributed in good measure to the team's triumph. Kohli, Krunal Pandya, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Josh Hazlewood shared the spoils in the finals. C V Aravind Bengaluru



A thought for today
History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce
KARL MARX

Finally, Sense Of Us

Great that GOI's announced Census. But delimitation & caste questions make it more than just stats

Better late than never, as they say – GOI's finally announced a date for census. But this piece of excellent news comes with a big question mark attached to it. Given that the population count has to end by March 2027, will final results be out before 2029 Lok Sabha elections? This is a politically supercharged question.

If the population count does come in appreciably before, say, early 2029, a delimitation commission can be set up in this LS term itself. But if, like in the previous census, the final population count takes almost two years to publish, 2027 census results won't likely come in time for the delimitation exercise to finish before 2029 polls. Therefore, census 2027 is not just a vital statistical exercise for the world's largest democracy, it will also be keenly watched to see whether it changes the dynamics of electoral politics before the next LS polls. It would be best, therefore, if GOI gives a broad idea of the month/year by which final population count can be expected, as well as its plans on a delimitation commission given those dates.

For example, a delimitation commission can start its work before 2029 but GOI may decide to go with existing LS seat structure for the next general elections. That most big states ruled by opposition parties are in the South, which has successfully controlled population growth, and BJP's political dominance is concentrated in the North and West makes any debate on delimitation fraught. Anything short of clarity will make a polity already characterised by bitter divides even more fractured. India, in a relatively sweet spot economically, simply doesn't need a hot-blooded political fight, pitting North against South.

Speaking of economics, and hopefully assuming the census doesn't lead to almighty political rows, the exercise will fill several gaps in understanding and governing India. We don't have any idea of key numbers. What's the urban-rural divide, in terms of numbers and living standards? How many Indians are poor enough to qualify for govt benefits like free foodgrain? How have consumption patterns changed? What's the real story on migration? These are just a few of many vital questions the census will answer.

Caste census? Caste will be enumerated, that's all we know now. We also know Bihar's caste census has done little to improve policy and Karnataka's is mired in controversy. Like delimitation, this is another political red hot potato.

Death At A Stadium

RCB celebrations turned into a tragedy yesterday, but it was an entirely preventable one

Life is cheap in India, it is commonly said. It feels cruel. It also feels true all too often. How true it is of what happened at M Chinnaswamy Stadium yesterday. Royal Challengers Bengaluru fans had waited 18 years for their team to win the IPL trophy. Their excitement was palpable even to those watching from far cities, Delhi to London. Dream fulfilled, mission accomplished, nirvana...the rejoicing messages were unending. Siddaramaiah to DK Shivakumar to HD Kumaraswamy to Vijayendra Yediyurappa...proud cheers poured in from across the state's political spectrum. *Ee Sala Cup Namde!* This year the cup is ours. That massive numbers would pour into any celebratory space was a no-brainer. Then came the stampede. And the deaths.

Of course these were entirely preventable. Bengaluru traffic police had initially said that the victory parade was cancelled and then said it had made "preparations in case it happens". If it had indeed done so, the stadium wouldn't have gotten packed far beyond capacity. Indeed, various authorities could have actioned steps to prevent uncontrollable crowds from approaching the venue. The Bengaluru metro was running overcrowded, for example, issuing frequent warning announcements. Social media was also full of live images and videos that should have initiated safety measures in various control rooms. Every part of govt seemed to have participated in cheering the RCB victory. Which part of it will take responsibility for turning the cheers into tears?

Just over the past year, we have seen stampedes take lives of Kumbh travellers at the New Delhi railway station, at a Dalit gathering in Hathras, a devotees queue in Tirupati, a *Pushpa 2* promotional event in Hyderabad, and the list continues. Because basic crowd management is missing, ordinary activities are always on the edge of a deadly pileup. Govt doesn't do its job, and citizens pay with their lives.

Taco Bhel

Street food always comes up Trumps

Bachi Karkaria

It also gets tarreefs. Wall Street has been unkind to versatile taco by associating it with a guy who's merely versatile in changing his mind/policies/friends/foes. Its acronym has been particularly snarky to a President for whom all things Mexican are difficult to swallow. It's doubly delish that TACO was dished out by a street called Wall, coined by *Financial Times* columnist Robert Armstrong. Should I succumb to the temptation of bringing in the 'strong arm' tactics of the present POTUS? *Na-chhod do*. Let it pass. "Trump Always Chickens Out" has bred a brood of jokes, but the ones laughing all the way to the bank are street-smart dealers who bought when a tariff announcement took a bite out of a stock, and sold when a rescinding made it regain its mojo. Takings have been plumper than a Butterball turkey since Trump has see-sawed 50 times on tariffs since he returned to the menu. So, there's much Thanksgiving there.

'Good friend Modi' may not use the TACO jibe about 'Good friend Donald', but 'taycos' have plenty of takers in Guju-land. In fact, Taco Bell has Mehtamorphosed to Taco Bhel, stuffed with anything. This has also been the fate of the traditional quintessential Bombay dish. Indeed noun has become verb; it's been 'bhel-puried'. Actually all dishes 'Make-see-kun' have been revolutionised, ordered from outlets called Pancho Villa, and polished off in 'a Zapata'. That's when the hungry aren't leaning towards 'peeza'.

Masalafied Mexican and Italian have a pan-Indian following but nowhere more than in Ahmedabad. Remember, it was called the experimental theatre of Hindutva, but I've always found it to experimental theatre of food. Anything goes, even ingredients/toppings/fillings that don't conventionally go with one another. I'll get *sardon da saagified* for saying this, but culinary 'new normal' was first institutionalised in the *khaa galis* of Amdavad. Like in another context, if others gave you a 'goli', they'd give you an ice 'gola' – in 22 flavours. The *laadiualas* of Manek Chowk had innovative pani-puri *pani* long before fancy fusion chefs started serving it in cutesy containers, and at distinctly uncutesy prices.

Yes, there may be plenty of Ahmedabaddies, but I'm all for streetside Ahmedagoodies.

Alec Smart said: "Drones are now the worker bees of the war-hive."

GOI Needs Nerves Of Steel

Trump doubling tariffs on steel & aluminium imports to 50% and EU readying to charge a green tax mean big threats to New Delhi's trade interests

Ajay Srivastava

As of yesterday, US has doubled its tariffs on steel and aluminium imports to 50%. It's done this citing national security. This is quite ironic. After all, it's shielding two of the world's dirtiest industries, responsible for nearly 9% of global CO₂ emissions. And in doing so, it is violating established global trade rules.

Trump is using a 1962 law that allows the president to raise tariffs if imports are seen as a security threat. He first exploited this provision in 2018 to impose 25% tariffs on steel and 10% on aluminium. Aluminium tariffs were raised to 25% in early 2025. Now both stand at 50%.

US Rust Belt politics | Do steel and aluminium imports threaten US national security? Not really. However, the issue strikes a political chord – especially with industrial workers who have lost their jobs over the years.

In US, steel is more than just a material. It represents the decline of once-thriving industrial cities like Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Buffalo, and Youngstown, now part of the 'Rust Belt'. Cheap imports, lack of investment in new technology and rising wages led to plant closures and mass layoffs, and it's the anger against those that tariffs tap.

High tariffs, however, haven't revived the US steel industry. Instead, steel prices have jumped to over \$1,180 per tonne – far higher than \$690 in Europe or \$392 in China – making cars, buildings, and machines more expensive to produce.

Since the tariffs were first implemented in 2018, steel imports have increased, rising from \$98.6bn to \$114bn in 2024. To underline, the tariffs haven't cut imports or boosted production. They've mostly stuck around because they play well in US politics.

WTO skirmishes | US promised the World Trade Organisation that it would keep steel tariffs between 0% and 5%. These are called 'bound rates' and set the legal ceiling for tariffs.

However, in March 2018, the Trump administration invoked Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act to

impose significantly higher tariffs – the above mentioned 25% on steel and 10% on aluminium. These exceeded WTO limits, leading to retaliation from other countries and trade disputes.

US claimed it was acting under a WTO rule – Article XXI of GATT – that allows countries to restrict trade for national security reasons. However, in Dec 2022, a WTO panel ruled that US steel imports didn't qualify as a "war or emergency", so the national security excuse was not upheld.

Still, the ruling couldn't be enforced. WTO's appeals



body, which acts as its top court, has been paralysed since US blocked the appointment of new judges. As a result, US continues to apply illegal tariffs.

Retaliations | After Trump imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium in March 2018, Canada, Mexico, EU, China, Türkiye, Russia and others have retaliated with duties on US goods – ranging from bourbon and motorcycles to apples, almonds and steel.

India initially held off, hoping to resolve the issue through talks. However, when negotiations failed, it imposed retaliatory tariffs on June 16, 2019, ranging from 10% to 120% on 28 US products, including walnuts, chickpeas, lentils and steel.

India withdrew these tariffs on Sep 6, 2023, as part of a broader trade agreement reached during Modi's visit to US in June 2023, which aimed to settle six WTO disputes. Yet, US never entirely lifted its tariffs on Indian steel and aluminium.

India's options | With US tariffs on Indian steel and aluminium now at 50%, India informed WTO in May 2025 that it plans to impose retaliatory tariffs on US goods under global trade rules.

US, however, does not want to discuss this. It continues to justify its tariffs as national security measures – even though WTO rejected that claim in 2022.

With WTO's dispute system effectively stalled and US showing no willingness to negotiate, India has limited options. It may press for zero tariffs through ongoing India-US Free Trade Agreement talks. If talks fail, India may decide to retaliate.

The new 50% US tariffs will hit India's \$4.56bn in steel and aluminium exports. But US isn't alone in raising trade barriers.

EU's trade barriers | EU has imposed quotas on steel imports, and any imports exceeding the limit are subject to a 25% tariff. Starting Jan 2026, EU will also begin charging a carbon tax on imports under its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). This has already hit India hard. Between FY2024 and FY2025, India's steel and aluminium exports to EU fell by 24.4%, dropping from \$7.7bn to \$5.82bn.

India must treat CBAM as a serious issue in its trade talks with EU. If not, Indian exports will face steep carbon taxes in Europe, while EU goods may enter India duty-free, creating an uneven playing field. India missed the chance to address this in its UK trade deal and shouldn't repeat that mistake. Yet, early signs suggest it may again settle for vague assurances instead of firm protections.

High trade barriers in US and EU reflect a growing shift toward protectionism, often justified by national security or climate goals. India now needs a clear strategy – to protect its trade interests, push for fair deals, and strengthen domestic manufacturing.

The writer is an expert on trade & tech issues

WHEN T-20 CRICKET ISN'T JUST CRICKET

Kohli found the last missing trophy. Bengaluru celebrations turned tragic. And two moments, both involving Bumrah, stood out as emblems of sporting excellence in IPL 2025

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To the neutral fan, the final was underwhelming. Neither Royal Challengers Bengaluru nor Punjab Kings, both seeking a first IPL title, tried to seize the game by its throat. Both, instead, waited for the other to falter. Neither team played its natural game – they played the occasion. Which is why Tuesday's final that RCB won will be more remembered for its human drama than what transpired on the pitch.

Over 18 years, Virat Kohli and RCB have become synonyms in franchise cricket – the cricketer's messianic appeal found nationwide backing for the city team. On Tuesday, the sight of Kohli in tears of bliss connected with millions. His personal emotion became a public memento. And it is extremely tragic that the much-awaited celebrations that followed in Bengaluru were blighted by the death of several fans.

Memories, on or off the field, aren't easy to make in IPL. It's the nature of the beast. 74 breathless games over 73 hectic days – interrupted for 10 days following a four-day near-war situation in-between – witnessed 1,294 sixes and 2,245 fours, roughly translating to 17 sixes and 30 fours per game. A staggering 26,381 runs were scored, 868 wickets fell. Which stroke or delivery do you remember? Amidst the flurry of images and breathless commentary repeated in every game, few moments of excellence get hardwired in the brain. They all mutate into something barely remembered, like a passing monsoon dream. Among other things, IPL is constructed to be an enemy of memory.

Yet two moments from IPL 2025 stood out as emblems of

excellence. Moments of pure beauty or cruelty, depending on your loyalty. Moments already subject to countless replays on TV and exhaustive analyses in newspapers. Moments that will hopefully continue to be displayed in promos for years to come.

The first happened in Qualifier 1, a do-or-die game. Mumbai Indians had scored an intimidating 228/5, but after 13 overs Gujarat Titans were 148/2 – 81 runs to win off 7 overs. Still tough, but the momentum was firmly with the Titans. That's when Mumbai captain Hardik Pandya gave the ball to Jasprit Bumrah. For cricket lovers, Bumrah is like a magician on call nowadays. Every time he's handed the ball he is expected to cast a spell. For batters, it's different. They don't simply encounter Bumrah the bowler, they also must grapple with his sheer aura, with his near-mythical skills in their heads. In the last couple of years, the paceman has often produced irrefutable deliveries in desperate moments to pilot a game decisively in his team's direction.

His "two run, one wicket" 18th over in the 2024 T20 World Cup final against South Africa being the finest example.

The two Titans' batters, Sai Sudharshan and Washington Sundar, both blessed with a keen sense of match awareness, well knew this. Both were in sure touch and aware the opposition was withering. The immediate task, therefore, was to eschew risks, take singles, avoid damage. The first three balls went to plan,

nudged for singles. Then Bumrah goes round the wicket to southpaw Sundar. The yorker, slanted and wicked, travelled at nearly 90 miles an hour. Sundar aimed for a flick, only to find air. The ball landed below the bat, to rearrange the leg stump. Sundar collapsed on the ground like a defeated soldier. The Mumbai fast bowler fist pumped with a cold stare. The Titans lost impetus, confidence. The game was never the same again. Bumrah had turned a match on its head. Again.

Two days later in Qualifier 2, a similar situation arose once more. This time, Punjab Kings captain Shreyas Iyer was in the mood. He had just smashed Reece Topley, a specialist white-ball medium pacer, for three consecutive sixes. 31 runs were needed off 18 balls. Another now-or-never situation for Mumbai. A wicket, especially Iyer's, could swing the game back towards the team. A visibly worried Pandya handed over the ball to – who else – Bumrah. Another last throw of the dice. Another magic ball expected.

This time, though, Bumrah had been softened by Josh Inglis, the Aussie keeper-batsman rising in stature with every outing. He had flayed the world's finest all-format bowler for two sixes and two fours in one over. But Bumrah showed no traces of any setback. He reproduced the same delivery – another lethal yorker aimed at the base of the middle-stump. Only this time it was intercepted by Shreyas. His angled bat came down swiftly not only to neutralise the threat but also guide the ball to the third man fence. Seldom was such a serious delivery so summarily dispatched. The game swung further away from Mumbai Indians as Iyer played the knock of his life and finished the job.

Tailpiece: Mini gems seldom make headlines. Jitesh Sharma's 24 off 10 balls and Liam Livingstone's 25 off 15 balls, both for RCB, belong to that category. Together they made a major difference to the final's outcome.

Calvin & Hobbes





Sacredspace
How can we be so arrogant? The planet is, was, and always will be stronger than us. We can't destroy it; if we overstep the mark, the planet will simply erase us from its surface and carry on existing.
Paulo Coelho

Heal Yourself And Save The Environment

Brahma Kumari Shivani

What if every river reflected peace, every forest hummed harmoniously, and the air we breathed felt like a gentle embrace? Such a world begins within. This World Environment Day, let's remember two often-overlooked truths: Our emotional health shapes the environment, and the environment deeply affects our well-being.

Our emotions are energy that ripples outward as vibrations, influencing the five elements. Calm and loving minds nourish nature, whereas stress and negativity disrupt it. The spiritual principle 'Sankalp se Srishiti' teaches that our thoughts create our world. Our inner state directly influences state of nature. Here's how:

Air | Air isn't just made of particles – it holds vibrations. When you feel irritated, speak harshly, rush with

anxiety, or carry insecurity, these emotions spread into the atmosphere, creating vibrational environment of your home, workplace, and world. That is why every space has a distinct 'vibe'. You feel peace in a place of worship, joy in a happy home or restlessness in a hospital. We create these vibes, and once they are 'in the air', they affect our mind and body.

Our responsibility | Choose peaceful thoughts, kind words, and compassionate actions to create a high-vibration environment that uplifts and heals.

Water bodies | Spiritual traditions worldwide use water for purification not only physically, but also vibrationally. Water absorbs emotions. A calming shower after a tense day isn't just refreshing; it clears our energy. The feelings we carry – love, fear, stress, gratitude – are absorbed by the water

around us in our homes, cities, and the planet.

Our responsibility | Before sipping water, pause, infuse it with a prayer, affirmation, or gratitude. Your intention energises the water to heal your mind and body.

Vegetation | Visualise two plants, both given the same sunlight and water – one is nurtured with love, the other with frustration. You already know which will thrive. Now, expand that image to plants and trees across all the farms – absorbing society's stress, worry, and unrest. Can crops grown in such an environment nourish us?

Our responsibilities | Nurture your mind – avoid content filled with ego, lust, violence, fear or pain. Fill your mind daily with spiritual wisdom, positive affirmations, and empowering thoughts. Your vibrations are absorbed

by the food we grow and consume.

Cook and eat consciously – play spiritual music or prayers while cooking. Avoid screens while eating – your food absorbs what you watch and feel. Pause for 10 seconds before eating to energise the meal with meditation, prayer, or affirmations.

Honour farmers – do not bargain for lower prices. When our farmers are happy and contented, their crops carry vibrations of well-being.

Meditate daily. Just 15 minutes of meditation daily builds emotional strength. You begin to respond, not react impulsively, to scenes throughout the day. *Choose minimalism.* Before purchasing anything, pause and ask: "Can the planet afford this?" *Choose a plant-based diet.* It supports gut health, uplifts mental energy, and reduces your environmental footprint.

When we transform, the environment feels it and begins to heal.



THE SPEAKING TREE