Encroachment of land in Mumbai



Santosh Karmarkar

Paediatric surgeon and social activist based in Mumbai



Slum houses and skyscrapers along Mumbai's coast in February 2026. AFP

The average Mumbaikar's plight has become like that of the poor peasant in Tagore's epic poem *Dui Bigha Jomi (two bighas of land)*, in which the poor man says to his zamindar -"O Lord, countless are the plots of land you already own, But consider – I only have land enough to bury me when I'm gone!". The zamindar brushes him aside saying – "Your half-acre will allow me to design a lovely fountain". The poor peasant replies: "Spare this poor man's land, or else he dies!"

Today, the average Mumbaikar occupies two positions when it comes to land ownership. Is he from the builders' lobby (the zamindars of today) or is he a poor Mumbaikar (today's landless farmer) whose only remaining *Dui Bigha Jomi* is being taken away from him? Zamindari exists in India's financial capital today. And it is called '*Builderdari*'.

Rise of the builderdari

The plight of the common Mumbaikar is worse than that of the farmer in Tagore's poem for he has no access to the *builderdar*. He cannot even meet him or speak with him to plead his case. And right under his very nose, he is forced out of his land – land which should have been for him; for the public; for the millions of *aam* Mumbaikars.

When large tracts of mill lands were taken over to build luxury malls and high-rises, when gardens and recreational plots were usurped, when prime plots near Railway stations were given to builders instead of being used for public benefit such as for the much needed expansion of Railway stations and bus terminals, and when redundant Port Trust land is being leased out to *builderdars* and billionaires, where does the common man go? A few months back, a prime plot of land facing the Sea Link bridge, was walled off by a realty company owned by one of India's richest billionaires.

Quite recently, this problem reached its zenith, when the plot of land which was being taken over to build a luxury apartment tower, was already being used by a public hospital viz-a-viz the Sion Hospital for more than 25 years. This happened because one of the alleged *builderdar*s in this case has been the Guardian Minister for Mumbai.

There is no denying that the Sion Hospital urgently requires more space and land to be able to carry out its myriad activities which include outpatient, inpatient, medical college and students-related activities as well as space for sufficient parking and open space for the rehabilitation of patients. The demand for indoor beds and other facilities is so huge that the conditions in the wards of the Sion Hospital, as is the case with any public hospital in the city, resemble wards in war zones. Overcrowded corridors, two patients on one bed, and cluttered IV stands and medical equipment are a common sight. And yet, the above-mentioned prime plot of land has been taken over by the *builderdars* for building luxury apartments.

Do these *builderdars*, their political benefactors and their rich clients (who get world-class treatment in the city's private hospitals) really care for the poor Mumbaikar?

This has been a recurring theme of land usage in Mumbai for decades. Converting public land for private luxury residences prioritises the luxury of a few over the lives of millions. *Chawls* (which provided low-income housing to millions) and mills have been converted to skyscrapers and luxury malls.

The courts must take *suo moto* cognisance of this matter and seek a record of all existing public land in Mumbai and the suburbs and freeze any further conversion of public land. This is a step that should have been taken long ago. This has now become imperative for saving the lives of many Mumbaikars and the life of the city itself.

Converting public land for private luxury residences prioritises the luxury of a few over the lives of millions

Disabled citizens and the future of AI



Navin Aade

works on climate, disability inclusion and AI at NClude

A friend of this author has been blind since birth. He uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) almost every day – to read a document; to make sense of a photograph; or to get through a government form his screen reader cannot open, all without relying on a sighted person for help. Watching what it gives him, independence in the small things most people never have to think twice about, the promise of this technology is impossible to dismiss. At the same time, it is impossible to assume that this promise will reach disabled Indians on its own. AI models are moving into government services, recruitment and healthcare. Behind them, data centres and power lines are rising as the Centre courts $200 billion in AI investment for the next two years.

Disabled people are being brought into the conversation late, if at all.

In the November 2024 *Rajive Raturi* judgment, the Supreme Court held that accessibility is a facet of the fundamental right to life and dignity, and that India's accessibility rules were toothless; they were merely polite suggestions whereas the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 intended binding ones. The court gave the Centre three months to frame mandatory standards. Nearly two years later, the petitioners are back in court because too little has changed. Disabled people should not be made to adapt to systems built without them; AI is the newest such system.

The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities penalised 155 establishments, government ministries among them, for websites and apps a disabled citizen simply cannot use. While the 2016 Act has required accessible digital services since 2019, compliance remains the exception. This is the ground on which we are now deploying AI.

Inherent bias

AI is not neutral. When researchers ran 21 language models through AccessEval, a benchmark spanning nine kinds of disability, the models became more error-prone, more negative in tone, and more likely to stereotype the moment disability entered the question. A study of the widely used image model CLIP found it 15 percentage points less accurate on photographs taken by blind and low-vision users than on web images, and that objects central to disabled lives, such as a white cane or a Braille display, appeared up to 17 times less often in the datasets used to train such models. You can see this bias in everyday digital interactions as well. Tell a mainstream chatbot you are blind and want to become a software engineer, and it often opens with some version of "I'm sorry you're blind." The person asked a career question but the model answered as if they had reported a loss.

Further, a survey of 2,462 users of the NClude platform, which uses these same models to help disabled people complete job applications and government forms on inaccessible websites, revealed findings that were striking: 1,313 users said they had completed a task previously closed to them, but only 543 managed it through AI alone. The rest needed a staff member to step in. A system without that fallback leaves users to improvise a workaround.

Any AI system the government deploys should be tested for disability bias. Training datasets need genuine disability representation, gathered with consent

The same neglect is being set in concrete. India's data-centre capacity is projected to more than quadruple by 2030, to 6.5 gigawatts or more. States compete for these projects with power subsidies and duty waivers; Maharashtra this year relaxed its renewable-energy requirement for data centres from 100 to 51%. Rarely does anyone ask what the new load does to a grid already straining at summer peaks, or what the servers' heat adds to cities that are dangerously hot to begin with.

For millions of disabled Indians, this is not a distant environmental debate. Some depend on powered wheelchairs, oxygen machines or other equipment that cannot be switched off when the grid strains. Many are the first to be stranded when a power cut or an inaccessible emergency alert throws daily life into disorder.

None of this is a case against AI, or the infrastructure a growing economy needs. Disabled people should not be asked to surrender tools they depend on in the name of sustainability. Any AI system the government deploys should be tested for disability bias. Training datasets need genuine disability representation, gathered with consent. And State incentives for data centres should carry conditions on renewable sourcing and on grid and heat impact.

Disabled Indians must have a voice in helping to decide what this technology becomes, from the data that trains the models to the grids that keep them running.

Coal stocks critically low as power demand rises in India

High temperatures and strong El Nino events have increased the pressure on coal-fired thermal power plants

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis

On September 28, Union Coal and Mines Minister G. Kishan Reddy on Monday denied any shortage of coal in the country, despite data showing that more than 44% of India's thermal power plants had critically low stocks. Mr. Reddy said the problem was not a coal shortage but a surge in power demand.

According to the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), data as of September 30 show that among the 191 thermal power plants, 84 plants were critically low on stock. The CEA considers a power plant to be critical when inventories fall below 25% of the required normative stock or when the stock can support power generation for less than three days **(Chart 1)**.

While data contradict Mr. Reddy's claim, he is right about the increase in demand. India saw an increase of 10% in power demand in 2026 – the highest year-on-year increase in the past decade.

India also saw a surge in power shortages in September 2026, the highest since August 2023, according to a *Reuters* report. The report also states that reliance on coal-fired thermal power plants has increased during this period due to a decline in hydro-power generation. It links this to the El Nino phenomenon (a warming of the central and eastern Pacific that alters atmospheric circulation and weakens monsoon winds over the subcontinent).

India has seen weaker monsoons in the last six years in which it experienced strong El Nino events.

Chart 2 shows India's rainfall departure percentage over the past 20 years, specifically in the monsoon months; June, July, August, and September. The rainfall departure percentage compares the rain that actually fell against the historical average for that exact location and period. The data show that in June, India experienced its highest rainfall deficit for that month since 2014, another year that saw a strong El Nino event.

As Chart 3 shows, coal was the primary source for 79% of the total energy generated in 2024-25, according to the "Energy Statistics India 2026" report by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

The International Energy Agency (IEA) posits that unprecedented higher temperatures experienced around the world contributed heavily to the rising demand for electricity.

Chart 4 compares India's average power demand (in gigawatts) per month in 2025 with each month's highest temperatures. The country's average power demand rose in the beginning months of the year along with the temperatures, which went from a maximum of 25.53°C in January 2025 to an annual peak of 35.97°C in April 2025. The consequent decline in the demand for energy saw a concomitant dip in temperatures. In their report regarding thermal comfort in India, the IEA states that the surge in energy demand is driven by rising ownership of cooling technologies such as fans and ACs.

According to the IMD, India experienced its hottest August, since nationwide record-keeping began in 1901, along with the rest of the world, in 2026. The national average mean temperature soared to 28.01°C, which is 0.67°C higher than the "normal" temperature of 27.34°C. The country also saw its highest power demand of all-time recently: 270.8 GW on May 21, 2026.

Although India's coal stocks are deteriorating by the day, the later months of the year generally promise lower temperatures and eased power demand. However, the decreased pressure on coal stocks does not imply a decreasing shortage of supply.

High demand

The data for the charts were sourced from the the Central Electricity Authority, India Meteorological Department, the Ministry of Power, and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

With inputs from Gauri Singavarapu. who is interning with The Hindu Data Team



CHART 1: As per the Central Electricity Authority, 85 out of 191 thermal power plants have critically low coal stock. The chart shows the number of critically low plants at the end of each month

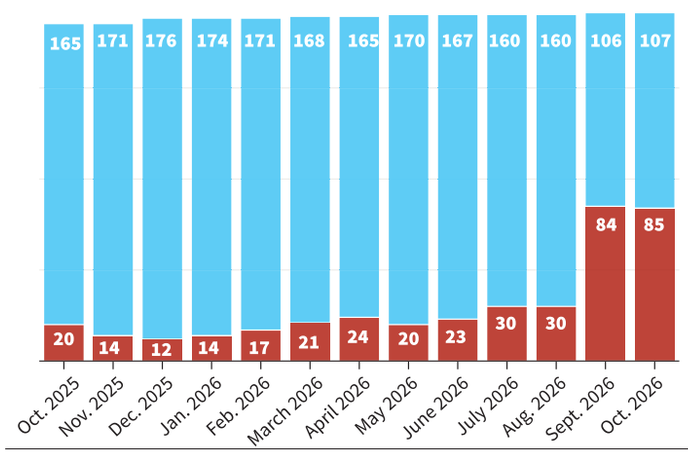


CHART 2: The rainfall departure percentage compares the rain that actually fell against the historical average for that exact location and period. The bars in red show years with moderate to strong El Nino events

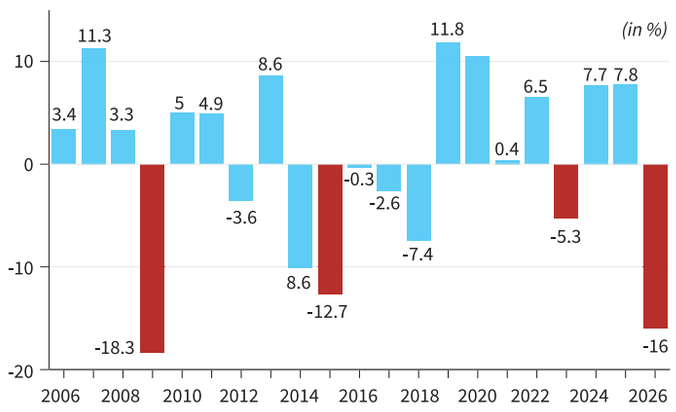


CHART 3: Coal still accounts for most of the energy generation in India. In 2024-25, 79% of total primary energy generation was from coal, as shown below

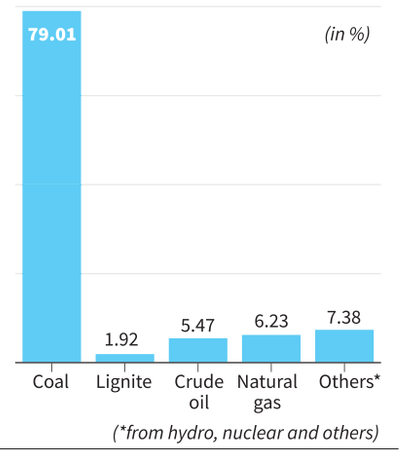
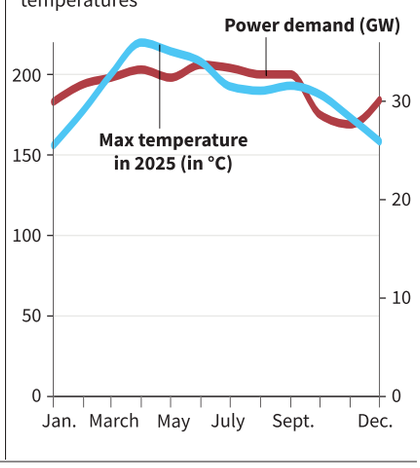


CHART 4: The average power demand rose in the beginning months of 2025 along with temperatures



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 6, 1976

Ajanta, Ellora complex to be put on tourism map

Aurangabad, October 5: Air-India which works in close collaboration with the Government's tourist offices abroad in promoting tourist traffic to India would shortly extend this arrangement to Australia and the Far East, the Managing Director, Mr. K.K. Unni, said here yesterday.

Mr. Unni, who is here in connection with the inauguration of the "Operation Aurangabad" scheme designed to put the Ajanta-Ellora-Aurangabad-Daulatabad complex on the world tourism map, told Samachar that this was being done following the success of such joint operations in the U.S., the U.K., and Europe, which had led to a significant inflow of tourist traffic from those countries.

Mr. Unni said that Air-India, as one of the co-sponsors of "Operation Aurangabad", considered this a unique example of a very practical purposeful, pragmatic and professional approach to the task of developing tourism in a region which was full of archaeological and cultural treasures. Sufficient infra-structure had been built here in the shape of a convenient air service linking two of the most important aerial gateways to India, Delhi and Bombay, he said.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 6, 1926

A huge python on board a steamer

As there was no issue dated October 6, 1926, from the issue dated October 5, 1926

Calcutta, October 5: There was much excitement on board the steamer "Creeve Hall" on Monday forenoon when alarm was raised that a python had been seen among the cargo in the ship's hold. According to the "Englishman", the vessel had arrived the day previous from Colombo and was lying at No. 6 jetty. When coolies began unloading the cargo in twin decks of No. 6 hatch, a python was observed coiled up in one corner alongside some cargo. The chief officer immediately communicated with the police and Inspector Humble of the Reserve Force and Sergeant Green of the River Traffic police were soon on board both armed with shot guns. A hunt for the python then began by the police and the officers of the ship carrying electric torches and the coolies shifting the cargo.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Decline in India's sunflower oil imports in September

36 in per cent. Indian sunflower oil imports fell in September to their lowest level in more than four years after the Ukraine war disrupted shipments. India's sunflower oil imports plunged 36% from a month earlier to 103,000 metric tonnes in September, dealers' average estimates showed. PTI

Years after which Odisha is holding student union polls

8 Students' union elections will be held in public colleges and universities across Odisha on October 15, ending an eight-year hiatus, Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj said on Monday. "The election is aimed at preparing the leadership for the future from the college level," he said. PTI

High schools disrupted due to French student protests

413 France high school students protest disrupted lessons at 413 of the country's 3,700 schools on Monday, the Education Ministry said, down from the number of schools affected last week. It said the drop was due to "sustained dialogue with high school students". AFP

Death toll from flooding in Thailand since mid-September

31 Thai authorities on Monday warned of more rain and flash flooding as the death toll from floods across the country since mid-September rose to 31. Thunderstorms, strong winds and heavy rain are expected across much of upper Thailand from Monday through Wednesday. AP

Spain's crude oil imports from January and August

2.32 million metric tonnes. Between January and August, Spain imported 2.32 million metric tonnes of crude from Venezuela, the highest for this period since the 2.39 million tonnes imported in 2006, according to data. REUTERS

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why is Buxa bringing tigers back?

Why was Buxa chosen for reintroduction? How will the tigers be reintroduced? Why was Valmiki chosen as the source? What are the challenges? Can Buxa sustain a tiger population? How has tiger reintroduction worked in India? Why did tigers disappear from Buxa? How will the reintroduced tigers be monitored?

EXPLAINER

Shiv Sahay Singh

The story so far:

On October 2, a three-year-old tigress, T138, was released in Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal, marking the beginning of a phased programme to reintroduce tigers and establish a viable, self-sustaining population in the reserve. Three more tigers are likely to be introduced to the reserve, which has not recorded much presence of tigers over the past few years.

The tigress was translocated from Bihar's Valmiki Tiger Reserve and released in the presence of Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav and West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari.

Initially, the tigress would be kept in an enclosed area of about 2.3 hectares to allow the animal to acclimatise to its new surroundings before it is released into the wider reserve. T138 would be subject to intensive post-release monitoring using a combination of telemetry, camera trapping and field-based monitoring to assess her movement, adaptation, health and behaviour.

The release of the tigress is not merely about bringing tigers back to Buxa, but its "objective is to create the conditions in which a tiger population can establish, breed and ultimately become viable and self-sustaining," PIB said in a statement.

Why is Buxa Tiger Reserve significant?

Buxa was declared a tiger reserve in 1983 and is the 15 th tiger reserve in the country. Buxa Tiger Reserve is situated in the Alipurduar Sub-division of Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal.

With an area of 760.87 sq. km, the reserve stretches over a length of 50 km from west to east and 35 km from north to south. The reserve has corridor connectivity across the border with the forests of Bhutan in the north; to the east, it has linkages with the Kochugaon forests, Manas Tiger Reserve, and to the West with the Jaldapara National Park.



Three-year-old tigress, T138, walks through the forest after being released into the wild at Buxa Tiger Reserve, in Alipurduar, West Bengal. PTI

One of the reasons for low tiger density has been changes in the habitat due to increasing anthropogenic pressure. "Over the decades, however, habitat degradation and fragmentation, changes in land use and decline in prey availability have affected the ecological conditions required to sustain a resident tiger population. The Reserve subsequently witnessed a prolonged absence of a stable resident tiger population," a PIB statement said.

Why was Valmiki Tiger Reserve selected for bringing the tigress?

The National Tiger Conservation Authority found that there were no tigers at Buxa, Dampa and Palamu tiger reserves; it initiated a programme of reintroduction of tigers in 2018, which has resulted in the reintroduction of tigers at Buxa. Scientists and forest officials were looking for a habitat similar to Buxa from which the tiger may be brought to the reserve. Bihar's Valmiki Tiger Reserve, which lies in the easternmost part of the Terai Arc Landscape, was considered suitable for tiger augmentation because of the similarities in terrain with Buxa.

West Bengal has a thriving tiger population in the Sundarbans, the only mangrove forest in the world to have tigers. As per the last census, the Indian Sundarbans is home to about 100 tigers in the unique mangrove ecosystem. However, translocating tigers from the Sundarbans to Buxa may not have worked because of the vast differences in the terrain and the habitat.

What has been the experience with reintroduction of tigers?

Tiger 'reintroduction' done in India is the first such scientific endeavour in the world, says NTCA. Reintroducing tigers in the Indian context means establishing a tiger population in an area which was part of its historical range but from where it has gone locally extinct.

The tiger reintroduction has been a successful collaborative venture between the NTCA, State governments, and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), with numbers of tigers increasing in reserves where the exercise was carried out.

The reintroduction started in 2008 when tigers were successfully reintroduced in Sariska (Rajasthan) and Panna (Madhya Pradesh) Tiger Reserves. The tiger reintroduction programme has been carried out across 12 tiger reserves in less than two decades.

The success of the programme, however, has not been uniform across the reserves.

A publication titled "Reintroduction & Population Recovery of Tigers in India: Field Experiences & Key Learnings" released by NTCA and WII earlier this year has pointed out that relocation of tigers in Satkosia Tiger Reserve posed several challenges. "The translocated tigers encountered difficulties in adapting to the new environment, and the landscape experienced considerable human-tiger conflict, including incidents of livestock depredation and negative local responses," the report said.

The NTCA website also added that in the past there have been few examples of tiger 'release' (Dongarpur in Rajasthan and in Russia) which were not successful owing to several factors.

Keeping these challenges in mind, the NTCA has prepared a protocol on tiger re-introduction. The protocol deals with aims and objectives of reintroduction, constitution of team, pre-project activities, conducting feasibility study, selection and evaluation of site, suitability of release stock of tigers, socio-economic requirements, preparation for release and post-release activities.

What are the challenges?

Buxa Tiger Reserve had not had a resident tiger for several years, though on some occasions tigers have been recorded in the winter months.

The reserve is dotted with settlements and surrounded by revenue villages and tea estates. The State government has convinced about 300 families to relocate so that they can make the tiger reintroduction exercise successful. Wildlife, particularly elephants, has been threatened by linear infrastructure including a railway line, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of pachyderms over the decade. Because the region lies close to Bhutan, heavy commercial traffic on the road connecting Bhutan and West Bengal through Buxa poses an additional concern.

THE GIST

- A three-year-old tigress from Bihar's Valmiki Tiger Reserve has been released in Buxa Tiger Reserve as part of a phased programme to establish a viable, self-sustaining tiger population
- Valmiki was chosen because its terrain is similar to Buxa, while translocation from the Sundarbans was considered unsuitable due to differences in habitat and terrain
- The reintroduction faces challenges including habitat degradation, low prey availability, human settlements, linear infrastructure and heavy commercial traffic through the reserve

Why are States divided over the mining amendment?

Amendment curbs States' fiscal powers, but their responses vary with dependence and political alignment

Safira Hussain
Sanjay Kumar

In a federal country like India, differences between the Centre and the States over certain issues are not unusual. One such instance recently arose over the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026, passed by Parliament.

Under the amended Act, the Centre's regulatory powers over mining have been expanded to cover not only mines and mineral development but also mineral-bearing lands. It bars States from imposing fresh taxes on mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands, except under conditions prescribed by the Union government. It also cancels mineral taxes imposed by States but not fully collected before the Act came into force.

Mines and minerals are a subject over which legislative powers are divided between the Centre and the States. State governments are empowered to regulate mines and minerals under entry 23 of the State List, but this power is subject to central legislation as per entry 54 of the Union List. The latter entry gives Parliament the discretion to determine the extent of authority over mining regulation and development in the public interest. The Constitution also gives States powers to tax mineral rights and land through entries 50 and 49 of the State List. The recent amendment draws on the Centre's regulatory authority over mineral development to place new limits on these State-level taxing powers. So, the issue widens from mining regulation to the fiscal autonomy of mineral-rich States.

The amended provisions contradict the constitutional position articulated by the Supreme Court in 2024. The court held that States can tax mineral rights, subject to Parliament's power to limit this in the public interest, while their power to tax mineral-bearing land cannot be curtailed through Parliament's powers under Entry 54. The Centre has argued that uneven and multiple State-level taxes raise the cost of domestic minerals, prompting industries to turn to imports and placing an additional burden on the exchequer. By invalidating unrecovered past dues, the law hits at the potential source of revenue for States, narrowing the prospective mineral-related revenue for some of the major mineral-bearing States.

The fiscal stakes

Mineral-related receipts account for 85% of non-tax revenue in Jharkhand and 80% in Odisha, compared with 48% in Karnataka, 41% in Madhya Pradesh and 39% in Rajasthan. Telangana and Chhattisgarh are less dependent, with mineral receipts making up 11% and 6%, respectively. For Jharkhand and Odisha, restrictions on the ability to impose or retain mineral-related levies therefore have significant fiscal implications, while the immediate impact may be smaller in Telangana and Chhattisgarh. Odisha is particularly revealing in this regard. Despite deriving a substantial share of its non-tax revenue from minerals, the State has not responded with a unified position. The Opposition has demanded a special Assembly session. The BJP-led State government, however, has rejected the demand and argued that the amendment would not harm Odisha's mineral revenues. Telangana, where mineral receipts account for only about 11% of non-tax revenue, has also joined other non-NDA-ruled States intending to move the Supreme Court against the amendment. While Karnataka, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala are planning to challenge the law in the Supreme Court, arguing that the restrictions on State taxation of mineral rights and mineral-bearing land undermine States' fiscal powers and federalism, Kerala has additionally argued that treating mineral-bearing land in this manner gives the Centre wider powers over areas such as the State's coastal and forest regions. Jharkhand has also raised objections, with the Chief Minister warning that the loss of revenue from mineral taxes could affect social-security schemes benefiting millions because the amended Act renders certain uncollected past dues invalid. By contrast, there has been no comparable challenge from States such as Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan or Chhattisgarh so far.

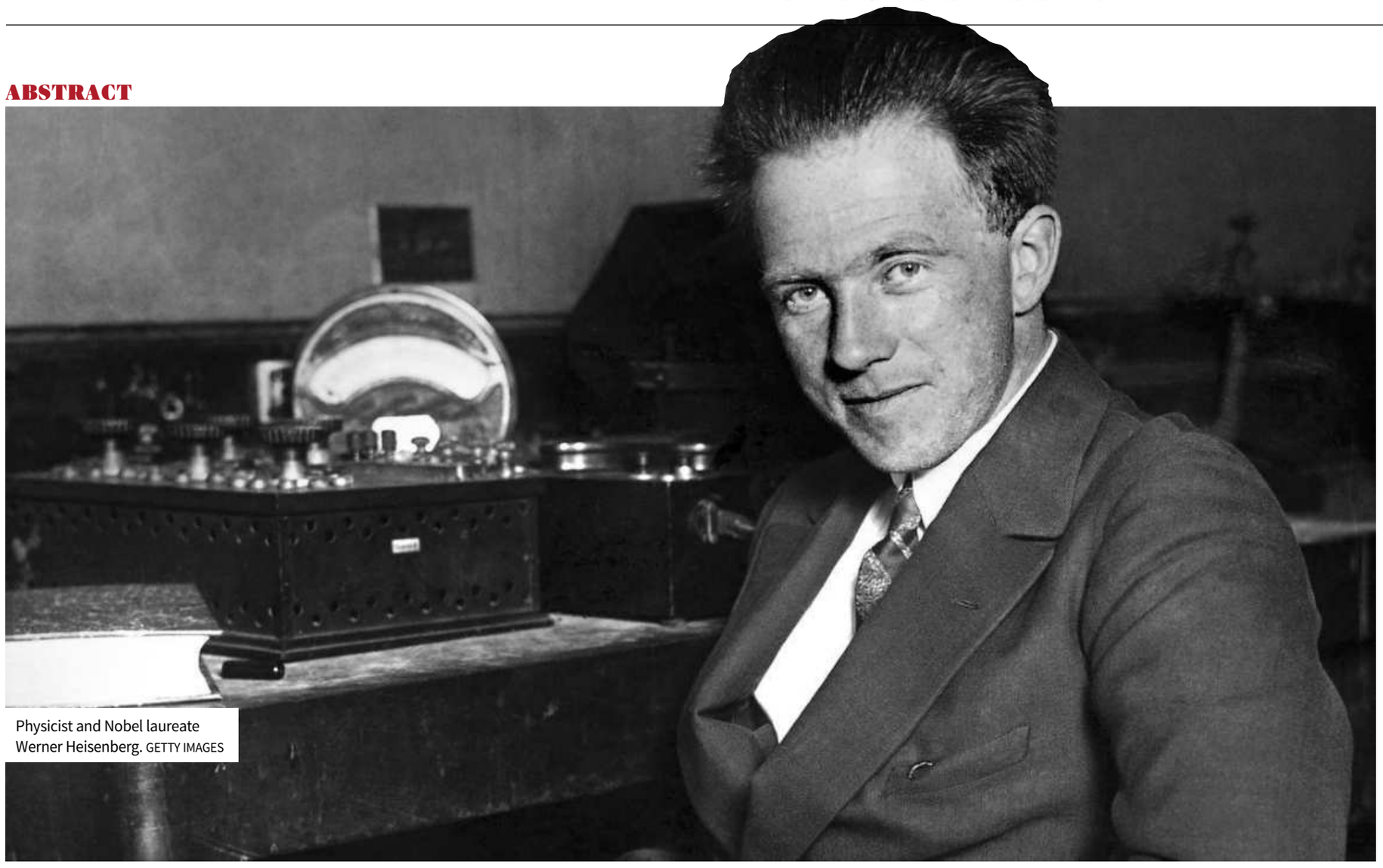
The political geography of this discontent points to an interesting feature of Indian federalism. Even when the underlying concern is perceived erosion of States' fiscal space, the extent to which it becomes a federal issue varies across States. Mineral dependence creates a material stake, while political alignment may influence whether that stake translates into an organised federal challenge.

India's fiscal federal structure comes across as asymmetric rather than purely decentralised. It gives greater taxation powers to the Centre while placing greater expenditure responsibilities on the States in several areas. The Centre has significant influence over borrowing and transfers to the States, which restricts State autonomy when they depend on the Centre's transfers or require its approval for borrowing. How much fiscal autonomy do States possess, and how far can the Union influence it often becomes a bone of contention between them.

The evolving Indian federal dynamic is marked by push and pull between the central authority and States' autonomy. Conflicts between the Centre and the States over legislative jurisdiction, fiscal resources, administrative control, and even foreign policy engagements have surfaced time and again, be it over the GST compensation, the terms of reference for Finance Commissions, the National Education Policy, the Citizenship Amendment Act, and proposed amendments to All-India Services rules, to list a few. This amendment therefore adds another fault line to India's continuing Centre-State contest over legislative authority and fiscal autonomy.

(Safira Hussain is currently associated with Lokniti-CSDS; Sanjay Kumar is a Professor and an election analyst)

ABSTRACT



Physicist and Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg. GETTY IMAGES

The Nazi nuke: Werner Heisenberg was more off target than he believed

Using nuclear archaeology, scientists have found that the Nobel laureate may have grossly overestimated his team's ability to build a nuclear weapon by 1945; they found that Germany lacked the uranium, heavy water, and reactor-grade graphite needed to achieve a sustained chain reaction

Vasudevan Mukunth

Patrick J. Park, Brittany Robertson, Miriam E. Hiebert, Jason Zhao, Ciara B. Sivels and Timothy W. Koeth, 'Nuclear archaeology reassesses Heisenberg's last reactor experiment', PNAS Nexus, Vol. 5, Issue No. 9, September 29, 2026

Hans Bethe. Felix Bloch. Niels Bohr. Albert Einstein. Enrico Fermi. James Franck. Otto Frisch. Samuel Goudsmit. Lilli Hornig. Rolf Landshoff. Maria Goeppert Mayer. Rudolf Peierls. George Placzek. Eugene Rabinowitch. Joseph Rotblat. Leo Szilard. Edward Teller. Stanislaw Ulam. John von Neumann. Victor Weisskopf. Eugene Wigner. These are just some of the scientists who had emigrated from Europe, many of whom later made critical contributions to the Manhattan Project – the American effort to build the world's first nuclear weapon.

Many of these scientists had seen firsthand the horrors Nazi Germany was perpetrating in Europe; many were Jews who were escaping persecution themselves. They showed their contempt for Adolf Hitler and his armies by bringing a sense of urgency to their research on the bomb, and were often motivated by what they believed the stake was: the fate of the world itself.

The Manhattan Project tested its first atom bomb on July 16, 1945, and delivered two to the U.S. military in July-August. Part of their sense of urgency was rooted in doubts about whether Nazi Germany was also building a bomb, including some groups led by the physicist and Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg. The anxieties were not unfounded: in April 1945, only weeks before Germany surrendered to Allied forces, Heisenberg's team had assembled a nuclear reactor in a cellar beneath a church in Haigerloch, in the country's south.

The setup, called the B8 pile, had 664 cubes of uranium suspended on chains in around 1,400 litres of heavy water. A 40-cm-thick shell of graphite surrounded the core, and was itself surrounded by a layer of aluminium and a 60-cm-thick layer of (ordinary) water. The team had taken six years to build B8 but had little to show for it. When a few neutrons were shot into the reactor, the uranium multiplied them into more – but no chain reaction followed.

Far from critical

After the war ended, Heisenberg said the team had come very close; he wrote in a 1947 article in *Nature* that Haigerloch didn't have enough resources and that just a little more quantity of uranium would have done the trick.

According to a new study in *PNAS Nexus*, by researchers from the U.S., Heisenberg & co. were actually way off the mark.

Only around 14 of the 1,100 or so uranium cubes made for Heisenberg's efforts still survive. Using a pycnometer, the team found the density of one cube to be 18.535 g/cm3, lower than the 19.01 g/cm3 of solid uranium, indicating the cube was porous. Another cube contained 0.724% of uranium-235 (by mass), meaning it was natural rather than enriched uranium.

In March 1944, a German physicist named Karl Wirtz had reported that Nazi Germany's stocks of heavy water had accidentally been diluted to 98.85% purity. A post-war sample from Haigerloch in 1947 found only 96.8% purity. The team also started from the records of aluminium giant Norsk Hydro to estimate that Nazi Germany had a maximum supply of 1,836 kg of pure heavy water during the war.

When the team worked upwards from here, including the design of the B8 pile, they concluded it had a neutron multiplication factor of 0.942. A reactor needs to have a factor of 1 to be critical. A difference of 0.058 is actually large. The team found that the uranium cubes in B8 were arranged too close together, preventing the heavy water from efficiently slowing the neutrons. The researchers estimated that increasing the heavy water's purity to 100% would improve the factor to only 0.95.

They also simulated over 1,200 combinations of uranium and heavy water and found that the B8 pile would have required at least 2,994 kg of uranium and 3,411 litres of heavy water to become critical. B8 however, contained 1,538 kg of uranium and 1,549 kg of heavy water when it was dismantled. More importantly, the team also estimated all German facilities at the time combined possessed only 2,572 kg of uranium and 1,890 kg of 96.8%-pure heavy water – a significant shortfall and which could support a factor of 0.959 at best.

The first U.S. reactor, called Chicago Pile-1, first became critical on December 2, 1942, using natural uranium as fuel and graphite, rather than heavy water, as the moderator. So some nuclear historians have opined that Heisenberg *et al*. had simply picked the wrong moderator.

A 2025 study in *The European Physical Journal H* demurred, however: while the U.S. was able to source petroleum coke extremely low in boron and turn it into reactor-grade graphite, the graphite made from metallurgical coke in Germany was high in boron, which absorbs neutrons. The B8 pile used the graphite from the predecessor B7 pile, and the new study also found that it contained 3.4 weight-parts per million (wppm) of equivalent boron contamination. The Siemens graphite from earlier contained around 6.6 wppm. On the other hand, the Manhattan Project used graphite with around 1.4 wppm of boron. In simulations, it didn't matter how far apart the uranium cubes in the B7 pile or in any previous piles could have been: the contamination made criticality impossible.

The significant difference between the Nazi German and the Manhattan Project programmes, then, seems to have been industrial capacity. The Americans developed and built multiple technologies to enrich uranium, set up reactors and chemical separation units, and a weapons laboratory, which together created 1.3 lakh jobs and invested $2.2 billion at the peak. Nazi Germany had nothing of similar scale.

According to a 2015 study in *Angewandte Chemie*, some uranium from the Nazi nuclear programme had not experienced a significant neutron flux and had probably come from Joachimsthal in today's Czechia, indicating (in a limited sense) the absence of an industrial uranium enrichment programme.

Many questions about the Nazi nuclear programme still remain open, often rooted in different interpretations of common data. Some important ones are centered on whether German scientists deliberately delayed the bomb project. Some technical questions are open, too. For example, the purity of the heavy water at Haigerloch itself is unknown and the graphite's boron content is based on archival rather than direct, firsthand information.

The overall picture today is neither that German physicists were incompetent nor that they were tantalisingly close to building a bomb. Their base of materials fell short of what a nuclear programme required and their supply chains were not good enough. Ultimately, given the information available at the time, and more so given Germany was also home to many of the world's best nuclear physicists, the Manhattan Project scientists' concerns were understandable.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Test yourself on India's show at the recently concluded Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
The 85-medal tally is India's second-highest ever haul at the Asian Games, following the record 107 at Hangzhou 2022. With which country did India tie for the gold medals with 21?

QUESTION 2
Who was the only Indian to win all three types of medals, and in which events?

QUESTION 3
At 15 years, 6 months, and 6 days old, who became India's youngest-ever gold medal winner?

QUESTION 4
Which sport gave India the maximum gold medals with five?

QUESTION 5
Apart from Neeru Dhanda in shooting, who else returned with two gold medals to his/her name?

QUESTION 6
Pincky Balhara and Suchika Tariyal won bronze medals in which contact sports?



Visual Question:
Identify this person. She became the first Indian woman to win an individual gold medal in which sport? REUTERS

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Singeetham began his career as an assistant to which esteemed director? **Ans: K.V. Reddy**
2. '*Dikkatra Parvathi*' won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Tamil in 1974. On which Bharat Ratna's literary work was it based? **Ans: Rajaji (C. Rajagopalachari)**
3. Singeetham had the honour of directing Rajkumar's 200th and Kamal Haasan's 100th film. **Ans: '*Devatha Manushya*' and '*Raja Paarvai*', respectively**
4. Of his 61 films, what is special about these four: '*Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma*', '*Samyuktha*', '*Ghatothkach*' and '*Welcome Obama*'? **Ans: He also composed the music**
5. Name the 1985 biographical dance film based on the life of Sudha Chandran. **Ans: '*Mayuri*'**
6. He was an executive director of which National Award-winning 1970 film? **Ans: '*Samskara*'**
7. He is credited with creating the first dialogue-less feature film in 1987. Ans: '***Pushpaka Vimana***' (Pushpak/Pesum Padam)
8. The famous song sequence '*Sundari Neeyum*' from '*Michael Madhana Kama Rajan*' was visualised differently. How? **Ans: It was filmed at 48 fps instead of the normal 24 fps to give it a romantic slow-motion feel**
9. What is special about '*Sing Geetham*'? **Ans: All the dialogues are in a 'sing-song' format**
Visual: This is a screengrab of Singeetham making a cameo with a bioscope to introduce a film with a song. Name the film. **Ans: '*Michael Madhana Kama Rajan*'**
Early Birds: Arun Kumar Singh | G. L. Vadhera | Dodo Jayaditya | Sudhir Thapa | Sunil Madhavan



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

"What is the meaning of 'wicked'?"

"Wicked? Well, when you say that someone is wicked, it means that he/she is evil. He/she is behaving in a way...."

"I know that meaning of wicked! But does it have another meaning?"

"Another meaning? Well, I have heard...."

"...you see, today my cousin in America emailed me saying that the Harry Potter movie is wicked. What does he mean by that? How can a movie be "wicked"?"

"Well, what he means is that the movie is excellent. In informal contexts, the word 'wicked' is used to mean excellent."

"Wicked means excellent? You are joking, right?"

"No, I am not. Native speakers of English use the word 'wicked' to mean 'excellent or impressive'. For example, I can say, the masala dosai that you get in that restaurant is wicked."

"I bought some really wicked shoes last weekend. How does that sound?"

"Sounds great. But remember, this use of the word 'wicked' is restricted to informal contexts. It is considered to be slang by many people."

"Ok, I'll try and remember that. Let's hope I get some...."

".... where did you get that shirt? It's really tight."

"This shirt is not tight. Most of my friends have said that it's a great shirt."

"I agree. It is a great shirt. No doubt about it."

"But you said it was tight. How can...."

".... one of the meanings of 'tight' is excellent."

"You mean 'tight' and 'wicked' mean the same thing?"

"That's right. In informal contexts, they can both mean the same thing. "Look at those really tight shoes that the woman is wearing. How does that sound?"

"Sounds good to me. You must see Lord of the Rings. It's really tight."

"But when a person says, ' Those shoes are really tight, how do we know what he means? Does he mean that the shoes are really tight or...."

"... I understand what you are saying. Well, I guess the meaning will depend on the context."

"That makes sense."

"That does make sense, doesn't it? But what you are doing doesn't."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, with the exams around the corner, shouldn't you be studying? Most of your friends are pounding the books."

"Pounding the books? Does it mean studying very hard?"

"That's right. When you 'hit the books', or 'pound the books', you study very hard. For example, my neighbour's son has been pounding the books for over six months now."

"I spent the entire weekend pounding the books."

"You could also say, I spent the entire weekend hitting the books."

"I've been hitting the books for over three months now."

"It's about time that you became a study animal."

"A study animal? Does it mean someone who studies all the time?"

"Students refer to person who studies very hard as a 'study animal'. People tell me that my friend Madhu is a study animal."

"My sister has been a study animal."

"Too bad you aren't one."

"I know. I wish I could become a study animal."

Published in The Hindu on March 5, 2002

Word of the day

Vicissitude:
a variation in circumstances or fortune at different times in your life or in the development of something

Synonyms: ordeal, misfortune, tragedy, challenge, trouble, adversity, difficulty

Usage: *She faced many vicissitudes after moving to a new city.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/vicissitude

International Phonetic Alphabet: /vɪsɪsɪtjuːd/

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

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Economy

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2026

EASE OF DOING BUSINESS IN FOCUS: NO ARREST, MINIMUM SENTENCING TO Rs 10,000-FLOOR FOR NOTICES

GST process reforms pin hope on data, tech to ensure compliance

Siddharth Upasani & Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, October 5

THE GST Council's meeting on Thursday will take up the second half of the reform exercise that was kicked off with the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate cuts announced in September 2025. Officials said the process reforms on the agenda will cement the indirect tax regime for the next half a decade or so and "systems built on technology and good quality data" can help ensure correct behaviour from businesses without "onerous compliance".

"GST rates were cleaned up last year. Now, the focus is on moving towards a stable tax system with predictability, as was the demand from the industry. It may take a year or two to stabilise and then the GST regime will only require minor tweaks for the next 5-6 years," an official said. "If the proposals are approved by the Council, then the framework will be set," the official added.

A key proposal in the process reforms that will be discussed in the Council meeting on October 8 is going to be the removal of the power to arrest by GST officers, as reported by *The Indian Express* on Sunday. This power, officials said, has led to the creation of unnecessary leverage over businesses even before the actual arrest stage is reached.

"Tax disputes will be resolved through civil consequences, namely recovery of the tax, interest for the delay, and penalty," the official said. However, prosecution will remain available, with the GST Council expected to discuss some tweaks. Additionally, the threshold for prosecution is likely to be increased from Rs 1 crore to Rs 5 crore.

The sentencing provisions are also proposed to be softened, with the minimum sentence likely to be removed altogether. This, officials said, means courts won't be bound to impose a term of imprisonment regardless of circumstances. Also, a fine will be available as an option in every case. Furthermore, it is proposed that no notice will be issued at all where the amount involved is below Rs 10,000. Crucially, this change is expected to apply to new cases as well as those pending, whether in adjudication or in the appeal phase.

"Such cases are about a fifth of all cases by number and a negligible part of the money. For a small business, a notice of this size costs more to answer in fees and time than the amount in dispute. Removing that category will be a real relief, and will free up officers for matters of substance," the official said.

The GST Council will deliberate on a wide variety of issues on October 8 that encompass all the tax dealings of an entity during its lifecycle– getting registered, filing returns and correcting them, claiming refunds, and answering demands.

"All four processes are proposed to be redesigned on a single principle, namely that the system should do what can be done from data and the officer should be left with what needs judgement," an official said.

One major process change is set to be for the export of services, which will help align GST laws with the practice on ground. Citing the example of a testing laboratory which receives a prototype from a foreign client, tests it, sends back the report, and is paid in foreign exchange, the official explained that the place of supply followed where the work was performed. "It will now follow the location of the customer, and such work therefore qualifies as an export. This opens the whole field of testing, certification, repair, calibration, research and analysis to export treatment, and India has substantial capacity in all of them."

Wednesday's meeting comes over 13 months after the last one in September 2025 which announced the major rate overhaul that saw the number of tax slabs being reduced to 5% and 18%, with a 40% rate for demerit goods. "There have been no meetings of the GST Council in the interim, but discussions have been ongoing to bring all stakeholders on the same page, and that takes time. What has helped is that there have not been any major concerns about revenues being adversely impacted by the rate rationalisation exercise of September 2025. This has made it easier to go ahead with the process reforms discussions at this week's GST Council meeting."



The GST Council last met in September 2025. REUTERS

GST Council to now meet on Thursday

New Delhi: The 57th meeting of the GST Council has been rescheduled to Thursday from Wednesday, an office memorandum said, citing "unavoidable circumstances". This will be the Council's first meeting after it announced an overhaul of Goods and Services Tax rates in early September 2025. This week's meeting is expected to focus on process reforms. **ENS**

As RBI rate hike looms, a move beyond 25 bps seems a minor possibility

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, October 5

THE RESERVE Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) began its three-day meeting on Monday. And while most economists are predicting that a 25-basis-point increase in the policy repo rate to 5.5% will be announced on Wednesday, talk has emerged that a larger hike could be possible.

"It's not a debate that there will be a rate hike on Wednesday. But considering the MPC is now acting from behind the curve, it could even be a 50 bps increase," said a senior economist who did not wish to be named.

While the six-member MPC had unanimously left the repo rate unchanged at 5.25% on August 5 and offered rather sanguine commentary to go along with it, minutes of its meeting, released two weeks later, struck a different note. Governor Sanjay Malhotra, for instance, said while headline retail inflation had averaged only 2% in 2025-26 — when the repo rate was brought down to 5.25% — there were signs it was now normalising. This "may suggest a recalibration of policy rate."

Meanwhile, Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta noted "a case for a hike may emerge during the course of the year".

According to Soumya Kanti Ghosh, State Bank of India's Group Chief Economic Advisor, the RBI may "raise rates by 25 bps AT LEAST" (emphasis Ghosh's). Meanwhile, Madhavi Arora and Harshal Patel of Emkay Global Financial Services said that "a 50 bps hike cannot be ruled out as a potential policy catch-up".

The RBI last increased the repo rate way back in February 2023. As such, any rate hike on Wednesday will be the first in over three-and-a-half years.

The headline inflation rate, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rose to 4.82% in August, as per latest data. And while this is comfortably within the RBI's mandated range of 2-6%, it was the third month in a row that it had come in above the medium-term target of 4%. The RBI's most recent forecasts also show inflation rising to an average of 5.9% in the last three months of 2026, before cooling to 5.5% and 5.3% in the first two quarters of 2027.

Long rate hike cycle?

To be sure, the market overwhelmingly expects the repo rate to be raised by only 25 bps on Wednesday. However, many who do so have not only brought forward their prediction of a rate hike from December to October but also think the RBI may end up raising interest rates significantly.

Morgan Stanley economists led by Upasana Chachra see the RBI on Wednesday kicking off a run of four consecutive rate hikes of 25 bps each, or 100 bps in total, which will take the repo rate to 6.25% in April. "We view the rate hike cycle primarily as policy normalisation rather than disruptive tightening," Morgan Stanley said in a report last week.

The word 'normalisation' has found several takers, with some even suggesting the first 50 bps of increase in interest rate will only lead to some normalisation of monetary conditions.

The last time the repo rate was 5.25% or lower was in mid-2022, when the RBI was in the midst of reversing the extraordinary measures taken to help the economy hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• NORMALISATION OF MONETARY POLICY

THE RBI last increased the repo rate way back in February 2023. As such, any rate hike on Wednesday will be the first in over three-and-a-half years

WHILE MOST economists are predicting that a 25-basis-point increase in the policy repo rate to 5.5% will be announced on Wednesday, talk has emerged that a larger hike could be possible

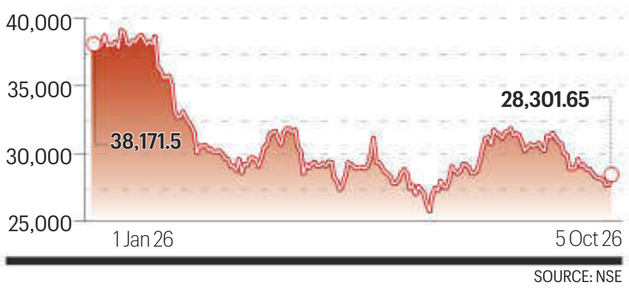
THE LAST time the repo rate was 5.25% or lower was in mid-2022,



when the RBI was in the midst of reversing the extraordinary measures taken to help the economy hit by the coronavirus pandemic

Accenture forecast lifts IT stocks, but near-term outlook remains hazy

• Nifty IT is down sharply so far in 2026



SOURCE: NSE

Akash Mandal
Mumbai, October 5

A HANDFUL of Indian IT stocks were among the best performers in the stock market on Monday after global technology major Accenture's better-than-expected revenue forecast for the year lifted sentiment across Indian bourses.

Big names such as Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS) and Wipro Ltd gained up to 2%. Smaller names like Persistent Systems Ltd and Mphasis Ltd also added up to 3%. However, not all IT stocks rose, as Infosys Ltd and HCL Technologies Ltd fell 1-3%. In fact, the latter two were briefly in the green early in the session before swiftly falling into the red. Others that ended higher also lost some steam by the end due to profit booking. This led to Nifty IT, which had gained nearly 1.6% earlier in the session, eventually ending flat compared to its previous close.

Overall, the benchmark Sensex gained 472.77 points or 0.7% to end at 72,382.47. Nifty 50 also added 0.6% to close at 22,555.75. Many sectors, including banking, financial services and fast-moving consumer goods, also saw strong buying, helping lift the benchmarks. A handful of banks and IT majors have a big weightage on both indices.

This follows a lean patch for the markets as the two key indices extended their losing run for the eighth straight week — the longest such losing streak in 25 years. "Markets staged a recovery, supported by softer-than-expected US jobs data and a moderation in crude oil prices, providing some relief to investors assessing the near-term interest rate outlook," said Vinod Nair, Head of Investments at Geojit Investments.

Irish major Accenture's earnings for the June-August quarter beat analysts' estimates on Thursday. However, the bigger talking point was the higher-than-expected guidance provided by the company for FY27. As the markets remained shut on Friday on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, this exuberance was seen on Monday.

"Accenture's 4QFY26 revenue of $18.68 bn (+7% y-o-y in constant currency or cc terms) exceeded its top end of guidance band of $18.4 bn. It guided for 3-6% growth in cc (with inorganic contribution at 2-2.5%) terms for FY27E, which was higher than the Street expectations of 2-5%, and expects no effect from currency movements in FY27E," noted Nomura. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

IndiGo hikes fuel charge amid high jet fuel prices, higher airfares likely

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, October 5

WITH JET fuel prices remaining elevated on a sustained basis amid the West Asia crisis, IndiGo on Monday announced hikes in its distance-based fuel charges for domestic and international flights from Tuesday (October 6). The hikes in fuel charge are bound to lead to a further increase in airfares, which have already been high due to the impact of the West Asia war. Jet fuel is a major cost element for airlines as it accounts for over 40% of their operating expenses.

While the increases on domestic flights range from Rs 100 to Rs 350 per sector, a large number of international passengers will face substantially larger increases compared with the fuel charges announced by the airline in April. The fuel charges for international flights have been hiked by up to Rs 2,500 per sector. The revised fuel charges will apply to all bookings made from 00:01 am on Tuesday, which means that booking already made will be unaffected by the charge revision.

"ATF prices have remained volatile in recent months, especially following geopolitical issues in the Middle East. The continuous rise in the fuel prices, with the latest month-on-month increase exceeding 14%, has taken ATF costs to levels that are amongst the highest in the last decade. Given that Aviation Turbine Fuel makes up a significant share of airline's operating costs, this rise is expected to impact airlines' cost structures and network economics, including those of IndiGo," said the country's largest airline, which operates over 2,200 flights a day.

IndiGo described the latest increase as a "measured and relatively modest adjustment", saying a significantly larger increase would have been required to fully offset the rise in fuel costs. The fuel charge was introduced in March, in the early days of the West Asia war, and was last revised on April 1.

"IndiGo regrets the additional burden these revised fuel charges may place on its customers. However, the decision reflects the sustained increase in operating costs and the evolving market environment. IndiGo will continue to monitor the situation and make relevant adjustments as and when appropriate. IndiGo remains committed to giving wings to the nation by offering affordable, convenient and consistent travel to customers," the airline said.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• IndiGo fuel charges



(DOMESTIC ROUTES)

Route distance (km)	Revised fuel charge (₹)	Increase (₹)
0–500	375	100 (36.4%)
501–1,000	600	200 (50%)
1,001–1,500	900	300 (50%)
1,501–2,000	1,150	350 (43.8%)
Above 2,000	1,300	350 (36.8%)

New bilateral investment treaty model to soon get Cabinet nod: FM

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said a new template for bilateral investment treaties is ready and is expected to get Cabinet approval soon in a bid to make it more investor-friendly.

The new template, being prepared over the last one-and-a-half years, seeks to address shortcomings in the model approved in 2016 and provide sharper protection to investors from both sides, she said.

India has continued negotiations on investment protection agreements even as the new template is being finalised, she said at the Munich Security Conference here.

The latest agreement, with Saudi Arabia, goes beyond the 2016 framework and incorporates elements that are more sharply focused on protecting the interests of investors from both countries, she said.

India has also concluded similar agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Oman and some Central Asian countries, Sitharaman said. **PTI**

SEBI chairman urges investors to avoid finfluencers, unregulated products

Chandigarh: Launching its nationwide investor-awareness initiative, Project Jagrook, from Chandigarh on Monday, SEBI chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey urged investors to beware of investment frauds and use regulated products, channels and entities instead of relying on anonymous tips, finfluencers or exaggerated claims about returns.

Pandey advised investors to follow five basic habits: invest only in products they understand, start early and stay invested to allow compounding to work, diversify their investments and not mistake fixed returns for risk-free investments.

"Instead of asking, 'Which product gives the highest return?', first ask, 'What am I investing for?'" he said.

Stating that "more savers are becoming investors", Pandey said mutual fund assets have grown sharply from Rs 12 lakh crore in 2015-16 to around Rs 87 lakh crore today, at an average annual growth rate of about 21% over the past 10 years. Referring to a large-scale survey on awareness of securities-market products and actual market participation, Pandey said only 36% of investors had high or moderate knowledge of the securities market. **ENS**

• BRIEFLY

SEBI may pause closing auctions for derivatives

Mumbai: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is likely to stop using closing auctions to calculate derivatives settlement prices for at least a year, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter said, in a partial reversal of new mechanisms it has introduced for setting the closing prices of key stocks and derivative contracts. The SEBI in August introduced a new mechanism called the closing auction session, or CAS, for stocks that have futures and options contracts linked to them. REUTERS

India's economy remains strong: N Chandrasekaran

New Delhi: India's economy is robust in a world that is uncertain and difficult, and multiple indicators show that the country is in a stable and strong place, Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran said on Monday and highlighted that energy security, advanced manufacturing jobs and investments in human capital will be "critical" for sustaining long-term growth. He noted that the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision has percolated across multiple sectors in the country. PTI

India-Swiss group to resolve FTA irritants

New Delhi: India and Switzerland have agreed to set up a special group to address constraints related to trade and investment under the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) that has been operational for a year now. "A group will be formed within the Government of India to discuss all issues related to trade constraints or investment constraints," Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs Sibi Gorge told reporters at a Special Briefing on the State visit of Swiss President Guy Parmelin to India. FE

Foxconn's Q3 revenue rises 47% to $95.4 billion

Taipei: Taiwan's Foxconn, the world's largest contract electronics maker, reported on Monday a 47% jump in third-quarter revenue year-on-year, fuelled by strong AI-related demand. Revenue for the July-September quarter was T$3.03 trillion ($95.4 billion), well above an LSEG SmartEstimate of T$2.83 trillion that gives greater weight to forecasts from analysts who are more consistently accurate. Strong AI demand led to robust revenue growth for its cloud and networking products division, the company said. REUTERS

Only 9% use public transport to go to work

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, October 5

THE STATISTICS ministry's first-ever household travel survey has found that only 9% of Indians use public transport to go to work, with 43% using two-wheelers. A mere 3% use cars. The survey's results also seemingly back the decision by several states to offer free bus travel to women, with more than a fifth of urban women using this mode of transport to go to work, three times as high as urban men.

Further, people in urban areas spend as much as Rs 1,044 per month to commute to work, 71% more than the Rs 612 spent by people in rural areas. Nationally, the average monthly expenditure to go to work is Rs 785.

As per the survey, buses are used by 6.7% of people who reported travelling more than 1 kilometre to reach their place of work. Another 2.1% said they used monorail or tram, while 0.2% said they travel by rail.

"While monorail, metro, suburban rail, and trams account for 5% of urban worker commutes nationally, usage surges in Maharashtra (20.7%), West Bengal (16.5%), and Delhi (14.4%)," the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) said on Monday. Train, monorail, and tram include metro rail and local trains.

The findings of the National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), conducted from July 2025 to June 2026, are based on responses from 20 lakh people across 14,274 villages and 10,377 urban blocks. MoSPI said the survey's main objective is to generate data-driven insights that can be used in regional transport planning and infrastructure developments as well as identify gaps, optimise transport routes, and improve service frequency and scheduling.



Over a fifth of urban women take buses to work. REUTERS

The survey's results back the decision made by several states to offer free bus travel for women, with 21.7% of urban women who travel more than 1 km for work taking a bus. For urban males, this figure is just 6.9%.

In certain states, the fraction of urban women commuting to work by bus was significantly higher than the national average: 46.8% in Keralam, 41.1% in Tamil Nadu, 34.9% in Karnataka, and 28.9% in Telangana. The 'bus' category includes public, private, company, and intercity buses. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Honda to rework India strategy, target cost cuts

Mumbai/Tokyo: Honda Motor aims to cut costs by as much as a fifth and halve development times under its new partnership in India with Tata Technologies , as per two people familiar with the matter, as pressure from rivals forces the Japanese automaker to rethink its go-it-alone approach.

Reeling from electric vehicle (EV)-related losses that it expects to reach more than $12 billion, Honda is pivoting to gasoline-electric hybrids and slashing expenses. Last month, *Reuters* reported that it is seeking to cut more than $9 billion in costs over the next four years and has told suppliers to drastically reduce prices. In May, engineering firm Tata Technologies said it was selected to develop vehicles for a Japanese automaker. It declined to name the partner, but the two people and another person familiar with the matter said it was Honda.

Under the outsourcing agreement, Tata Technologies will develop cars for the Indian market, while Honda expects to see up to 20% in cost reductions and halve its development times from around five years at present, two people said. Honda decided to bring in Tata Technologies after the automaker's Japanese and Indian managers failed to agree on which suppliers to use for upcoming vehicles in India, two of the people said. **REUTERS**

• MARKETS

Sensex	NIFTY	Gold ▲	US Dollar ▼
72,382.47	22,555.75	₹1,48,198	₹96.30
472.77	133.80	Silver ▲	Oil ▲
0.66%	0.60%	₹2,24,157	$120.73

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIA BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION DATA GOLD PER 10G, SILVER PER 1 KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF OCTOBER 2, 2026

WEB EXCLUSIVE
The Cornell case made me ask my sons — what would you have done?
— Nalini Sorensen
Log on to www.indianexpress.com

WORDLY WISE
Who will guard the guards themselves?
— Juvenal

The Indian EXPRESS
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RAMNATH GOENKA
IN 1932
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The knock on the Supreme Court's door

THIS NEWSPAPER'S investigation that shone a light on the functioning of the Election Commission of India in the context of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls has raised serious questions. They have to do with a multi-member body, a constitutional authority, shrinking, many a time, into a one-man show, undermining the checks and balances within. More fundamentally, these questions touch the citizen's sacrosanct right to shape her own and the nation's future through the right to vote. On Sunday, Justice Ujjal Bhuyan framed the issues in all their breadth and gravity. Large-scale disenfranchisement caused by the SIR, he said, is a violation of the Constitution, and detaching the citizen from the right to vote is like "taking out the soul from the body". He referred to debates in the Constituent Assembly to underline the transformational vision and the constitutional guarantee. "... years of freedom struggle and the revolt against foreign rule made the adoption of universal adult franchise a natural choice and an essential ingredient of democracy..." Equal vote with equal value, regardless of identity and social location, was the first step in a new nation to achieve equality. As the Supreme Court takes up cases related to the modalities of the SIR, and the EC's appointment process and functioning, it would do well to listen in to Justice Bhuyan's outlining of what is at stake. Former SC judge Rohinton Fali Nariman underlined it: Also on Sunday, he said that the SIR's removal of voters put the right to vote, which is at the "heart of our democracy", in "great peril".

These are not just the concerns of two individual judges, they reflect the disquiet the Supreme Court needs to address to repair the damage done by its troubling silence. The citizen's fundamental right to participate in the electoral process has to be protected at all costs. But even as the EC went back on its own record of inclusiveness, even as it shifted the burden of proof onto the vulnerable voter and set up a hurdle race at every stage of the SIR, the Court kept giving it the benefit of every doubt. Going ahead, therefore, not just the EC, the Court is also on test.

It is welcome, then, that the SC has made it clear that it did not approve of the changes made to Form 6, which made the process of registration of new voters more daunting. It is reassuring, too, that it wants answers from the EC on aspects of the decision-making within. With due respect, the Court must keep asking questions, again and again. It has a formidable record of affirming the sanctity of Article 324 that secures the Election Commission, it should ensure that remains without stain. For, as one its own members said, this is about the soul of the nation.

From calling for peace, Delhi is now working for it

BY ALL accounts, India has stepped into a more proactive role vis-à-vis the Russia-Ukraine war. Since the conflict began in February 2022, New Delhi has consistently urged restraint, with PM Narendra Modi saying to Russian President Vladimir Putin in September that year that "this is not an era of war". Now, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha has said that, among the proposals Kyiv has received, India's is the "most comprehensive"; President Putin has said PM Modi "constantly raises the question about putting an end to the conflict" and has "very good ideas"; and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has acknowledged that India has gone "beyond advocacy" and is talking to both sides. The shift from calling for peace to working for it is welcome. Delhi must build on it.

On this front, India's interests align with those of the world. Strikes on ports and vessels by both Russia and Ukraine, two major grain exporters, have left farmers in both countries vulnerable and increased the risk of a global food shock. Minister Jaishankar referred to this a few days ago when he warned of a "major food crisis" in the coming months, in addition to the already significant fertiliser shortages caused by conflicts in Eastern Europe and West Asia. The Ukraine war has also disrupted European energy markets, while India's purchases of Russian oil have strained ties with the US. An end to the war, or even a de-escalation, would ease such pressures.

Going forward, Delhi would do well to focus on specific issues such as grain and energy, rather than sweeping questions involving territory or security guarantees. Both sides have immediate and shared interests in these areas, which means something can be agreed upon without first resolving the harder questions. Even if it does not exert as much leverage over Ukraine or Russia as the US and China, respectively, India can demonstrate that it is actively working towards getting the warring parties to talk. A record of even-handed diplomacy would also answer critics who see India as too close to Russia, a relationship that has drawn scrutiny, not least over oil purchases, for nearly five years.

A single cell, a flash of light, a breakthrough

IN THE beginning was a single cell, instinctively moving towards light so that the business of living may continue. For German photobiologist Peter Hegemann, studying the microscopic alga known as *Chlamydomonas* in the 1990s, the question was straightforward: How did this simple organism respond to light in one-twentieth of the time that it took the human eye to see? The simplicity of the alga's biology, it turned out, was the key needed to unlock the complexities of the human brain, from how different organs are controlled to where feelings, memory, even consciousness itself, reside.

In awarding the 2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine to Hegemann, American neuroscientist Karl Deisseroth and German biophysicist Georg Nagel, the Nobel Assembly has recognised what is effectively a new era in neuroscience. Hegemann, along with Nagel, discovered channelrhodopsin, a protein that enables *Chlamydomonas* to react to light in half a millisecond — compared to the 10 milliseconds that it takes the human eye to process information. Deisseroth then used it to develop a "light switch" that can control nerve cells, thus inaugurating the field of optogenetics.

The pinprick of illumination that was made by Hegemann's curiosity has since expanded to shed light on neural pathways that could once only be guessed at. Researchers have been able to identify the precise circuits that control functions and behaviours, from why some people develop a greater preference for sugar to how the rhythms of the heart can affect emotions and how the brain stores information about fear, anxiety and depression. It offers hope for a greater understanding of psychiatric and neurological disorders — areas of darkness that could soon become less intimidating.

From India to Global South, a Gujarat water-governance model



PARAMESWARAN IYER, NITIN BASSI AND DANIEL W SMITH

NEW DELHI recently hosted the ninth edition of the India International Water Week under the theme of climate-resilient water management. The talk focused as much on what India has achieved in the last decade as on what comes next — keeping water supply sustainable, using water more efficiently, and treating used water as both an environmental and economic resource.

India's influence in the global water sector has grown substantially. From a country exposed to frequent climate shocks and access challenges to one now preparing for climate extremes such as floods and droughts, it offers lessons for other countries in the Global South. Over the past decade or so, India has designed and implemented some of the world's largest programmes to improve water governance, rejuvenate rivers, increase access to water and sanitation, and enable community-driven water conservation, protection, and augmentation. And if we pause and take a step back in time, it is important to acknowledge the leadership of then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's initiatives between 2001 and 2014, a period that served as a laboratory for the water governance reforms that rolled out across India after 2014. These included the design and implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Jal Shakti Abhiyan, Namami Gange, Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABY), Per Drop More Crop (PDMC), etc.

This 25-year journey is documented in our new case study, 'From Gujarat to India: Water Lessons for the World', which traces water governance reforms in Gujarat and India from 2001 to 2026. Drawing on official data, policy and programme records, the literature and consultations with practitioners, the study examines how political leadership and prioritisation, public financing, institutional reform, administrative implementation and community engagement came together to strengthen water security at scale. Its central finding is that water security is as much a challenge of governance and institutions as it is of engineering — and that the Gujarat experience offers a useful lens for understanding the subsequent national journey and its relevance to the Global South.

The case study distils four key lessons which, if studied and contextualised appropriately, can prove effective in the coming years and inform water governance in other countries in the Global South: Lead with governance, manage the resource and the service together, root action in communities, and build for scale from the start.

Lead with governance, not only hardware: Political will and institutional strengthening, rather than infrastructure alone, are core to water security. India has developed a framework for putting them into action at scale, called the "4 Ps", which were articulated by PM Modi and UN Secretary-General António Guterres through the Delhi Declaration in October 2018. The first is political leadership that prioritises water, reflected in initiatives such as universal tap water access, a cleaner Ganga, community-driven groundwater management, and communication campaigns that keep water top of the mind, such as Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain. Second, enabling public (and private) financing for the capital and recurring costs of water governance. Third, developing partnerships between national, state, and local governments; community-based organisations, and national and international knowledge organisations, including multilateral development banks like the World Bank. Fourth, ensuring people's participation in local water decision-making and management, such as communities resolving to make their villages open-defecation free or preparing village-level water security plans. The "4 Ps" are worth emulating in any other context or geography.

> Water access gains momentum in communities equipped with effective local water governance institutions such as India's Pani Samitis

Manage the water resource and the service together: Taps and canals will fail if water does not flow. Addressing both water resources development and service sustainability simultaneously and at scale is paramount. Many cities in Africa are growing at a rapid rate, and industrial and irrigation demand will follow, so planning resources and services together now is cheaper than retrofitting later. As India's experience in recent decades shows, getting ahead of the coming surge in water demand with linked water resources and services plans would help countries gain from these economic shifts with lower risk for water insecurity. A key part of getting ahead of this surge is being forward-thinking on water reuse, especially for non-potable uses, including planned data centres and semiconductor fabrication units. In India alone, the annual market revenue from the sale of treated used water is projected to reach around Rs 73,000 crore by 2047, at current prices.

Root water action in community ownership: Water access gains momentum in communities equipped with effective local water governance institutions such as India's Pani Samitis, infrastructure that consistently delivers a high-quality service, and a balance of internal resources and external support. This has been demonstrated through numerous water conservation, harvesting, and recharge programmes. There is a governance linkage across scales to achieve this. As demonstrated in Gujarat during 2001-2014, the Chintan Shivirs helped prioritise water governance among key stakeholders and formulate actionable solutions to design water-related policies aligned with community expectations. A similar approach was replicated at the national level. The recent Departmental Summit on Water organised by the Ministry of Jal Shakti and addressed by the PM in September 2026 is an example.

Going big and scaling up: The world is off track on SDG 6 to ensure safe drinking water and sanitation for all, and to sustainably manage water resources, used water, and ecosystems by 2030. Estimates suggest an additional $500 billion in annual investment is required. To meet the scale of water governance reforms, infrastructure installation, data collection, and maintenance required for SDG 6, governments and their leaders cannot afford to slow down. Implementation of JJM across the country demonstrates that India can both think big and implement big. The global community can learn from political leadership at the highest level in India about the will, the financing and the institutions to do it at scale.

Iyer is a former secretary to the Government of India at the Ministry of Jal Shakti; Bassi is a fellow with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water; Smith is an assistant professor at George Mason University. Views are personal

The limits of US's West Asia strategy are showing



ANJU GUPTA

AS THE US-Israel war against Iran enters its eighth month, there is little indication that a "durable" agreement is likely to be reached soon and revive negotiations over Tehran's nuclear programme. The war has reignited the Saudi-Houthi conflict, incurring additional risks to the East-West pipeline as well as to the maritime traffic through the Red Sea and across the strait of Babel-Mandeb.

Israel continues to be militarily engaged in four theatres — Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria — while perceived threats from Iran and its allies based in Iraq and Yemen have not diminished. An attempt allegedly by an Omani co-pilot to crash a Flydubai flight en route from Dubai to Tel Aviv has raised the risk to aviation security in the region. A few days earlier, the UK police arrested five British nationals on suspicion of planning attacks on RAF Fairford, a base being used by US bombers deployed against Iran.

Both incidents are still under investigation. However, Iran hawks believe the incidents must be linked to Iran.

Against this backdrop, the last US troops withdrew from Iraq on September 30, in line with a bilateral agreement with the Iraqi government, though the condition of bringing all Iran-aligned armed groups under Iraqi government control has not been met. This has raised serious concerns about the further deepening of Iranian influence in Iraq. Recall that the US handed over its last base in Syria to the interim government in April, even though Syria continues to be highly unstable.

While the US does not seem inclined to militarily disengage with Iran, what do withdrawals from Iraq and Syria suggest about US policy?

The war seems to have pushed the US to reassess its footprint in the region for three reasons: Damage to bases, depletion of its munitions, and high casualties among US forces. Over 16 US bases in the region are reported to have suffered serious damage. US think-tanks have documented an alarming depletion of munitions and long waiting times before these can be replenished to pre-war levels. This makes it harder for the US to protect its bases and forces.

> The two upcoming events — the Israeli elections and the US midterm elections — could produce political outcomes unfavourable for the region

Further, the "successful" hacking of personal information of US forces based in the Gulf has been repeatedly flagged. Thus, force protection at the bases has become a crucial issue for the US, which explains the withdrawal from bases in Iraq and Syria. The US is unlikely to use existing bases in support of allies in other active conflicts (Saudi-Houthi, Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria).

US CENTCOM has stated that "Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve remains operational and is now headquartered in Jordan as US forces continue the counter-ISIS mission in Syria alongside Coalition partners and the Syrian government". This is in line with the US's current counter-terrorism strategy of working with partners rather than occupying bases in areas where force protection is a serious challenge. The US is in the process of deploying a third aircraft carrier strike group to the region.

The strengthening of seaborne resources seems to suggest that the US has perhaps reprioritised securing the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) in the theatre over providing physical protection to allies.

Competing partnerships, including Israel-UAE, the Mecca alliance, and the Saudi-Pakistan Defence Pact are coming up in search of durable security architecture for the region. Many Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are exploring ways to bring Iran into a broader architecture as well to ensure stability, security, and prosperity of the region. Given Washington's focus on Iran's nuclear programme and SLOCs, as well as Israel-Iran hostilities, such efforts may face serious obstacles.

The two upcoming events — the Israeli elections and the US midterm elections — could produce political outcomes unfavourable for the region. However, it is beyond doubt that the US-Israel war on Iran has resulted in multiple unintended consequences that the region and the global community will have to cope with for years.

Gupta, a security analyst and former director general of police, is the author of Glocal Terror in South Asia: Tracing the Roots in Geopolitics and the Tragedy of Afghanistan

In Germany, Indian migrant is caught between politics, policy



SHAIREE MALHOTRA

ELECTIONS IN the East German states of Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania gave the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) two striking victories, marking the German far right's first landslide since 1945. Its vote share increased in Berlin. Chancellor Friedrich Merz's Christian Democrats suffered a historic defeat in all three elections. From failing to enter the Bundestag in 2013, the anti-immigrant AfD rose to second place in the 2025 federal elections, becoming the largest opposition party. It has exploited grievances over economic stagnation, pairing the discontent with demands for severe restrictions on immigration. This has consequences for Germany, the EU, and India.

In 2022, India and Germany signed a Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPA). As Germany grapples with an ageing population, mass retirements and declining birth rates, the MMPA provides up to 3,000 annual job seeker visas for qualified Indian professionals. But while Germany invests in creating pathways to address labour shortages, its electoral politics portrays migration as a threat. With Indian nationals tripling from 86,000 in 2015 to 2,80,000 in 2025, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs describes India as "the most important country of origin for labour and education migration". Around 1,38,000 Indians work in skilled occupations including STEM fields, IT, healthcare — sectors central to the economy, but struggling with the largest worker deficits. A Bertelsmann Foundation study estimates that Germany would need 4,00,000 fresh immigrants annually to address worker shortages, likely to number 1.3 million by 2030. The AfD's proposed incentives to bring back Germans living abroad and "baby bonuses" can hardly bridge such gaps. But with the far-right boom, skilled Indians considering a future overseas may also rethink Germany's allure.

As migration rules are determined at the federal level, the far-right's rise may not lead to a direct abrogation of migration laws or agreements. Yet there is already evidence of a hardening political atmosphere. In 2025, Merz's CDU sought to restrict migration through a proposed law supported by the AfD. Thus, even as they try to keep the AfD out with the "firewall", its influence is changing how mainstream parties approach migration. States control aspects of public services, policing, and education, where far-right ideology may create an uneasy climate. Hate crimes doubled from 2019 to 2023. The AfD's rhetoric differentiates between irregular migration that burdens welfare systems and skilled legal migration that contributes to society. Yet rather than migration status, traits such as skin colour shape day-to-day encounters and prejudices. While the election results may not erode Germany's broader appeal, and a migration architecture that remains comparatively open as anglophone destinations tighten policies, perceptions are a two-way street. Hard-right rhetoric may convince skilled Indians to see Germany as a corridor to onward migration.

> Hard-right rhetoric may convince skilled Indians to see Germany as a corridor to onward migration

As Indo-German relations expand, the mobility of skilled professionals acts as a bridge, also linking both countries' research and innovation ecosystems, particularly in domains like AI. How policymakers reconcile political and economic realities will determine Germany's fate as Europe's industrial powerhouse and its attractiveness as a migratory destination.

The writer is a deputy director with ORF

40 YEARS AGO
October 06, 1986


INDIAN EXPRESS
Security awareness lacking, says PM
Clean chit given to SPG
Panel on civil services

PM on security measures

DESPITE BEING given funds and ideas to improve the police, the Union territories have not been able to use them well, PM Rajiv Gandhi has said. Talking to *Indian Express* two days after the attempt on his life at Rajghat, he said, "I have been trying to chase it for some time... the expansions I have asked for have not taken place at the speed I wanted."

Asiad closing ceremony

THE PYROTECHNICS the South Korean athletes displayed in the ultra-modern venues of the 10th Asian Games were reflected in the sky at a spectacular closing ceremony that may have brought a tear to the eye of the most hard-boiled media critic in the 100,000 capacity Olympic stadium in Seoul.

Panel on civil services

PRIME MINISTER Rajiv Gandhi is appointing an eight-member panel to "examine certain aspects relating to the civil services, including their structure, management, role etc." During a recent review of the performance of the Department of Personnel, it was thought that a panel should go into the various aspects of the functioning of the civil services to make them more efficient and result-oriented.

Reagan writes to Rajiv Gandhi

US PRESIDENT Ronald Reagan is understood to have written to PM Rajiv Gandhi on the hijacking of the Pan Am plane last month. Well-informed sources in New York said the letter was sent recently but would not give any details of the contents.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY
A Bolsonaro presidency would be bad for women, the poor and minorities.
— *The Guardian*

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The problem is not just what history textbooks teach, but also what they don't



MANU V DEVADEVAN

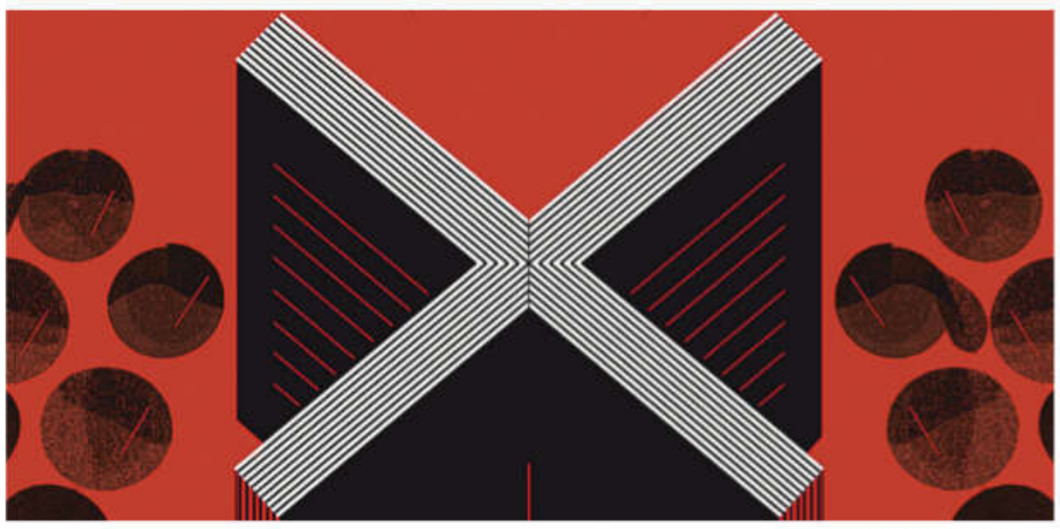


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

IN RECENT decades, the periodic revisions of Indian school History textbooks have become increasingly tenuous and worrying. From the invention of fictitious narratives to the erasure or inappropriate abridgement of important periods in history, revisions have assumed several questionable forms. The new textbooks tend to present pieces of information that are sometimes contrary to facts, besides contradicting their own statements in some instances. The larger purpose of these textbook revisions is to present a communally informed account of India's past that conceives of history as a story of antagonistic groups forced to share a geopolitical territory.

History is the discipline that tells us how we reached the present and what it meant to live in times when human lives were organised differently. Human lives were transformed by deep-seated processes involving the introduction and increased use of metals, tools and weapons, fire, agriculture, livestock farming, the wheel, alphabets and numbers, money, monumental architecture and more. Ideas, ranging from god, value, valour and hierarchy to justice, equality, democracy and peace have shaped human lives in profound ways. A lesson in History involves a nuanced understanding of this journey.

Do the new History textbooks in our schools live up to this mandate? No, they do not. NCERT's new Social Science textbook for Grade IX, Understanding Society: India and Beyond — Part 2, is the latest in a series of contestable textbook revisions. Released last Tuesday, the book putatively "aims to equip students with the skills that are needed to grow… and to enhance their analytical, descriptive, and narrative capabilities". As it turns out, there is much to be desired in the book on these counts.

Consider the chapter, "India's Long Road to Independence", which is meant to be an account of a decisive phase in Indian history. The chapter turns out to be an assorted set of events presented chronologically. Little is said in it of historical processes that might encourage critical thinking. Colonialism and nationalism are not defined or discussed in conceptual terms, and processes such as the growth of literature, the development of capitalism and the course of constitutional reforms are nowhere seen. There isn't a word on Ripon's local self-governance initiative or the Morley-Minto or the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

The chapter begins with a "big question": "How did a land of diverse geographies, languages and religions come together to challenge and finally end nearly two centuries of British rule?" This is precisely the kind of question that encourages critical thinking, but the chapter ends without touching upon any of the issues that the "big question" flags.

> The real issue lies in shifting the emphasis increasingly to lionised accounts of certain periods and presenting the past as a set of acts by a variety of actors engaged in religious antagonism

Another chapter, "Cultural Currents: 13th to 17th Centuries," puts off a conscientious reader with its embarrassing "big question": "How did Indian culture endure and continue to grow richer during this period despite invasions and an unstable political context?" The chapter states that religious differences between the Islamic invaders and the local population were so striking that there wasn't really a meeting ground in sight for a time. The power of the Bhakti tradition, along with Sufism, allegedly helped India overcome this crisis. The chapter posits that monotheistic Islam and a religion with several schools of thought were marked by a stark difference. A few pages later, it argues that Islam's idea of the oneness of god was already present in the Upanishads. One is left wondering what the stark difference was all about!

This chapter holds that Islamic invasions led to the imprisonment of women and their sale as slaves. As a natural consequence, women began to make their public appearances less frequent. The use of purdah, *ghunghat* and other forms of veiling are presented in the chapter as an attempt to protect women from the invaders. The 10th-century traveller Abu Zayd's words are cited as evidence to the effect that Indian women wore no veil before the advent of Islam. It is, then, mighty uncertain what Rama was referring to in the *Pratima*, a play attributed to Bhasa, when he told Sita, "*apaniyataam avagunthanam*", "remove your veil". And what was Sudraka speaking of in the Mricchakatika when he said that Sarvilaka covered Vasantasena with a veil (*vasantasenaam avagunthya*) after she relinquished her life as a courtesan?

These aren't the only factual inaccuracies in the book. There are several more. But the challenge that such textbooks pose is not with deliberate misrepresentation of facts or contradictory information. A learned class teacher can address these inadequacies in the classroom effortlessly. The real issue lies in shifting the emphasis increasingly to lionised accounts of certain periods in history and presenting the past as a set of acts by a variety of actors engaged in religious antagonism. The interrogative character of historical studies is less frequently seen in these textbooks.

Students are told of thousands of soldiers marching, but not how the soldiers were fed or from where they sourced their weapons. Students are told of high-quality steel produced in ancient India but not how the furnaces worked. Students are told of fire sacrifices by the Vedic people, but not told what it took to produce and maintain fire in an age when lighters and matchsticks did not exist. Students are given a checklist of great advances in astronomy but not told what an armillary sphere is and how it worked. Students are told that Bankim Chandra wrote *Anandamath* but not told how the schools of the day equipped children to be literate enough to read Bankim.

The schools that made Indians literate in the past 200 years have contributed in no small measure to the making of India as we have known it in our lifetime. This important lesson from the past should inform every line that a textbook committee decides to include in a book meant for our schoolchildren.

The writer is associate professor of History at IIT Mandi, Himachal Pradesh

ECI must not force voters to lie. Solution may lie in a Form 6X



S Y QURAISHI

THE ELECTION Commission's latest instructions mark a U-turn in its approach to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). After an exercise in which about 13 crore names disappeared from draft electoral rolls, the ECI has directed its machinery to identify and re-enrol arbitrarily deleted eligible voters. The change is welcome — even after causing countrywide chaos. But its significance should not be concealed behind administrative language.

In instructions issued on September 29 and reinforced at its October 1 meeting with Chief Electoral Officers, the ECI has ordered a special enrolment drive in 20 states and Union territories where SIR has been completed. Officials must compare pre-SIR and post-SIR rolls, identify missing voters, visit their homes and facilitate their enrolment. Political parties may assist. These instructions address two distinct problems. Both deserve attention.

First, young voters. For years, the ECI took pride in encouraging every Indian youngster who turned 18 on every January 1 to register immediately. The Union cabinet's 2011 decision to make January 25 National Voters' Day reflects this approach. In 2022, another important reform was introduced. Instead of a single qualifying date of January 1, it provided four: January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1. Seventeen-year-olds could even apply in advance. The message was unmistakable: Nobody should unnecessarily wait to exercise the franchise after becoming eligible.

What happened to that commitment in 2024?

The ECI must explain how many young people becoming eligible from 2024 onwards remained unenrolled and why. It cannot now quietly announce a special drive for young voters and expect everyone to forget these questions. Generation Z is entitled to an explanation. The Commission should publish quarterly figures for applications, enrolments, rejections and pendency, identify those affected by its additional requirements, and account for any eligible young citizens who consequently missed elections. Those responsible for unlawful or unjustified administrative obstructions must be held accountable. Announcing a corrective drive is no substitute for explaining why it became necessary.

Two, the restoration of deleted voters. Here, the contradiction is even more extraordinary. The Commission has instructed officials to identify people who appeared on the pre-SIR rolls but disappeared from the revised rolls and bring them back on the rolls straightaway. A dramatic surrender indeed. Yet it proposes to bring them back through Form 6. The heading of Form 6 explicitly states: "Application Form for New Voters". Its declaration requires the applicant to state: "I am applying for inclusion in Electoral Roll for the first time." How can somebody who has been voting for 20 or 30 years honestly sign such a declaration? There is an additional irony. The same form warns that making a false declaration is punishable under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, with imprisonment extending to one year, a fine, or both. An elector whose name has disappeared is effectively being told to declare that he is applying for registration for the first time.

We need to examine the experience of those previously registered voters who reportedly protested against this procedure but were nevertheless forced to submit Form 6. How many complied because they were told that they had no other way of recovering their vote? Why should citizens be placed in a position where recovering their electoral registration requires them to sign a false — and hence illegal — declaration? There is a potentially serious criminal dimension for election officials, too. Under Sections 45 and 49 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, intentional instigation or assistance in committing an offence can constitute abetment. An abettor can face the same punishment as prescribed for the offence.

But the larger question is institutional. The Commission is now instructing officials to identify previously registered voters and bring them back through a statutory form designed for first-time applicants. How can it reconcile these two instructions?

The solution is straightforward. Introduce an appropriate restoration procedure. Ask for the previous EPIC number and electoral-roll particulars. Verify whether the citizen remains eligible, has shifted residence, is registered elsewhere or has become disqualified. Where necessary, amend the statutory forms through the prescribed legal procedure. I would suggest introducing a new form, say 6X.

We must save citizens from expensive and cumbersome litigation when the electoral administration possesses the records needed to examine their claims. A first-time voter needs registration, using Form 6. A wrongly deleted voter needs restoration, using Form 6X, which can be created in a few hours by the Law Ministry amending the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.

The Commission has finally recognised the practical necessity of identifying both categories. It must now provide legally appropriate procedures for dealing with them, publish the results and explain the administrative failures that made this corrective exercise necessary.

Quraishi is former chief election commissioner of India and the author of An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Asiad report card

CELEBRATING ASIAD podiums while dreading Olympic deficits overlooks a key systemic flaw ('A late surge at Nagoya and a long way to Los Angeles', *IE*, October 5). Unlike sporting powerhouses that field development squads at continental meets, India persistently deploys its frontline Tier-1 athletes to secure medals at the Asian and Commonwealth Games. This over-reliance inflates regional tallies while masking our acute lack of bench strength. Continental success will never translate into Olympic gold until we build genuine depth beyond this handful.

Harsh Pawaria, Rohtak

Seeking capital

RISING GLOBAL borrowing costs deserve closer attention as India seeks capital for development ('Global capital is no longer cheap, that's the challenge', *IE*, October 5). Dependence on foreign funds becomes risky when investors demand higher returns and global conditions turn uncertain. The priority should be to strengthen domestic savings, deepen the bond market and maintain fiscal discipline. Public expenditure must increasingly favour productive infrastructure rather than recurring commitments. A predictable tax regime and stable policies would also improve investor confidence.

A Myilsami, Coimbatore

Aviation safety

THE INCIDENT is a reminder that aviation safety must account for both technology and human limitations ('A pilot's heroism points to need to rethink cockpit safety', *IE*, October 5). Pilots require regular simulator training for rare but critical emergencies, while airlines should strengthen procedures for situations involving incapacitation or impaired communication. Independent safety reviews can identify weaknesses before another incident occurs. Technology should assist pilots without creating excessive dependence on automation. Regulators must also ensure that safety recommendations are implemented and periodically audited.

S M Jeeva, Chennai

To fight cancer better, make every diagnosis count



JYOTSNA GOVIL

A LONG-STANDING demand to make cancer a notifiable disease across the country may finally be within reach. If implemented well, this could mark a turning point and change how India counts, plans for and responds to cancer. In its recent order, the Supreme Court asked the 19 states and Union territories where cancer has not yet been declared a notifiable disease to consider doing so. It also asked whether mandatory guidelines from the Centre are needed to bring uniformity.

The states should respect the Court's order in its full sense and begin the process without further delay. Experience from states where notification is already in place can provide useful lessons. But differences in reporting and use of information make it difficult to build a comparable national picture. India needs common national guidelines for cancer notification. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare should establish a standard minimum dataset, common definitions and timelines, uniform safeguards and compliance rules. Healthcare providers and laboratories will need training, technical assistance and a practical transition period.

The Indian Cancer Society, which completes 75 years in 2026, has long advocated stronger cancer surveillance because better data is the foundation of better cancer care. Notification can provide timely information on diagnosed cases, while registries can validate, enrich and analyse it to understand incidence, patterns and trends. Data is not merely about knowing how many people have cancer. It is about knowing where the disease is, who is affected and where the health system needs to respond. Linked with registry and health-system data, notification can reveal geographic patterns, high-risk populations, delays and dropouts, and show where additional staff, diagnostic capacity or financial support are needed.

> Notification can provide timely information on diagnosed cases, while registries can validate, enrich and analyse it to understand incidence, patterns and trends

The implications for health planning are considerable. How does a government decide how many hospitals a district needs, whether facilities are adequate, how many professionals are required or where specialised cancer services should be developed? Such decisions should be based on disease burden and population need. Cancer information must flow from facilities at every level, including smaller hospitals and diagnostic centres, into a system that can bring the data together. States have different levels of technical capacity and some will need the Centre's support through training, standardised protocols and digital infrastructure. Reporting must be simple, practical and interoperable with hospital, laboratory and cancer registry systems, including where connectivity is limited. A common digital backbone could provide shared standards while integrating existing systems. CoWIN demonstrated India's ability to operate digital public-health infrastructure at national scale. Cancer notification requires a different architecture, especially for longitudinal information, interoperability and privacy, but deserves the same ambition.

Reliable data can also improve planning for medicines, diagnostics, radiotherapy and emerging therapies by helping governments, healthcare providers and the pharmaceutical industry anticipate demand and improve availability. Data protection, however, must be non-negotiable. Cancer information is deeply personal. Any national system must safeguard access, privacy, cybersecurity and permitted uses of information, with clear rules on identifiable data and anonymisation. Better notification may initially make India's cancer numbers appear higher. This should not be interpreted as a sudden increase in prevalence. More comprehensive reporting will identify cases previously outside formal records; an initial rise may simply mean we are seeing the problem more clearly. Over time, consistent data can identify trends and gaps in care, strengthen research, guide resources and help policymakers assess whether interventions are improving outcomes. Most importantly, it can move cancer planning from estimates towards evidence.

The SC has opened the door. States should move promptly, while the Centre provides the standards, technical support, digital infrastructure and safeguards needed to make notification work consistently. Ultimately, this is about making every cancer diagnosis count. A diagnosis should not remain confined to an individual hospital record when, with appropriate privacy protection, it can help show where cancer occurs, where care is falling short and where resources are most urgently needed. We should use this moment not merely to count cancer cases, but to build the knowledge India needs to fight cancer more intelligently, more equitably and more effectively.

The writer is chairperson, Indian Cancer Society, Delhi Branch

AI gives answers. Children must learn to ask questions



VINEET NAYAR

IF A machine can answer almost any question our children ask, what should we be teaching them? I have been thinking about this as AI moves from our phones into our classrooms and workplaces. Knowing the right answer will still matter. But it cannot be the only thing we reward. We will need people who can ask better questions, challenge what they are told, experiment, and imagine something that does not yet exist. I have seen young graduates grow into CEOs. What stood out was their belief that they could figure things out. They were willing to say, "I don't know. Let me try."

For nearly two decades, I have worked with children and teachers in government schools. I have watched what happens when a child understands the lesson, and what happens when the language itself becomes a barrier. Imagine a six-year-old girl. At home, she talks endlessly, argues with her parents, and asks questions about everything. At school, the teacher begins explaining a lesson in a language she barely understands. Other children raise their hands. She stays quiet. Tomorrow, it happens again. Soon, "I don't understand the language" becomes "I don't understand the lesson." And then, perhaps, "I am not as smart as the others."

This is why the language in which a child first learns matters so much now. A familiar language lets the child concentrate on the idea rather than struggle with the words used to explain it. More importantly, it gives her the confidence to participate. She can ask why, disagree, make mistakes, and try again. I worry that we underestimate this. We speak about learning outcomes, but what about the child's belief in her own ability to learn? We can help her catch up on a missed chapter. Rebuilding the confidence to speak after years of silence is much harder.

> We speak about learning outcomes, but what about the child's belief in her own ability to learn?

For millions of children, the mother tongue is the language in which they first learned to think aloud, tell stories, make friends and ask why the world works as it does. It deserves a place at the beginning of their education, not just in a cultural celebration. This is not an argument against English. I know how many doors English can open, and I want those doors open to every child. But learning English and being required to learn everything through English are not the same thing. We should not make a child feel less intelligent simply because she has yet to master a second language.

For generations, we have often treated the child with the correct answer as the smartest child in the room. Today, a machine can produce answers in seconds. What will distinguish the person using it? The ability to ask why the answer might be wrong. To notice the problem nobody has framed. To wonder whether there is a better way. To test an idea even when the outcome is uncertain.

I call this the fourth language: The language of questions. It is not taught by asking children to memorise a list of questions. It grows when a teacher welcomes an unexpected "why", when a child is allowed to be wrong without being embarrassed, and when curiosity is treated as a strength rather than an interruption. And it begins long before a young person joins a company or learns to use AI. It begins in that first classroom, with a child who feels she has something worth saying. So as we discuss how many languages our children should learn, let us pay attention to the one in which they begin. The first language gives a child the confidence to speak. Only then can she learn the fourth, the courage to question.

The writer is founder-chairman, Sampark Foundation, and former CEO, HCLT

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• GLOBAL

Behind France's snowballing student protests

Yashee
New Delhi, October 5

AROUND 500 schools stayed shut across France on Monday amid raging protests by high school students.

The protesters have blockaded schools, set fire to waste bins, and in some cases smashed furniture. According to French officials, damage across 40-odd schools is worth around €3 million (Rs 32.5 crore). The protests began on September 17 at the Saint-Exupéry high school in Créteil, a Paris suburb, and quickly spread.

Education Minister Édouard Geffray has announced a feedback programme for students, along with an action plan to quickly hire more teachers beginning Monday.

What do the protesting students want?

The major grievances are overcrowded classrooms, fewer teachers, no nurses or social workers in some schools, and crumbling infrastructure. Inequality is also a factor, with students from poorer suburbs saying their address is impacting their education.

A French government report from April says, "During the 2024-2025 school year, 9.8% of teaching hours were not provided in public secondary schools, of which 7.5% was due to the non-replacement of absent teachers and 2.3% was due to the total closure of the establishment." The report adds that the "proportion of teaching time not provided increased by 0.7 points compared to the previous year due to a greater number of days of school closures."



Protest in Lille on Oct. 1. AP

Some of the students have said there are 40 of them packed in a classroom, when the average for French high schools is around 30 in a class. The length of the school day — from 8 am to 5 pm — is another concern. The extreme heat wave this year has added another dimension.

What is the political angle?

While in many schools, teachers have protested side by side with students, in other cases, school staff have said the protesters are not from among their pupils.

This, the scale of the violence, and flags of Palestine and Algeria at some of the protests have led those on the right and even the centre to claim that the hard left party France Unbowed (LFI) is playing its part in the protests.

France will go to polls next year. The government of Emmanuel Macron is under stress over migration and identity politics on one hand and rising inequality and spending cuts by the government on the other.

While support for the hard right party National Rally led by Marine Le Pen has surged, the LFI's presidential candidate, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, is popular among the youth. However, the French youth often do not turn up to vote in large numbers. Some analysts believe that the LFI is fuelling the students' protests to rally the youth and make them vote for it next year.



• NOBEL MEDICINE PRIZE 2026

How scientists used light to control brain cells

The work laid the foundation for optogenetics, which has expanded knowledge of how the brain functions, and could help develop new therapies


ANONNA DUTT

THE NOBEL Prize in Physiology and Medicine for 2026 was jointly awarded to Karl Deisseroth, Peter Hegemann and Georg Nagel for their discovery of an alga protein that reacts to light and its use as a switch to study the functions of nerve cells.

Their explorations led to the creation of a new field of study called optogenetics, which may finally help scientists understand how the brain forms memories, feelings and behaviours.

"We were able to precisely pace the heart and look at the effects that different heart rates have on brain states... Communication across the body, from the body to the brain, but with the precision of a gain of function in a peripheral organ allowing us to see the effects on brain and behavioural state... this ability to execute a precision intervention in one organ and read out the effects in complex behaviours — this is something that people have wanted for a long time to be able to do," said Deisseroth.

In simple terms, they found a way to control cells with light. Imagine that the brain is a vast electrical network containing billions of tiny cells called neurons. These neurons communicate by sending electrical signals, allowing us to move, see, remember, feel pain and experience emotions. Deisseroth, Hegemann and Nagel helped scientists develop a remarkable way of controlling these electrical signals: using light.

Their research led to the discovery and development of light-sensitive proteins, called opsins, that can be placed in specific cells. When light is directed at those cells, the proteins act like tiny switches, turning the cells' activity on or off. This is known as optogenetics — essentially, using light to control genetically modified cells.

• 'For their discoveries concerning light-gated ion channels and optogenetics'


"Optogenetics... fundamentally altered our understanding of the brain," the press release said. It credited the three for ushering in a new era in neuroscience.


KARL DEISSEROTH, 54
The Howard Hughes Medical Institute and Stanford University


PETER HEGEMANN, 71
Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany


GEORG NAGEL, 73
University of Würzburg, Germany

ON TUESDAY: NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS

What is optogenetics?

It is a field of research that uses light to manipulate the activity of neurons or other types of cells and study the resulting effects. This is done by expressing the light-sensitive protein in the targeted cells. Within the brain, it has contributed towards identifying neural circuits responsible for sensing pain, social behaviours, thirst, food consumption, reward and attention or the understanding of how memories are created.

Interestingly, the field rests on a theory proposed by Francis Crick, the molecular biologist who was behind the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA, and was awarded the Nobel prize for it.

He envisioned activating individual nerve cells in the brain to investigate the mechanisms that underlie human consciousness. With nerve signals being extremely rapid, he realised it would only be possible if scientists were somehow able to manipulate the nerve cells with light. He himself admitted that the idea sounded farfetched.

But it was made possible by the work of Hegemann and Nagel on the alga Chlamydomonas. These are famous for their ability to quickly swim towards a light source. Hegemann found that these reacted extremely quickly, within half a millisecond after the light reached a tiny orange dot (called the eyespot) that the alga used to detect light. For reference, it takes 10 milliseconds for the human eye to react to light. Hegemann wondered, how could the response to light be more than 20 times faster in Chlamydomonas?

Why the field matters

'Optogenetics has given us an extremely powerful way to switch on and off the neurons and see what happens.

•

It has allowed us to manipulate nerve cells and study its effects with an unprecedented level of precision,' said Vidita Vaidya, senior professor, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.

He hypothesised that a single protein complex both captured light and acted on it in the alga as opposed to the multi-step process in the human eye. Yet, finding this protein was a challenge because when the proteins in the algal eyespot were removed from their natural setting, they became unstable and easily damaged. This is when he discovered that Japanese researchers had mapped the DNA of Chlamydomonas, among which were the codes for two genes that shared similarities with light-capturing proteins.

Enter Nagel. He used egg cells of frogs to express the two proteins and confirm Hegemann's hypothesis. The alga detected and reacted to light using the protein channelrhodopsin-2 (ChR-2). They then introduced the cells in different types of cells and found that they all became light sensitive.

Deisseroth found that ChR-2 could control the activity of specific nerve cells in the manner proposed by Francis Crick. He used it to control rat nerve cells in a petri dish and later in the rats. With Deisseroth's lab at the forefront, researchers soon found more proteins that can turn nerve cells on and off, and which are activated by different wavelengths of light.

How does it help to study the brain?

"Imagine the brain to be a building with lots and lots of rooms — now there was no way for us to know what happens if the light is switched on in just one room. Optogenetics has given us an extremely powerful way to switch on and off the neurons and see what happens. It has allowed us to manipulate nerve cells and study its effects with an unprecedented level of precision. It has completely changed the scale at which discoveries are happening in neurosciences," said Vidita Vaidya, senior professor at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.

Optogenetics is still largely used in laboratories to see which set of neurons regulates what type of behaviour in animals, helping scientists look into the black box, Vaidya says. Dr Sanjeev Kumar Mahto, professor at IIT BHU, said it has allowed scientists to see the functions of the brain and enhance the understanding of what causes certain conditions.

Deisseroth's research group introduced the gene for ChR-2 in 2006 and successfully used light to activate neurons and control the movements of mouse whiskers. The same year, he used the technique to wake sleeping mice by manipulating a recently discovered type of nerve cell that was suspected to control wakefulness. His team also studied the brains of mice as they experienced fear, and noted which nerve cells appeared to form memory. When they later reactivated these nerve cells, the mice showed signs of fear, despite not being in danger at the time.

What kind of therapies are being developed based on this field?

There are ongoing clinical trials on restoring vision in people who have become blind due to *retinitis pigmentosa*, a disease that destroys the eye's rods and cones. Using special glasses emitting light, the person was able to discern and grasp objects on a table. There are also hopes that optogenetics could improve cochlear implants. Currently, these implants stimulate the auditory nerve using electricity.

• LEGAL

House privileges vs free speech: The question before Supreme Court

Amaal Sheikh
New Delhi, October 5

THE SUPREME Court on Tuesday will begin hearing a long-pending reference on the scope of legislative privileges, special powers and immunities enjoyed by Parliament and state legislatures to protect their functioning, and whether they can be invoked against citizens, journalists and others for breaching the privileges of the House.

A seven-judge Constitutional Bench comprising the Chief Justice of India Surya Kant will hear the matter.

At the heart of the case is whether these privileges, under Articles 105 and 194 of the Constitution, can override fundamental rights such as freedom of speech and expression under Article 19.

Legal framework

Article 194(3) grants legislatures certain privileges and immunities. Article 19(1)(a) guarantees freedom of speech and expression, including press freedom. The case turns on the interplay between these two rights and whether legislative privilege can override the right to free speech. The petitioners contend that such a privilege exists to protect the House's functioning, not to shield it from scrutiny.

Articles 14 and 21 provide for the right to equality and the right to life. The petitioners argue that when legislatures order arrests or imprisonment for alleged breaches of privilege, they affect personal liberty. According to them, any action affecting liberty must satisfy constitutional guarantees of fairness, due process and protection against arbitrariness.

History of the challenge

In 2003, *The Hindu* reported on sharp exchanges between Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa and the Opposition in the state Assembly. Speaker K Kalimuthu objected to those reports and referred them to a Privileges Committee, saying the descriptions were "contrary to truth" and "had affected the privileges of the legislature".

The controversy escalated after *The Hindu* published an editorial criticising the "crude use of state power against various sections including political opponents and the independent media". It stated that legislative privilege "exists to protect its free and independent functioning and not to protect the reputation of the government or of individual members". A Tamil translation published by *Murasoli* was also referred to the Committee.

The Assembly ultimately held five journalists of *The Hindu* and *Murasoli* editor S Selvam guilty of gross contempt and breach of privilege, sentencing them to 15 days imprisonment and issuing arrest warrants. The journalists approached the SC, which immediately intervened and stayed the warrants but referred the matter to a Constitution Bench.

Past verdicts

- In 1954, the SC ordered the release of the editor of Blitz, who had been detained under the UP Assembly Speaker's warrant, after finding that he had not been produced before the magistrate within 24 hours.
- In *Sita Soren* (2024), it held that bribery is not protected by the Constitution. It overruled a 1998 ruling wherein the court had granted immunity to MPs accused of taking bribes to vote.

Supreme Court precedents

The reference came about because of two conflicting Constitution Bench decisions. In 1959, the SC, in a 4:1 majority, in *Pandit M.S.M. Sharma v. Sri Krishna Sinha* (also known as the Searchlight case) held that Assembly privileges under Article 194(3) included the power to prohibit publication. It said that because Article 19(1)(a) is a general provision and Article 194(3) is a special provision, free speech must yield to legislative privilege.

But in the Special Reference No. 1 of 1964, the Uttar Pradesh Assembly jailed a citizen, Keshav Singh, distributing pamphlets accusing an MLA of corruption. When the Allahabad High Court granted him interim bail, the Assembly ordered that the two judges who passed the order, the lawyer and Keshav Singh himself be brought before the House in custody. While a Full Bench of the HC stayed those arrest warrants, the President referred the dispute to the SC.

The SC bench held that Constitutional courts could examine the legality of detention ordered in privilege proceedings, and that legislatures could not proceed against judges and lawyers for performing their duties. The court said that the Searchlight case did not lay down a universal rule that fundamental rights in Part III of the Constitution (Articles 12-35) always yield to legislative privileges.

What petitioners are arguing

The petitioners argue that the TN Assembly's action violated free speech, personal liberty, and basic principles of natural justice. They contend that "honest and courageous reporting by the press is the bedrock of parliamentary democracy" and that journalists cannot perform their role "in an atmosphere of fear and terror".

They argue that legislative privileges are subject to Article 21 and that permitting a legislature to deprive a person of liberty "by mere passing of a resolution" would be "an anathema to the Constitution". The petitioners also argue that privileges exist to protect the functioning of the House, not the government, stating that there is "no concept of any parliamentary privilege being applicable to a Chief Minister... or to a 'government'" and that privileges are "not intended to protect the fame and reputation of the ruling party".

• CULTURE

Cornell 7 & the frat house problem: 'Greek life' on US campuses under scrutiny

Arav Shah
New Delhi, October 5

A FORMER student of Cornell University in the US filed a civil lawsuit in the New York State Supreme Court last month, alleging that she was raped by seven members of a university "fraternity" house in 2024. The lawsuit names, among others, seven students of Cornell who belonged to one of the chapters of the national "Chi Phi" fraternity. They are now being referred to as the "Cornell 7".

The incident has shone a harsh light on a ubiquitous aspect of college life in the US — fraternities, which are male student organisations built around shared social, academic or professional interests. Many have voiced anger over the freedoms enjoyed by fraternities (also called frats) across the country, relative to their status as a student-led group.

The mayor of Ithaca, where Cornell is situated, has called for a moratorium on fraternity life (also called Greek life because frats are named after Greek letters), with the Chi Phi fraternity's Cornell chapter shut down pending investigation.

Around a million students are estimated to currently be part of such organisations across the US, according to Fraternity Advisor, a website that documents US college fraternities.

How college fraternities evolved

Until the late 1700s, student-led groups in the US were dominated by literary societies.

Nicholas L Syrett, author of the book *A History of White College Fraternities*, told *The Indian Express*: "Almost everyone who wanted to be in one (literary society) was able to join." Indeed, at some schools "students were basically required to join one of two societies. In that sense, they weren't exclusive at all".

In 1776, however, a fraternity called Phi Beta Kappa at the College of William and Mary in Virginia came up as an alternative.

Fraternities, unlike literary societies, were "by definition exclusive", said Syrett, who is Gender Studies Chair at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "One of the reasons was also to separate out the wealthier or secular students from the poorer students studying for the ministry [religious offices]."

The Greek lettering was derived from the position the study of the Classics represented in Western education.


People arrive for a hearing on sexual assault at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., on Oct. 1. AP

Community and 'fraternity'

For much of their existence, Greek letter organisations had membership restrictions that could encompass elements from race and class to gender and political ideology. The fraternal mindset of brotherhood was contingent on who qualified as community.

Fraternities were also gender-segregated and 'sororities', as they were known for women, developed later during the expansion of women's higher education. The underlying structure remained the same.

Today, "it is illegal for race, religion or ethnicity to be a part of the pledging process," said Syrett.

Activities and operation

Over time, fraternities have become institutions functioning like corporate entities.

A national organisation oversees local campus chapters that consist of undergraduate members. The national board and chapter houses also benefit from their respective alumni networks built over time.

Alumni protests over fraternity crackdowns are not "unprecedented" and the national organisations also have "lobbyists in Congress who work to limit how much they can be regulated", Syrett said.

The Cornell case

The Cornell 7 case reflects a wider pattern of fraternity behaviour and misconduct.

In 2007, researcher John Foubert concluded that fraternity men were three times more likely to commit sexual assault than non-participants. Excessive alcohol ingestion is another component which fraternity life is closely linked with.

These fraternities are also infamous for their hazing practices, which are essentially humiliating initiation rituals for new students hoping to "pledge" themselves to the frat.

According to a database maintained by journalist and hazing researcher Hank Nuwer, there has been at least one university hazing death in the US every single year between 1959 and 2021.

Disproportionate freedoms

The true source of a fraternity's power on campus is real estate. "Most fraternity houses are owned by alumni corporations that then rent out space to individual members to live in them," Syrett explained. "This means the universities do not officially control the property."

While a university can govern the process of Greek life — such as setting university-wide rules on joining and eligibility — they have very little authority over the physical spaces themselves.

The houses are legally classified as private property and "for day-to-day matters, they are in charge of what happens in the houses," Syrett said.

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Business Standard
VOLUME XXXIII NUMBER 147
NEW DELHI | TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2026

Enabling competition

India must encourage entry of firms and innovation

The latest Monthly Economic Review (MER) from the Ministry of Finance makes an important distinction about what India needs next. It notes that even though the economy remains buoyant, investors are cautious because trade tensions, tariff pressures, geopolitical risks and higher global interest rates are affecting the outlook. India, therefore, cannot take its recent growth performance for granted. Only the right policy environment can encourage investment. In this regard, the MER notes that India must become "more competition-friendly rather than business-friendly". Only a competitive economy, it argues, can become successful and innovative. Attracting investment and making it easier for businesses to operate are necessary, but they are not sufficient. A business-friendly regime can lower costs and speed up approvals. A competition-friendly economy goes further. It ensures that firms face competitive pressure to improve productivity and quality. For instance, a 2010 International Monetary Fund (IMF) study, using firm-level data across countries, found that competition-enhancing product-market reforms accounted for 12-15 per cent of productivity growth in countries. Meanwhile, a more recent IMF assessment of India argues that weak business dynamism and subdued competition are holding back productivity. It notes that subdued dynamism tends to affect the reallocation of resources towards more productive firms.

Manufacturing is a good test. The MER, for instance, notes that electronics production more than doubled in five years to 2025-26 and exports rose about fivefold, with smartphones becoming India's largest exported product category. However, most components are still imported and the domestic supplier ecosystem remains incomplete. The next challenge, therefore, is not merely to attract more factories but to deepen backward integration, supplier networks, and increase domestic value addition. Indian products need to be more competitive in global markets. However, competition in the economy cannot be left only to the Competition Commission of India's (CCI's) enforcement after a market has already become concentrated or a firm has abused its position. Government policies themselves shape market structure through licensing, procurement, subsidies, tariffs, localisation requirements, access to infrastructure, and sectoral regulation. A policy intended to support domestic capability can build competitive firms, but if poorly designed, it can also protect incumbents from competitive pressure. India has had a draft National Competition Policy since 2011, but it has never been formally implemented. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance last year reiterated the need to implement such a policy and to improve coordination between the CCI and sectoral regulators. It is well known that it is relatively easy for large businesses to operate in India than it is for small and new entrants, partly because of complex regulations that attach a premium to access and the ability to get things done. This is one of the reasons large conglomerates are expanding into multiple areas, potentially affecting the entry of more dynamic and smaller firms. This needs to change if India is to achieve higher sustainable growth.

The success of several policies, including production-linked incentives, component schemes and semiconductor programmes, should ultimately be judged by whether the sectors that get support can achieve scale, productivity, technological depth, and export competitiveness without requiring permanent protection. The same principle applies beyond manufacturing to aviation, infrastructure, energy, finance, telecom and digital markets. Thus, being competition-friendly requires better regulation, stronger institutions, policy consistency and state capacity. India now needs to move from business-friendly to market-friendly policymaking.

Reality check at Nagoya

India needs a more focused approach in sports

India's performance at the recently concluded Asian Games at Nagoya, Japan, was worryingly underwhelming, both by its own standards and when measured against its Asian peers. With 85 medals, India came in fourth, thanks to a flurry of medals in the last few days. The Indian women's hockey team offered a triumph by beating China to win gold after 44 years, handing India a rare double with the men winning gold by prevailing over Malaysia. Teenager Kumkum Mohod's individual recurve gold — making her the first Indian to do so— added to the lustre. But Nagoya's total medal haul was considerably lower than the 107 India won in the previous edition of the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China. In sports where India has a strong advantage such as badminton, India failed to win an individual medal for the first time in 12 years. Ahead of the Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028, the outlook does not appear to be encouraging.

The obvious message that would be drawn from this overall performance is that the state does not spend enough on developing its sporting talent. After all, China, which won a whopping 341 medals — 169 of them gold — has long had a well funded and formidably organised programme to nurture its sporting talent. That consistently pays dividends in terms of medal tallies in all major multi-sport events, including the Olympics. In the summer Olympics of 2024, for instance, China came second in the medal tally with 91 gongs. As an analysis in *The Indian Express* showed, the Indian programme has not yielded quite the same levels of success. Ahead of this edition of the Asian Games, for instance, the government spent almost ₹98 crore on the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS). This scheme, started in 2014, focuses on elite athletes and offers intensive customised training and systematic exposure to competition. But the analysis found that only roughly two per cent of the TOPS spending translated into gold medals. Indeed, the recurve gold was not an outcome of the scheme's interventions. The ₹98 crore spending is considerably higher than the ₹24.21 crore spent in 2023. The question, then, is not whether India lacks sporting talent but whether the TOPS scheme is identifying the right talent to develop. This is, admittedly, not an easy task and often a question of sheer luck.

That said, there is some long-term hope to be drawn from the stories of Indian sportspersons who have overcome adverse economic conditions to compete in the international arena. R Vithya Ramraj's is a heart-warming story of a truck driver's daughter who won multiple medals, including the women's relay gold. Boxing gold medalist and Olympic bronze medalist Lovlina Borgohain, who came from a family of poor agriculturalists, is another example. Their ability to develop has much to do with significant improvements in access to sporting and training infrastructure compared with the past. The Khelo India Centres that have opened across the country are a case in point. But these are still exceptions rather than standard practice. As the Nagoya reality check shows, India needs to enable more of its people, especially among the poorest, to access sporting facilities. Only then can it discover the critical mass of talent that can win medals at the highest level, consistently.

Banking for Viksit Bharat

A very costly clean-up with no accountability has been completed, but much deeper reforms are needed



IF TRUTH BE TOLD

AJAY CHHIBBER

India is celebrating a clean-up of the banking system. The 4R framework — Recognition, Resolution, Recapitalisation and Reforms — under which this clean-up was undertaken was unfortunately weak on reforms and on holding those responsible accountable. It is like Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, where, in the end, the crime was committed by everyone involved: Politicians, regulators (the Reserve Bank of India), bank managers and crooked capitalists, with the taxpayer as the ultimate collective victim, but no one was held responsible.

Now the roster for the "Banking for Viksit Bharat" high-level panel, which was announced in the 2026-27 Union Budget, is being finalised. Its broad mandate is to assess:

Global-scale mergers: Consolidation strategies to build Indian mega-banks capable of ranking in the world's top-tier banks.

Foreign holding rules: Potentially lifting current caps on foreign ownership to broaden capital liquidity.

Boardroom AI mandate: Formally incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) governance and ethical framework compliance into board-level strategy.

Why we need a "strategy" to build a global bank is not clear to me. What we do still need are some more basic reforms that should have preceded — or at least accompanied — the exorbitantly costly clean-up, which required an injection of ₹3-4 trillion until FY2021 and around ₹16-17 trillion in writeoffs of bad loans by the banking system. The non-performing assets (NPAs) originated from the easy credit policies during the United Progressive Alliance government to fund the boom from 2003-08 and then ostensibly help India recover from the impact of the global financial crisis of 2008-09 (*see chart*).

But the easy credit policies were continued for too long. In addition, capital inflows emanating from the massive global spillovers into India were not sterilised, which led to huge injections of liquidity into the system. The resulting indiscriminate lending ended up in very large NPAs. The Asset Quality Review initiated by the RBI in 2015 showed that gross NPAs, which were 4.1 per cent of all loans in 2014, were as high as 11.1 per cent by 2018, with state-owned banks' NPAs at 14.6 per cent. This was not new bad loans but just their recognition — the first R.

The huge injection of public money and bad loan writeoffs, as well as the use of a new Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) for the second R — resolution — have helped reduce gross NPAs to 1.9 per cent by March 2026, while banks have been recapitalised — the third R. But the IBC has now been weakened, and there is very little accountability for those responsible. Alleged fraudsters Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, and Mehul Choksi were allowed to flee India and have not been brought to justice, while the lenders that failed to conduct due diligence have faced no serious penalties.

The weakest part of the 4Rs was reforms. The only reform carried out was consolidation, shrinking the number of public-sector banks (PSBs) from 27 to just 12 by 2020, while the Prompt Corrective Action framework was used to nurse them back to health. But merging very weak banks into somewhat less weak banks hardly constitutes a reform.

Despite the massive clean-up, the banking system still functions inefficiently, and credit remains costly compared with comparator countries — by at least 200-300 basis points, and even more for non-preferred borrowers. India's credit-to-gross domestic product ratio also remains very low — more comparable to that of Bangladesh and Indonesia and far below those of the rapidly growing economies of Vietnam and Thailand (*see chart*). If India has cleaned up its banks, why have they still been unable to lift their game and substantially increase the credit-to-GDP ratio?

The new Viksit Bharat Banking Committee should consider three additional critical reforms for a better financial system.

First, the relationship between the RBI as regulator and the owner of state banks — that is the government — needs untangling. When, in 2017, the finance minister at the time blamed weak supervision by the RBI as the reason for their poor performance, the RBI governor responded that its regulatory powers over PSBs were diluted. The RBI approves the appointment of private bank chief executive officers to ensure they are "fit and proper". It has often turned down unsuitable CEOs for private banks — but for PSBs, those appointments are made by the Ministry of Finance. Moreover, RBI staff sit on the boards of PSBs, and the regulator is thereby complicit in all their decisions, which it is supposed to supervise and regulate.

Another complication is that the RBI is also the debt manager of the government and, therefore, tries to keep government borrowing costs low, a role that interferes with its monetary policy function. Public-debt management should be in the Ministry of Finance or in an independent debt management agency.

Second, one reason for the high NPAs was that commercial-bank lending was used to finance longer gestation infrastructure projects — an asset-liability mismatch — normally financed by bonds. India's bond market development is held back by financial repression using an antiquated instrument called the statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) — which requires banks to hold government securities. The SLR rate has declined from a peak of 38.25 per cent in 1992 but remains at 18 per cent, higher than that of even Bangladesh or Pakistan. Get rid of SLR.

Third, all commercial banks are required to lend 40 per cent to agriculture, exports and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Remove directed lending from commercial banks: Establish or designate one or two banks to perform priority-sector lending such as for exports and agriculture. For MSMEs, a Mudra scheme to provide non-collateralised lending has already been in place and non-banking financial companies are a major source of credit for MSMEs. Their growth should be encouraged.

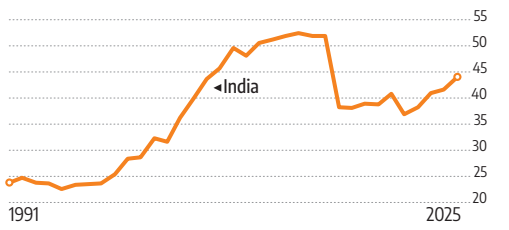
I would normally add a fourth reform, privatisation of some of the state banks, as NPAs in private banks were smaller than in PSBs. Two of them were slated for privatisation. But there is a caveat: This should be done only if we are sure they will not end up in the hands of large corporations.

Using a heart patient analogy, the banking sector clean-up is like angioplasty — it has cleaned the arteries. This has, no doubt, allowed the banking system a chance to resume normal function. But to pump faster to finance Viksit Bharat, India must strengthen and streamline the regulatory system, remove unnecessary mandates on the banking system, and create a balanced financial system with a much stronger bond market. More fundamental reforms are needed.

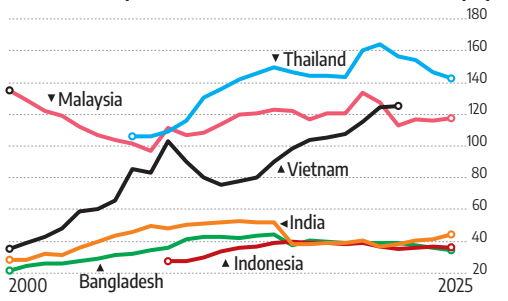
The writer is distinguished visiting scholar, Institute for International Economic Policy, George Washington University

India's credit gap

Domestic credit as a share of GDP (%)



India and comparator Asian countries (%)



Source: World Bank

The search for good writing



MEDIASCOPE

VANITA KOHLI-KHANDEKAR

Vidya Balan had just come off the stage. A senior writer began a conversation with her, possibly a pitch. Ms Balan listened politely as she made her way to the speakers' room, but the writer was stopped. Viraf Patell, actor (*Made in India – A Titan Story*, *Pathaan*), writer, and the host for the event got her through security. The conversation continued with the writer at one point kneeling beside Ms Balan.

The event was Ficci-Frames, the media and entertainment industry's annual jamboree in Mumbai in 2013. The image of the kneeling writer bothered Mr Patell. He grumbled to the late Leena Jaisani, deputy secretary general for media and entertainment at Ficci (the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry). All the talk about empowering writers meant nothing if they could not be given basic dignity. Jaisani offered Ficci's backing and told Mr Patell to do something about it.

He did. In 2015 came Frame Your Idea or FYI. It ran parallel with Ficci-Frames. Sixteen producers met 115 writers. This first version of a physical platform where anyone, literally anyone, can come and pitch a story, screenplay or script to, say, a Disney or Excel saw 650 meetings over three days. Last week, FYI saw over 500 writers meet 75 producers across film, TV, and streaming in more than 3,500 meetings spread over two days. "That's an average of seven meetings per writer — over 35,000 minutes of creative exchange, packed into 15 hours. Frame Your Idea is the biggest writer-producer meet in the world," said a delighted Mr Patell in a late-night video. He also doubles as creative director, Ficci FYI.

The process is simple. If you have a developed story, screenplay or an idea, put it on paper with a logline and synopsis. Then register for FYI and pay ₹2,000 per meeting — a sore point for Mr Patell but reflective of the oversupply. In the run-up to FYI come a host of free online workshops on writing and pitching by Boman Irani, Roshan Abbas and others, on legalities, protecting your idea, and paperwork. The FYI team mails you well in advance on what is needed before you walk in and a WhatsApp group keeps you updated.

Your columnist attended Ficci Frames on both days, September 29 and 30, at the Grand Hyatt in Mumbai. The FYI venue, though within the hotel, was far away from the main event, with its own reception, seating and a tea/coffee counter throughout the day. Lunch and free access to Ficci-Frames were part of the deal. There were three cavernous rooms housing representatives from Yash Raj Films, Dharma Productions, Maddock, and Platoon One Films, among others, in little pods. Each pitch was exactly 10 minutes — at eight minutes, a volunteer would pop in to tell them they had only two minutes left. The team of volunteers drawn from event management and media schools was extremely supportive. If a meeting was cancelled or a producer didn't show up, they had substitute meetings planned. There were storytellers from Hyderabad, Kashmir, Mumbai, Pune and even foreigners, there were published authors, complete novices, and people from the fringes of the entertainment business.

In a country that aspires to be a creative soft power, this is the grunge work needed before we see an abundance of writing that translates into shows and movies at scale. Good writing and lots of it is where much of the value for any media and entertainment ecosystem originates. Hollywood studios have had writers on their rolls for years. The United Kingdom has a rich tradition of theatre at school, university, great drama, film schools and clubs that have created an army of writers, actors, and supporting cast.

Indian film studios had writers on their rolls in the early 1950s. Then they went bust and took away a lifeline for writers, who need time and therefore a regular income before the writing fructifies. There were exceptions like Salim-Javed but otherwise writing became one of the least paid and most ignored parts of the filmmaking process. The discipline of a bound story, script, and screenplay came back partially after the turn of the millennium with corporatisation, multiplexes and organised financing. It accelerated with the entry of global streamers like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. They were commissioning long-form, premium shows at scale and producers had to step up. The whole idea of writers' rooms was born.

No major film studio in India has writers on its rolls. Some of them run writers' labs or offer script fellowships. There is the National Film Development Corporation's annual event in Goa, FYI and a couple of other forums that handhold writers. The Screen Writers Association helps with legal guidance and support. Otherwise for anyone wanting to write — a book, film or show — it is a long, lonely journey.

How many filmmakers or film writers have come out of this process over seven editions, the sceptics ask. Mr Patell reckons that FYI has to be measured in terms of how many of these writers get a second and third meeting. It has been between 5 and 7 per cent. It is in line with the numbers in producers' offices too — for every 100 meetings, five are called back. The difference is this happens over six months instead of two days. The efficiencies FYI brings to sieving through stories and talent explains why the number of producers jumped from about 50 pre-Covid to 75 currently.

The long-term effect of FYI, however, is more intangible — it brings muscle to the process of creating content at a stage when there is no investment or scale — while writing. Hang on then for the happy ending to this story.

@vanitakohlik

Conflicts in the conservation universe

BOOK REVIEW

RANJONA BANERJI

This one is not for the faint-hearted. A collection of eight essays, this is written for those who themselves study or are passionately interested in the environment and conservation. Being a quasi-scholarly work, it is filled with jargon or if not that, then scholarly terms that are often hindrances to easy communication. To put it simply, this is not popular science. This is a discussion of the conjunction or indeed the dichotomies of lineage-based exclusion and a-historical narratives. Keep your dictionary handy and your brain on full alert at all times.

Having got past that hurdle, however, there is much to interest and digest. This collection puts forward the issues of conflict within the conservation universe. Human versus animal, development versus terrain, city versus village, rich versus poor, elite versus downtrodden, forest versus cultivation, and more are presented to make you think as well as question commonly stated norms and values about the conservation and protection of nature from human destruction.

The editors introduce the idea: "This volume is an opportunity to widen the canvas beyond refugia and holds out the hope of building wider networks to conciliate economic producers and nature. At the same time, rethinking nature requires not only acknowledgement of its resilience but also of the vulnerability of certain key processes and species under both state and community stewardship."

(Don't say I didn't warn you about the language.)

The opening two chapters are eye-openers for the lay reader in the sense of "state and community stewardship". While much is written and discussed about our mountains and rivers, our oceans are largely forgotten, except for coastal development issues. Aarthi Shridhar and Divya Karnad, in their individual essays, take us straight into India's maritime communities and the various crossed lines between traditional and localised artisanal fishers, commercial fishing and migratory fishers. The impact on marine life is as complex as the price paid by humans, whether from environmental or commercial decisions on which they have had no say. The lack of voice leads to discrimination and slavery-like conditions in some areas.

One argument that runs through the book is the conflict between urban elite conservationists and the rural or non-urban often tribal or Dalit communities that exist on the peripheries. Hita Unnikrishnan, Haren Nagendra and Manjunatha B takes us on a fascinating — especially for the uninitiated — journey into the water bodies and green spaces, which made up the area that is now the city of Bengaluru.

We have been made aware, over the years, how indiscriminate building on water bodies, or of using them as waste disposal sites, has contaminated life in Bengaluru. But now we learn of all the communities who lived around these bodies and in the "commons", who have been marginalised or removed so that the urban sprawl could grow.

Nityanand Jayaraman's dive into Chennai's development is a lesson for all cities that ignore their ground realities in their haste for growth. When neither terrain nor ground realities are taken into consideration, disaster often ensues. In the case of Chennai, it is abundant rain and then extreme water shortages. Across India, versions of such crises repeat themselves with increased ferocity.



Nature Contested: Ecology, Society, and Environment in Contemporary India
Edited by Mahesh Rangarajan, Ravi Agarwal and Rinki Sarkar
Published by Orient Black Swan
225 pages ₹955

From south India we jump straight to Assam, where Arupjyoti Saikia's essay explores the history of community and difficult terrains. The unpredictable nature of the mighty Brahmaputra dominates this chapter, as we learn how traditional almost nomadic living and agricultural and fishing practices have been tamed by concrete and bricks only to find that neither geography nor geology will listen.

The next two chapters introduce us to conflicts between the rights of ancient or traditional inhabitants of lands to be "protected" and between humans and animals. Anand Vaidya looks at how Adivasis and Dalits are divided when it comes to forest rights, whether by ideologues or their own societal issues. Or indeed, whether they are together in reality despite all efforts.

Meera Anna Oomen presents a human-nature conflict in an area of great concern but perhaps not much discourse in popular conversation: Between people and pigs. She provides an interesting historical, religious and social background to an old fight between humans and *Sus scrofa cristatus* or the Indian wild pig. We still see them in semi-urban areas and farmers often complain. Again, we see how there is no one size fits all solution or answer. Those who live on the margins of society suffer most from arbitrary decisions taken from on high to save this or conserve that.

Nature Contested will challenge the reader in a number of ways, from long-held positions or populist ideas to accepting intersections and interjections into the usual. A word of advice, if you have eye issues and use an e-device to read, that may be advisable. The print is small and the ink too light. Conflict it seems is everywhere!

The writer is an independent journalist

DELHI
businessline.
TUESDAY - OCTOBER 6 - 2026

the hindu businessline.
TUESDAY - OCTOBER 6, 2026

Underwhelming show

Asian Games' medals tally affirms need to improve

India leaves Aichi-Nagoya with a campaign that is difficult to classify as either a triumph or a disappointment. The 85-medal haul — 21 gold, 27 silver and 37 bronze — helped secure the fourth place, but there has been a sizeable drop from the record 106 at Hangzhou in 2022.

While it still counts as the country's second-best medal count at the quadrennial showpiece, the regression, particularly in gold, makes a case for some introspection. The campaign began under an avoidable cloud as the organisers struggled with accommodation, transport and accreditation. A handful of athletes had to wait long hours for rooms, there were inadequate food options, and some had to make lengthy journeys to training venues. Indian shooters, for example, faced commutes of up to two hours to the range. The participation of about 17,000 athletes and officials strained the system further. The organisers eventually apologised and things looked up, but the opening logistical nightmare was a blemish on the Games being hosted in a country which is renowned for efficiency.

On the sports front, India took its own sweet time to find its rhythm. Athletics (24 medals) remained the biggest contributor, while archery, hockey, cricket and boxing delivered the most consequential gold medals. Both hockey teams qualified for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, while the cricket teams retained their crowns. The women's hockey team's victory was especially significant, as it brought to an end a gold drought that stretched back to the 1982 Games in New Delhi. Meanwhile, Pranavi Urs became the first Indian woman to win an individual Asian Games golf gold, underlining a widening sporting base.

The most striking individual story came from shooting. Neeru Dhanda became the first Indian woman to win an individual Asian trap title, and added another gold in the mixed team event after winning a silver in the women's team event. And she did all of that despite being hospitalised for three days in Bhopal with suspected H1N1 in the lead-up to the Games. Her performance rescued a campaign that was threatening to become defined by near misses, which is perhaps why she was flown back to Japan as India's flag-bearer at the closing ceremony.

India finished with 15 shooting medals, but only three gold, compared to the seven it won in the previous edition. There were a few glaring disappointments. Tennis failed to win a medal for the first time since 1986, while badminton (one bronze), table tennis (one bronze) and several other disciplines contributed less than expected. A late surge propped up the campaign, and India eventually matched its previous ranking, finishing behind China, Japan and South Korea. For a country with 2036 Olympics-hosting ambitions, Aichi-Nagoya served as a minor caution.

There were historic breakthroughs, Olympics qualifications, national records and new champions, but also evidence that India's recent gains are not enough. The next cycle must turn these lessons into sustained improvement.

Foreign capital: need for diversity, not dominance

KEY TAKEAWAYS. FCNR(B)'s success should prove that there are ways to get foreign capital without making concessions that create excess volatility



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



ASHIMA GOYAL

The Indian debate is quick to blame domestic policy even for external shocks. Thus, it was argued that there was something fundamentally flawed with the Indian economy because it was running an overall balance of payment deficit for two years. Never mind that the current account deficit (CAD) was only about 1 per cent of GDP and outflows were largely due to external shocks continuing since the end of 2024. This created rupee weakness that led to further outflows in a self-fulfilling cycle.

Since the 1990s reform, a set of analysts had been arguing for full capital account convertibility to cut bureaucratic tangles that ostensibly kept capital away. But periodic global financial crises would throw cold water on these recommendations. Strangely, global shock-induced outflows have now become an opportunity to ask for more concessions to foreign capital. The argument is that foreign capital is essential to finance the CAD and raise investment. All kinds of concessions have to be rolled out to attract foreigners, who are seen as the only hope.

POLICY TOOLS

Is it domestic or foreign policy that is creating shocks? One reason why people even listen to the argument is that the Indian policies being criticised have protected the economy from the worst consequences of external shock-led volatility. In August, I was speaking at a Bank of Indonesia conference in a session on integrated policy frameworks and adaptive policy tools. Since their economy has suffered the ills of being 'too open too fast' to foreign capital flows, they understand how necessary it is to use multiple policy tools to moderate global volatility.

Since the 2000s, financial crises have originated in advanced economies (AEs). Fluctuating global risks have aggravated surges and suddenly halted capital flows to emerging markets (EMs). They have had to cope with these shocks without help from an outdated international financial architecture.

The East Asian crisis especially hit a few EMs, who had followed IMF advice to more fully liberalise capital flows. Short-term foreign debt became very costly to service under steep currency depreciations. However, they had gained from globalisation and were committed to it, so they undertook major market supportive financial and legal reform. They reduced short-term foreign debt, slowed down capital account convertibility and did well in the 2000s.

AEs, however, did not adopt any of the then prevailing reform suggestions such as hedge fund transparency, prudential regulation or investors' bail-in. Had they done so, the string of crises that originated in AEs may have been mitigated.

RATE VOLATILITY

After the 2008 global crisis, Indonesia added exchange rate, capital flow and macro prudential policy to its flexible inflation targeting. But in the 2010s, they liberalised foreign investment in local currency (LCY) bonds, which were pushed as being free of currency risk. But large interest rate volatility followed during the 2013 taper-on crises, when the US Fed pronouncements on early reversal of quantitative easing led capital to flee EMs. Even the IMF has begun an analysis of integrated policy frameworks that deploy multiple policies suited to the context to reduce rate volatility and risk and therefore interest rate spreads for EMs, where raising interest rates to defend the currency may only raise risk premiums. FX reserve buffers for strategic intervention, signalling, and macro-prudential measures are included in the framework.

India's post-pandemic policy used all of the above, plus structural reforms. As a result, performance regularly exceeded expectations. One-year forward exchange rate premium fell from 5.19 per cent over 2014-19 to 1.95 per cent in 2023, as the RBI's daily intervention kept the rupee in a narrow but depreciating band. The band was too narrow and had to be widened, but unfortunately this was done in the end of 2024 just as global shocks intensified. It is in uncertain times that markets require more guidance.

Reforms to reduce transaction costs for foreign fixed income investors are required, but fully open doors are best avoided

What is an ideal share of foreign capital? The bond market in absolute size and as a percentage of GDP is much larger in India compared to Indonesia, but the share of foreign investors is much larger in the latter. Even so, bond markets are underdeveloped in India. Issuances of debt are just 13 per cent of equity while global averages are 25-30 per cent.

In Indonesia the share of foreign investors in the bond market was 32.6 per cent during the 2013 taper on. The 10-year yield shot up to 15.14 per cent in July. By 2026 Q1 the foreign share had fallen to 12.6 per cent and the 10-year yield rose much less, from 1.8 per cent in February, to 7.8 per cent in June.

In India the foreign investor share was only 1.3 per cent and 10-year yields rose to 8.3 per cent in July 2013. In 2026 Q1, the share had risen only marginally to 2.5 per cent (higher at 6.8 per cent for the fully accessible route). The 10-year G-Sec rate averaged 6.86 per cent. The central bank was forced to raise repo rates more in Indonesia —175 and 100bps. In India, changes in the two periods were only 50 and 0 bps. Depreciation of the Indonesian Rupiah exceeded that of the rupee, even though they raised interest rates relatively more. Diverse ownership lowers the level of interest rates, but capping the share of foreign investors as a percentage of the domestic market lowers interest rate volatility. The ideal share seems to be above India's, but below the Indonesian level to reduce interest rate level as well as volatility and support the domestic cycle.

THE FINAL WORD

Diverse ownership is helpful, but the tail must not wag the dog. Reforms to reduce transaction costs for foreign fixed income investors are required, but fully open doors are best avoided. Higher volatilities in 2013 compared to 2026Q1 demonstrate that above a threshold of development and with critical buffers, an integrated policy framework can counter global shocks.

Multiple instruments are required to reduce exchange rate volatility. Markets remain nervous due to continued geo-economic stress and perceived vulnerability to oil shocks. But the success of the FCNR(B) should give the important lesson that there are ways to get foreign capital without making concessions that could create excess volatility. Ammunition is available to break self-fulfilling fears of depreciation so that real exchange and interest rates can be near equilibrium, growth supporting levels despite external shocks.

The writer is Professor Emeritus, IGIDR

How does analogue paneer differ from the regular?

bl.explainer

Mangaiyarkarasi J

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has proposed to ban the sale of analogue paneer made from constituents not derived from milk, saying the move is aimed at safeguarding consumer interests. The draft notification, published on September 24, also requires products already licensed or registered under the 'analogue in dairy context' category to drop the word paneer from their nomenclature, labelling and marketing.

What is analogue paneer? How is it made?

According to the standards set by the FSSAI, a product can be called paneer when it is made from milk or milk solids using permitted acids. In the case of analogue paneer, milk fat or milk protein may be partly or wholly replaced with non-milk constituents such as vegetable fat or oil or vegetable protein. Depending on the formulation, manufacturers may also use ingredients such as starches, milk solids, emulsifiers and stabilisers. There is no exact composition, so the nutritional aspect of the product also varies from product to product. FSSAI calls these products 'analogue in the dairy context'. Analogues are, therefore, not illegal by themselves; the problem arises when they get sold and used as conventional paneer without clear disclosure.

What has the FSSAI proposed, and why now?

The draft notification proposes ban on the manufacture and sale of paneer not made from milk. The proposal comes amid raising concerns of analogue paneer reportedly being sold as conventional paneer. The FSSAI's central advisory committee has noted that the absence of specific quality parameters for dairy analogues, particularly in the case of paneer, makes enforcement difficult. It also raised concerns that consumers may not be able to distinguish an analogue from genuine paneer made from milk, especially when it's used in restaurants. Punjab, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal, Telangana and Uttarakhand have imposed restrictions and ban on the manufacture and sale of analogue paneer.

Is analogue paneer unsafe? How is it nutritionally different from genuine paneer?

Being an analogue doesn't by itself mean it is unsafe to consume. The concern stems from not knowing what went into the making of the analogue product, or what has been used to substitute for the milk constituents and the rest of the composition. Unlike conventional paneer, there is no single ingredient list for making an analogue. Mislabelling deceives consumers. An analogue made with vegetable fat and starch, for instance, cannot be assumed to provide the same amount or quality of protein and nutrition as conventional paneer.



ANALOGUE PANEER. Leaves a bad taste in the mouth

Paneer made from milk products has a defined nutritional profile set by the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN-ICMR). Their Indian Food Composition Tables puts the average protein content of paneer at about 18.9 grams per 100 gram, with about 24.8 gram of fat and 2.4 gram of carbohydrate. For analogue paneer, though, there is no equivalent standard nutritional value or protein data because the formulation varies between products and depends heavily on the ingredients used.

So, why make an analogue in the first place?

Because replacing relatively expensive milk fat and milk protein with cheaper non-milk ingredients can substantially reduce production costs. Industry estimates suggest that analogue paneer can cost about 30-50 per cent less than conventional paneer, with reported prices of around ₹200-250 a kg, compared with roughly ₹400-600 per kg for milk-based paneer.

Can you tell if the paneer you are buying or eating is analogue?

For packaged products, checking the ingredient list and nutrition information are the starting points. But, for food eaten outside, menu declarations about analogue use are nearly rare-to-non-existent. Price, texture and appearance may offer clues, but they cannot by themselves establish authenticity. The same applies to commonly circulated home tests such as the iodine test or dry-pan test. An iodine reaction, for example, can indicate the presence of starch adulterants, but it does not by itself prove that a product is an analogue. Laboratory testing remains a more reliable way of establishing composition.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



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.

MPC's modest tightening

This is with reference to the editorial 'Bite the Bullet' (Oct 5). The editorial has rightly said that it seems prudent to consider a 25-basis point repo rate hike by MPC, given the inflationary pressures and continuing geopolitical constraints pushing up oil prices among other factors. The RBI may also like to prevent inflation expectations becoming entrenched so that raising moderately now can reduce the need for a sharper tightening at a later stage. With regard to the impact of a 0.25 per cent hike, the impact would not be severe on any sector. For the industry, the cost of borrowing may increase a bit and some investment decisions may be postponed temporarily. But companies with high debt and thin margins would feel the pressure. However, if inflation remains high, businesses will face the pressures of higher wages, raw material costs, logistic costs and finance costs. So, it would be better for the industry if the MPC opts for modest tightening.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

Voters taken for a ride

This refers to 'Impossibility of a Paretian EC' (Oct 5). There is no objection to SIR, but to the methodology adopted, which is worse than the disease. Equating large-scale deletions with rolls purification on the grounds that thousands of people in India die every day is strange. Does the EC not conduct a special summary revision every year to update its rolls to account for such occurrences? What sanctity does its intensive exercise have if a wide gap exists between the country's estimated adult population and the number of voters it ultimately maps, especially women? The total gains versus total loss criterion is subjective, and depends on which side of the fence you sit on. Apply it to the millions of legitimate voters whose names are dropped because they couldn't comply with the document-intensive process, and see what it feels like to lose the basic right to vote.

Kamal Laddha
Bengaluru

Communication is key

Apropos 'A Test for Forward Guidance in Monetary Policy' (Oct 5). The RBI's forward guidance plays an important role in shaping market expectations, influencing investment decisions and maintaining financial stability. However, guidance loses its value if communication is vague. Monetary policy operates amid uncertain oil prices, global interest rate movements and unpredictable capital flows. MPC should clearly distinguish its present assessment from projections that may change with incoming data. Regular explanations of inflation risks, liquidity conditions and growth prospects will help businesses and investors plan more confidently. The RBI must retain flexibility without creating unnecessary uncertainty. Credible communication, supported by consistent reasoning and transparent data, is essential for an effective monetary policy.

M Barathi
Bengaluru

Published by Nirmala Lakshman and Printed by Praveen Someshwar at HT Media Ltd. Plot No.8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.201306, on behalf of THG PUBLISHING PVT. LTD. Chennai-600002. Editor: Raghuvir Srinivasan (Editor responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act). ISSN 0971 - 7528

Power to arrest under GST

GST Council must ensure it is exercised judiciously

Mohan R Lavi

As the GST Council meets on October 7 for its 57th meeting, one of the more contentious items before it is whether GST officers should retain the power to arrest at all. Nine years of experience suggest that if the power is retained, it must be exercised judiciously and only in exceptional circumstances.

Section 69 of the CGST Act empowers the Commissioner to authorise the arrest of a person where he has reasons to believe that the person has committed specified offences under Section 132, where the amount involved exceeds ₹2 crore. Offences above ₹5 crore are cognisable and non-bailable. The Law Committee could not agree on the proposal. One view is that the safeguards being built into return filing will reduce mismatches and ITC frauds, and that prosecution remains available to deal with fraud. The opposing view is that diluting enforcement may hurt compliance, and the power should be retained with safeguards against misuse. The final call now rests with the Council.



VITAL. Safeguards against misuse of power to arrest

JUDICIAL CAUTION

The courts have consistently treated arrest as the exception. In *Make My Trip*, the Delhi High Court held under the erstwhile service tax law that the power of arrest must be used with great circumspection and not casually, and that the statutory process of determining the tax cannot be bypassed. The Supreme Court affirmed this in January 2019. The Punjab & Haryana High Court in *Akhil Krishan Maggu* held that arrest must be reserved for exceptional cases — originators of fake invoices, persons who ignore repeated summons, those likely to flee the country, habitual offenders, or where concrete evidence of active involvement exists. It specifically cautioned against arresting chartered accountants and advocates merely on the basis of statements of others, and noted that arresting the top brass of a running concern can close it down.

CBIC's Instruction No. 02/2022-23 of August 17, 2022, directs that arrest should not be made in a routine and mechanical manner, that *mens rea* must be palpable, and that it should not be resorted to where the demand arises from a difference of opinion on interpretation of law. Every arrest must be reported to the Board within 24 hours. In *Make My Trip*, a senior executive was arrested without even a show-cause notice having been issued, and the court found that the tax 'voluntarily' paid after the search was anything but voluntary. In *Akhil Krishan Maggu*, the court found officers recording one statement after another, apparently to intimidate a young advocate into a self-incriminating confession. Arrest, in such hands, becomes a tool of recovery rather than of investigation. Those hit hardest are not organised fake-invoice rackets but the small business owner, their employees and professionals.

It is worth remembering that the Income-tax Act, which collects more revenue than GST, does not give assessing officers the power to arrest; offences are dealt with through prosecution before a court. GST officers today have e-invoicing, e-way bills, the invoice management system and AI-enabled analytics at their disposal. Fraud can be detected through data without placing a taxpayer behind bars before his liability is even determined.

If the Council decides to retain the power, the safeguards in the CBIC (Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs) instruction must move from the circular into Section 69 itself. Reasons to believe should be recorded in writing and furnished to the person arrested. Arrest should require the prior approval of a committee of senior officers rather than a single Commissioner. It should be barred where the dispute is interpretational, where the taxpayer has cooperated, or where the tax has been paid. And officers who arrest without justification must be personally accountable. Personal liberty under Article 21 cannot be left to the temperament of an officer. A power meant to be used rarely must be designed so that it can only be used rarely. It is hoped that the GST Council will take a reasonable decision on the power of the department to arrest in their 57th meeting.

The writer is a chartered accountant

Conditions ripe for rate hike

POLICY MOVE. RBI needs to be categorical in its stance and actions in times of external vulnerabilities and uncertainties



ABHIMAN DAS
SMITA ROY TRIVEDI

Has the time for a rate hike finally arrived? In retrospect, as we had argued earlier, given the global and domestic inflationary trends, a pre-emptive rate hike would have helped (*businessline*, August 3 and May 4, 2026). The contours of what lay ahead were becoming increasingly visible through the last two quarters.

Three factors have made a rate hike desirable: First, domestic inflationary headwinds, fuelled by the global conditions, suggest that a hawkish stance could help. Both CPI and WPI have headed northwards in the last four months. Second, given global inflationary trends, it was only a matter of time before the Fed raised the rates, making "follow the Fed" imperative to prevent capital outflows. Third, given the sustained depreciating trend in rupee, brought about by FII outflows, a higher rate differential could help.

CONFUSING SIGNALS

However, the RBI has so far chosen to keep interest rate unchanged, yet sending somewhat confusing signals through minutes, rate and stance decisions in its Monetary Policy Committee meetings. As for the domestic situation, CPI inflation came in at 4.82 per cent in August, up from 4.45 per cent in July, to an eight-month high. As is the case with India's inflation story, CPI food and beverage inflation climbed faster reaching 5.66 per cent in August, up from 5.24 per cent reported in July. Onion inflation (over 48 per cent) stood out in this context.

In recent years, the average inflation that made the RBI raise rates is above 6 per cent, veering close to 6.25 per cent. In each of these tightening episodes, Fed was in hawkish mode

In August 2026, core inflation also crossed 4 per cent, indicating greater pass through and generalised price pressure. Reflecting global price conditions, WPI inflation rose to 9.92 per cent in August 2026, up from 9.78 per cent in July — staying near double digits for the past four consecutive months. Crude prices are at over $100/barrel and likely to continue, and rupee-dollar exchange rate again sniffing 96 thresholds, despite buoyant FCNR inflows. The Chart shows the usual "three's trouble" dynamics in crude, rupee and inflation.

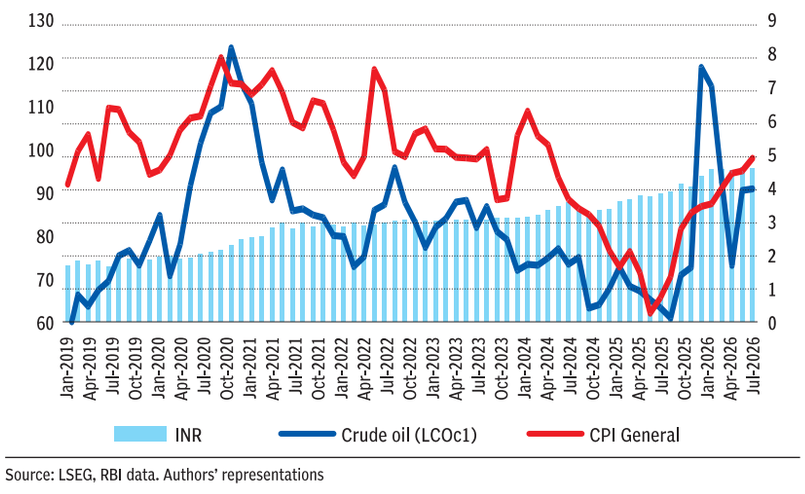
Second, US interest rate has been raised by 25 bps, so that sustained pressure on capital outflows is likely to continue. Will MPC consider the above developments as 'risks are evenly balanced'? In this context, it is instructive to look at how the RBI has responded to inflationary conditions in the past.

How many times in the last 20 years has the central bank raised rates and at what inflation range? As the Table shows, the average inflation that made the RBI raise rates is above 6 per cent, veering close to 6.25 per cent. In each of these tightening episodes inflation had remained persistently elevated and Fed was in hawkish mode. The episodes of repo rate increase in 2018, considered as exceptions, coincide with RBI's adoption of a new monetary policy framework of Flexible Inflation Targeting.

Besides those episodes, the FIT target of 4 per cent largely seems out of sync with reality for inflation control. Therefore, going by past experience, the MPC is unlikely to change the repo rate in the October 2026 policy on the basis of inflation alone— unless the Fed rate hike and the rupee pressures in its aftermath become dominant. Post the Fed hike, the rupee has continued to be under pressure, reaching a low of 96.30 as of October 5, 2026.

CHART

Crude oil, rupee and CPI



Source: LSEG, RBI data. Authors' representations

TABLE

Incidence of RBI's repo rate hike

Date of MPC	Repo rate (%)	Extent of hike (bps)	Voting for hike	Previous-month CPI (%)	Two-month average CPI (%)	Fed hike previous to the meeting
June 6, 2018	6.25	25	6 out of 6	4.87	4.73	Yes
August 1, 2018	6.5	25	5 out of 6	4.17	4.6	Yes
May 4, 2022	4.4	40	6 out of 6	7.79	7.37	Yes
June 8, 2022	4.9	50	6 out of 6	7.04	7.42	Yes
August 5, 2022	5.4	50	6 out of 6	6.71	6.86	Yes
September 30, 2022	5.9	50	5 out of 6	7	6.9	Yes
December 7, 2022	6.25	35	5 out of 6	5.88	6.35	Yes
February 8, 2023	6.52	25	4 out of 6	6.52	6.12	Yes

Source: RBI data, Federal Reserve (Fed) database, Authors' calculations

HAWKISH STANCE MAY HELP

With domestic credit growth already at a multi-year high and liquidity conditions showing signs of exuberance given the expected FCNR flows, a rate hike, or at least a hawkish stance may help.

The general trend of geopolitical tensions is further intensifying and is likely to remain firm in the near term. So are the inflationary trends. In this situation, with so many outside vulnerabilities and uncertainties, exchange rate is but one of the considerations. Holding on to exchange rate stability through schemes like FCNR(B), which lead to large-scale build-up of future liabilities, is questionable when geopolitical conditions are unpredictable.

Das is ICICI Bank Chair Professor, IIM Ahmedabad; Trivedi is Associate Professor, National Institute of Bank Management. The views are personal

Two leaders on tenterhooks

Sridhar Krishnaswami

In less than a month, the political fate of two leaders would have been determined even if they are not directly on the ballot. On October 27, the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, faces parliamentary elections that will largely determine if his Likud coalition will stay in power; even if it did there is the larger question of whether Netanyahu can extend his 19-year stint as Prime Minister. And on November 3, the mid-terms in the US will determine if the Republican Party can hold on to its razor thin majority in Congress. President Donald Trump is not on the ballot, but he is hoping that his personal pull will push the Grand Old Party across the finish line.

But realities tell a different story. With an approval rating of around 29 per cent, many Republicans are distancing themselves from the leader of 'Make America Great Again' and are getting ready for the worst. Many have given up on the House of Representatives; the Senate is in play as well, and it is being maintained.

SECURITY CLOAK

Netanyahu has always wrapped himself around the security cloak — that he is the only person who can provide the Jewish state the kind of peace of mind in a hostile and troubled neighbourhood. But as Israelis are nearing critical elections, questions are being asked if the October 7, 2023, massacre of some 1,200 people by terrorist thugs could have been averted. The contention being that Netanyahu had all the warnings including from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, perhaps from even Palestinians of what the Hamas was planning. The Prime Minister denies he failed to pass on relevant information to intelligence agencies.



HOME TURF. Facing election pressure

Iran has always been a thorn on then side of Israel, on its own as well as through Tehran backed proxies in the Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. Now, on the eve of polls there is a nagging suspicion that Netanyahu may restart the war with Iran just to use it as an excuse to postpone elections. The harrowing cockpit fight in Flydubai airlines once again brought Iran into the picture: Netanyahu immediately saying that the Omani co-pilot had undergone radicalisation and whoever had sent him "will pay a very heavy price".

President Trump was not too far behind, maintaining that early information suggested a link with Tehran and that Washington will hit the Islamic Republic "very hard" if proved. A majority of American voters are of the view that Washington does not have an exit strategy. In a recent poll, only 26 per cent approved of the President's handling of Iran.

Even at this late stage, Republicans are imploring President Trump to bring an end to the war so that there is at least some drop in prices of gas at the pumps.

It appears Washington is set for yet another massive strike on Iran, but after the mid-terms — a third aircraft carrier has moved to the staging area and a total of about 30,000 sailors and marines are available for any planned new offensive.

Nervous Republicans and jittery lawmakers seeking re-election are no longer confident that the cash pile is going to get them through. Party strategists are said to be throwing money in defending safe seats in the House and Senate in states that are seen as solid Red.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

On businessline.in

Why RBI should raise rates by 75 bps by year-end

Front-loading would help anchor expectations, restore part of the interest-rate cushion over the US and moderate demand before festive spending, credit expansion and imported-cost pressures become mutually reinforcing, says **Manas Paul**

https://tinyurl.com/mpvnbbc5

Should 'special' FCNR(B) deposits be insured?

From banks' perspective, considering the forex rate risk and that these deposits are quite sizeable, their inclusion for insurance cover needs serious re-thinking, points out **Manas R Das**

https://tinyurl.com/9sd35ae2

thehindu businessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 6, 2006

India offers Qatar stake in Petronet

India and Qatar are likely to sign deals under which more liquefied natural gas (LNG) could flow in from that country, which would pick up stake in Petronet LNG Ltd. The possibility of such deals coming through sent the PLL stock surging by 20 per cent today; the scrip closed at ₹57.90 on the BSE, hitting the upper limit.

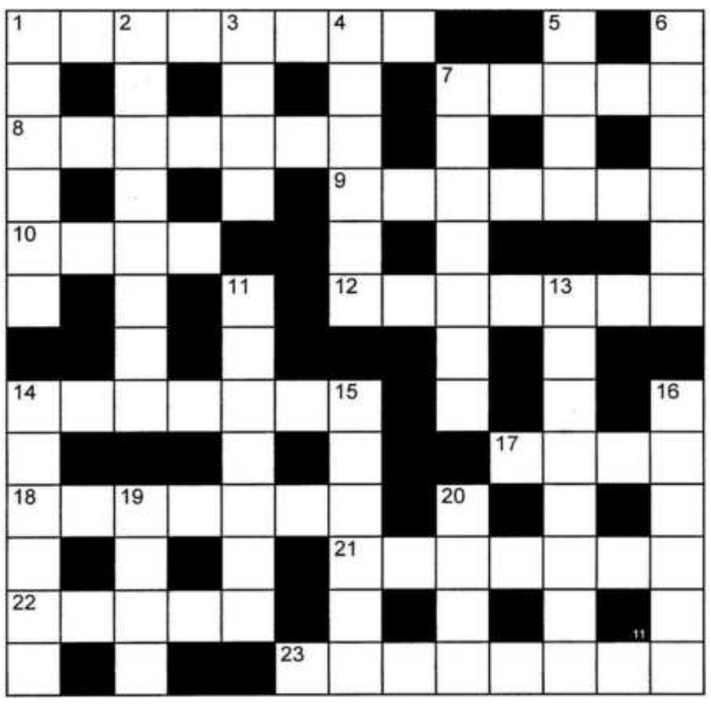
Tata Steel reviewing takeover options

Tata Steel said the company was reviewing various takeover options including that of British steelmaker, Corus Group Plc. "However, there can be no certainty that an approach will be made and, if made, that it will result in an offer," the company said in a notice to the BSE.

Drug cos oppose cost-based pricing

The pharmaceutical industry is opposed to proposals that call for cost-based pricing of drugs, sharing of production cost data and equipping the future regulator — the National Pharma Pricing Authority — with *suo motu* powers to bring drugs outside the National List of Essential Medicines under its control. This is likely to further delay the finalisation of the new drug policy.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2750



EASY

ACROSS
1. Hand-missile (8)
7. Dutch chinaware (5)
8. A flat-topped defence (7)
9. A front, cutting, tooth (7)
10. The sea-eagle (4)
12. Eucalyptus (3-4)
14. Like the Devil (7)
17. A high wind (4)
18. Composer of 'la Sonnambula' (7)
21. He conducts court looking into death (7)
22. Commerce (5)
23. Given back, renewed (8)

DOWN
1. Operator of canal-boat (6)
2. About to happen (8)
3. To break flint, stone (4)
4. Playing parts (6)
5. Addition sign (4)
6. Go without nourishment (6)
7. Counting system with base ten (7)
11. Cut short, brief (7)
13. Family servant of long standing (8)
14. Wooden work-shoes (6)
15. The gum used for chewing-gum (6)
16. Inspiring fright (6)
19. Jump (4)
20. Corrode, eat into (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS
1. He's a good fellow, the man taking guard – but he may get thrown (8)
7. Dutch capital is left in a whirl where they're making their china (5)
8. Aries, a bit of which is used for fortification (7)
9. It's ironic about first second tooth (7)
10. Eagle will construct some higher nest (4)
12. It may be a koala's habitat, but up in this one's in difficulties (3-4)
14. It is as devilish as it can possibly be (7)
17. The wind up? Force 9, perhaps (4)
18. Italian opera composer put ringing instrument in one finale (7)
21. He holds court for nothing when there's a free shot around (7)
22. This has its gap, and extra dental work shows it (5)
23. Big shop, though in the red, can be put back on its feet (8)

DOWN
1. A boatman who might see a grebe flying about (6)
2. It is about to happen to the tin men I'm constructing (8)
3. Take one hostage when I'd left to break stones (4)
4. Is on the stage when performing temporary duty (6)
5. It may be a sign of a positive factor (4)
6. Look hard when it's around five but have nothing to eat (6)
7. One may readily see the point of counting the system (7)
11. The company is since broken up, to be brief (7)
13. A servant is paid to keep a barrister's services (8)
14. Wooden shoes are given a rating among drunkards (6)
15. With which chewing-gum is made stylish, the French way (6)
16. Was afraid to be given food : are taken in (6)
19. It is bound to turn pale (4)
20. Guitarist may worry about this being on his fingerboard (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2749

ACROSS 7. Dependability 8. Panic button 12. Regard 14. Dental 16. Tailor 18. Moment 19. Cheeseboard 23. Superabundant

DOWN 1. Leap 2. Fern 3. Educed 4. Absurd 5. Clot 6. Eton 9. Anguish 10. Outwear 11. Flat 12. Rote 13. Roo 15. Ego 17. Rascal 18. Möbius 19. Club 20. Even 21. Adds 22. Dank

Economy

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2026

IN THE NEWS

COMMERCE SECY EXPECTED TO VISIT CANADA



COMMERCE SECRETARY RAJESH Agarwal is expected to visit Canada this week to give an impetus to the ongoing negotiations for the proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two countries, an official said.

INDIA PROBING INTO CHINESE GOODS DUMPING



INDIA HAS STARTED its probe into an alleged dumping of as many as five products, including engineering and chemical sector goods, from China, following complaints filed separately by domestic manufacturers. These investigations are carried out by the commerce ministry's arm.

Jindal Stainless, IOCL extended supply deal

JINDAL STAINLESS AND Indian Oil Corporation have extended their lubricant supply agreement by another five years, a statement said on Monday.

Patel urges states, industry to back chemical parks

UNION MINISTER ANUPRIYA Patel on Monday asked states and the industry to participate in the scheme to establish three chemical parks with at least ₹4,500 crore investment.

SAIL crude steel production in H1 grows marginally

SAIL HAS POSTED a marginal rise of 1% in production of crude steel during April-September to 9.6 million tonnes, compared to the year-ago period.

AGENCIES

FARM GOODS, MEDICINE SHIPMENTS TO RISE: MODI

Indo-Swiss group to resolve FTA irritants

● Concerns over fall in exports to Switzerland in Q1

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, October 5

INDIA AND SWITZERLAND have agreed to set up a special group to address constraints related to trade and investment under the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) that has been operational for a year now.

"A group will be formed within the Government of India to discuss all issues related to trade constraints or investment constraints," Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs Sibi George told reporters at a briefing on the state visit of Swiss President Guy Parmelin to India.

TEPA is a trade agreement between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), operationalised in October 2025. Members of EFTA other than Switzerland are Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Switzerland is the bloc's biggest economy and India's largest trade partner, with the total bilateral trade at $25 billion.

Despite EFTA being in force, India's exports to the region fell 22.7% to $461 million in April-June of this financial year, and imports contracted 13% to $2.93 billion.

During their bilateral meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Swiss President discussed the entire spectrum of cooperation under TEPA, and "this would definitely help us to implement all the provisions mentioned in TEPA," the secretary said.

"We have taken several important decisions to increase market access for Indian exports in Switzerland and further facilitate investment between the two countries. This will help increase exports of Indian agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and engineering goods to Switzerland," Modi said after meeting the Swiss President. "At the same time, we will attract new Swiss investments into key sectors in India, such as biotechnology, life sciences, banking, insurance, food processing, and sustainability."

There are 340 Swiss companies operating in India who have collectively invested $11 billion. Indian investment in Switzerland stands at $9 billion, and currently, 150 Indian companies, including the biggest names in the pharma and IT sectors, have a presence there.

Both countries also identified new opportunities for cooperation in military exchanges and defence production and agreed to deepen cooperation in nuclear energy.

The secretary said India has also invited Swiss universities to set up campuses in India. During the visit, five Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and agreements were signed between the two sides.

SMOOTHENING TIES

- India, Switzerland to set up special group to address trade, investment constraints
- India seeks higher Swiss market access for farm products, pharma, textiles, engineering goods
- Five MoUs, including on migration, young professionals and sustainable infra, signed on Monday



PM Narendra Modi with Swiss President Guy Parmelin in New Delhi on Monday ANI

● RNG MARG PLAQUE UNVEILED IN MUMBAI



Bombay High Court Judge, Justice Somasekhar Sundaresan, with Anant Goenka, Executive Director, The Indian Express Group, during the inauguration of the Ramnath Goenka Marg plaque, at Nariman Point in Mumbai on Monday SANKHADEEP BANERJEE

GST REFORMS

Rate changes may be annual affair

PRASANTA SAHU
New Delhi, October 5

WITH THE SECOND-GENERATION reforms set to be completed on October 8 with the rollout of process reforms, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) appears to be moving towards a more institutionalised and predictable regime, much like the direct taxes system, with frequent tinkering of rates giving way to a more structured annual process, sources said.

The first phase of the reforms began with the rate rejig and slab recast in September last year. The Centre and states then spent nearly nine months stitching together the proposed process reforms to make GST 2.0 a more wholesome experience, with lower tax rates and easier compliance.

The process reforms will make the system largely automated, covering everything from registration and filing of returns to making corrections, claiming refunds and responding to demands, with minimal intervention by tax officers.

"Going forward, rate changes, if required, are likely to be considered only once a year and take effect from April 1, providing businesses greater certainty and bringing an end to the practice of revisiting GST rates at every Council meeting," a senior official said.

The move does not mean the GST Council will meet less frequently. "Council meetings will continue to happen every quarter, but in every meeting, we don't want to deal with rates," the official said.

With the tax rate and slab rejig having stabilised over the past 12 months, and process reforms set to be unveiled this week, the next-generation GST is expected to provide greater stability over next five years or more, sources said. That, however, does not mean the GST framework will be frozen for the next five years or so. The Council will remain open to taking up larger issues from time to time, including changes to the tax base if the Centre and states reach a consensus, sources said.

STABLE REGIME

- Similar to direct taxes, frequent tinkering of GST rates is likely to give way to a more structured annual process
- Future revisions likely to take effect from April 1 each year
- GST Council will continue meeting quarterly, but rates will not be discussed at every meeting



90% GST refunds for pharma firms to be automatic



MANU KAUSHIK
New Delhi, October 5

PHARMA AND LIFE sciences companies may soon find it easier to recover their goods and services tax (GST) refunds, with the GST Council likely mandate that 90% of eligible credit claims to the sector can be released automatically after a risk check.

Currently, pharma companies pay 18% GST on many raw material inputs but collect only 5% GST on finished medicines. This inverted duty structure leaves them with excess tax credit that sometimes gets stuck with the government as a refund claim.

Even though 90% of eligible inverted-duty refund claims can already be released provisionally under a CBIC instruction issued in October 2025, the government now wants to make this arrangement part of the GST rules. This would give companies certainty over getting their refunds and help free up working capital stuck in GST refunds.

Besides, work done in India for foreign clients, including clinical trials, testing and contract manufacturing, is likely to be treated as exports. This would allow companies to claim the tax benefits available to exporters and reduce the GST burden on services provided to overseas clients.

Easier rules to aid IT, financial service exports

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, October 5

A SLEW OF changes to the tax treatment of services exports is likely to be taken up at the GST Council's upcoming meeting. The proposals are aimed at aligning rules with how Indian companies actually serve overseas customers and easing the recovery of taxes embedded in export costs, sources said.

The proposals could provide relief to information technology and IT-enabled services companies, engineering and consulting firms, testing and certification agencies, research organisations and financial-service providers.

These services form a major chunk of services exports of $421.3 billion in 2025-26. Services exports as a percentage of total exports have been increasing every year. They now account for 48.8% of total exports, up from 33.8% in 2024-15.

A key proposal before the Council is to remove the requirement that the supplier and recipient of a service should not be establishments of the same person. This condition has created difficulties for Indian companies operating through overseas branch offices, even when underlying customer is a foreign entity.

The proposed change would shift the focus to the customer's location rather than the corporate structure through which the Indian supplier delivers the service. This could provide greater certainty to companies maintaining overseas offices to service local clients and will benefit IT, business services, professional and consulting firms, research organisations and engineering companies.

The Council is expected to change the treatment of services performed in India on goods belonging to foreign customers. At present, place-of-supply rules can result in such transactions being determined by where the work is physically performed.

The proposed change would, in specified cases, link the place of supply to the location of the foreign customer, allowing services such as testing, inspection, certification, repair, calibration, research and analysis carried out in India on foreign-owned goods to qualify as exports.

Another proposal seeks to align GST requirements for receipt of export proceeds with the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) foreign-exchange rules. The move is intended to eliminate situations where an exporter meets RBI requirements but faces a separate test under GST.

RULES REJIG

- Proposed changes could link the place of supply to the location of the foreign customer
- GST refund and payment rules may be aligned with RBI norms
- Share of services exports in total exports rose to 48.8% in FY26



Random transit checks may go

SHUBHAM RANA
New Delhi, October 5

THE GST COUNCIL is likely to make verification of goods in transit process more intelligence-driven, where any decision to stop a vehicle will have to be authorised in advance by a senior officer, according to government sources

The Council may take up the proposal on October 8, which also states that a vehicle with goods in transit may be stopped only by the state from which the goods originated.

"For a transporter with his papers in order, this would mean the journey is settled once the goods have left the state of origin," a government source said. "A consignment crossing five states will now be subject to verification at one point rather than at several. Transit time will become something a business can plan around, and freight costs will fall accordingly."

While the current GST and e-way bill framework has helped curb tax evasion by creating digital visibility over the movement of goods, businesses have also faced challenges over time from routine interceptions, prolonged detention of vehicles and overlapping jurisdictional actions, experts said. This often resulted in supply chain disruptions and increased logistics costs, they said.

Verification of goods in transit to may be more intelligence-driven, with vehicle stoppages authorised in advance

The proposals, if passed, could help reduce unnecessary inspections, improve ease of doing business, and bring greater consistency in application of the law, experts said.

Decriminalisation steps to cut GST litigation, bring certainty: Experts

SHUBHAM RANA
New Delhi, October 5

THE PROPOSAL TO remove the arrest provisions under the GST regime is a significant step, tax and legal experts said, adding that, if implemented, it would set a clearer institutional boundary between determination of tax liability and criminal enforcement.

This, along with the proposal to revamp the prosecution provisions, would help reduce litigation and bring greater certainty to businesses, they said.

The current framework empowers authorities to arrest for specified offences such as fake invoicing and fraudulent availment or utilisation of input tax credit.

This power, while serving as a deterrent, particularly against organised tax fraud, also placed significant coercive power in the hands of the tax administration, said Manoj Mishra, partner and tax controversy management leader, Grant Thornton Bharat.

"We have seen that these powers under have been used to harass taxpayers. Taxpayers have alleged that they have been harassed and have been asked to pay hefty amounts of taxes, in some cases at 3 or 4 am, and the courts have taken such cases seriously," said Pranshu G, partner at Ashok Pranshu & Co.

Such wide powers to arrest are not present under the Income Tax Act, though there is clear procedure there for prosecution, Pranshu said. "But in GST, if there are certain offences under Section 132 and the tax evasion was above ₹5 crore, there was power with the commissioner to arrest the person and that was actually used differently," he added.

A noteworthy example of prosecution under the GST framework is the arrest of then Fino Payments Bank Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Rishi Gupta in February by the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI). Gupta was arrested in an investigation related to business partners of the bank, and not GST compliance by the bank itself.



GST arrest powers came under scrutiny after DGGI arrested Fino Payments Bank's then MD & CEO Rishi Gupta in a GST fraud case

● RAHUL BAJORIA, HEAD, INDIA & ASEAN ECONOMIC RESEARCH, BOFA GLOBAL RESEARCH

'India's growth momentum is broadening'

Strong economic activity in the first quarter of 2026-27 (April-March) likely continued in July-September, with GDP growth seen at 7-7.5%, well above the Reserve Bank of India's 6.4% August projection, according to **Rahul Bajoria**, *head of India and ASEAN economic research at BofA Global Research. High-frequency indicators suggest growth momentum is broadening despite risks. In the second half of FY27, BofA expects growth to remain stronger than the RBI's projections, with non-farm sectors likely to stay resilient, Bajoria told* **Shubham Rana**. *Excerpts:*

What is your assessment of the new GDP series and what issues remain?

The new GDP methodology is much more aligned with global SNA guidelines. It addresses several criticisms of the previous series, including double deflation, better measurement of services and incorporation of new information sets such as GST data. From a representative-sample perspective, the new series is far more robust. High-frequency data have also consistently improved over the past 12-18 months, particularly in the last six months, showing a broadening of growth momentum that is reflected in GDP data. Our Q1 growth forecast was 7.5%; the actual figure was 7.8%, broadly in line with our expectations. We were therefore surprised by the debate, but not by the outcome.



What is your assessment of GDP growth in July-September?

Growth momentum is broadening across sectors. There are headwinds in agriculture, with the early estimate of the Kharif harvest slightly below last year's level, possibly reflecting poor rains. But bank credit and deposit growth, car sales, industrial production, core-sector activity and trade numbers indicate that momentum has either held up or strengthened.

We expect Q2 FY27 GDP growth at 7-7.5%. Whether it is 7.8%, 7.3% or 7.2% is less important; the early indicators point to another very strong quarter.

What is your outlook for the second half of FY27?

We expect some moderation, but growth should remain somewhat stronger than the RBI's and the government's early forecasts. The moderation will partly reflect weaker agriculture. However, manufacturing, investment and services should remain reasonably resilient. The credit cycle and investment demand have held up over the past six months, and we do not expect that to change materially.

So, we see a slowdown, but not a major one. Base effects will also play a role, given the strong recovery following the GST tax cuts last year.

What is your inflation outlook?

We expect inflation to rise, but not faster than the RBI's trajectory. While we are more optimistic than the RBI on growth, our inflation outlook is broadly in line with its projections. Core inflation excluding metals has been rising but remains below 4%; we expect it to move towards 4% over the next six months.

(Read full interview on www.financialexpress.com)

WE EXPECT Q2 FY27 GDP GROWTH AT 7-7.5%. WHETHER IT IS 7.8%, 7.3% OR 7.2% IS LESS IMPORTANT

Opinion

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2026



POLL PANEL REVIEW

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant

There is a mandatory law and we expect them to follow it. If there is any violation, we can very well undo it. If there is no unanimity or majority as mandated under the law, then the court can very well annul those decisions

Towards a flawless GST

Process reforms are hugely welcome, but part of the problem is still structural

FINANCE MINISTER NIRMALA Sitharaman has rightly argued that a dependable tax system allows enterprises to look beyond immediate obligations and invest in opportunities that take time to mature. The point assumes added significance as India seeks to sustain an investment cycle amid an uncertain external environment, where tariffs are being weaponised. Yet the investment recovery remains tentative. Private-sector participation must broaden beyond large listed companies and high-tech ventures to the larger universe of unlisted and informal enterprises. Consumer confidence, too, remains subdued. The Reserve Bank of India's survey showed growing pessimism over near-term job prospects in both rural and urban areas. Against this backdrop, the next phase of goods and services tax (GST) reforms assumes importance. GST 2.0, launched a year ago with rate rationalisation, now needs to be consolidated through process reforms that simplify compliance, speed up refunds, and improve the flow of input tax credits.

The GST Council is expected to consider proposals aimed at reducing taxman-taxpayer interface and tax cascading. Lower project costs, stronger export competitiveness, and bringing more small units into the GST value chain—and thereby the wider national market—could be gains. Equally welcome is the shift in enforcement from criminal prosecution towards proportionate civil penalties, with arrest provisions proposed to be removed as invoice matching and better data systems strengthen fraud detection. There are signs of improvement. Following last year's rate restructuring, businesses have discharged a greater share of their tax liability through input tax credits, while accumulated credit has declined relative to taxable supplies. Aggregate SGST receipts of state governments, including their share of IGST settlements, rose 16% during April-September, faster than the 11.6% growth in gross GST revenues. These gains are encouraging, but should not obscure the larger task. Nor should any consumption boost from lower tax costs be overstated. Consumer demand depends not only on prices but also on household incomes, income expectations, and indebtedness, which remain less supportive.

Process reforms will have limited impact unless GST's structural shortcomings are addressed. While revenues have continued to grow despite last year's tax cuts, the revenue potential originally envisaged for this destination-based consumption tax remains largely unrealised. Nor is the expected productivity-enhancing impact on businesses clearly visible. At the heart of the problem are the residual flaws of a multi-tiered, dual-jurisdiction GST. India's system remains more complex than those in several countries where lower and, in some cases, single rates have delivered comparable or greater revenue buoyancy. Despite GST 2.0 creating a largely two-rate structure, India effectively retains multiple rates, including the 40% slab for demerit goods and services, exemptions, and limited input tax credit under the 5% rate.

One estimate suggests a 12% GST on the consumption base without exemptions could generate revenue equivalent to 8.4% of GDP, against around 6% currently, while improving economic efficiency. A single rate may not be feasible for a country of India's size and income disparities, but further simplification should remain the goal. Broadening the base by bringing excluded segments into the GST net is equally important. A single tax registration number for every business or business group, as in the UAE, could be explored as the GST Network matures. Extending e-invoicing to business-to-consumer and export transactions could reduce compliance friction. Deeper structural reform, rather than process tweaks alone, is essential if GST is to lower business costs, raise productivity, and provide the certainty needed for sustained investment and growth.

From experimentation to economics: AI's next phase

THE FIRST PHASE of enterprise AI was about experimentation. The next will be about economics. Almost every large enterprise is testing AI in some form, making the number of pilots or use cases increasingly irrelevant. The more important question is: Where is AI already moving revenue, costs, working capital, or return on capital?

On this measure, four sectors appear ahead of the curve—BFSI, digital-native retail and consumer businesses, telecom, and manufacturing. Their advantage comes from a combination of large usable data sets, digitally mature workflows, high-transaction volumes, and outcomes that can be measured financially.

BFSI is arguably the most mature AI adopter today. Banks, insurers, and fintechs have used machine learning for years across fraud detection and credit scoring. AI is now moving deeper into underwriting, collections, compliance, customer servicing, cross-selling, wealth management, and software development.

The attraction lies in the measurable ROI. Lower fraud losses, higher collection efficiency, faster underwriting, better cross-sell, and lower servicing costs all flow relatively directly into earnings. BFSI thus shows that the most valuable AI model may simply be the one most deeply embedded into a high-frequency economic workflow.

Retail and e-commerce potentially have the strongest linkage between AI and incremental revenue. AI can influence almost every transaction: Discovery, search, recommendations, pricing, promotions, inventory placement, fulfilment, fraud, and customer service. A large value-focussed Indian e-commerce platform has put AI at the centre of its operating architecture, processing billions of signals to understand customer intent and context. This matters because small improvements become powerful at scale. A modest increase in conversion or basket size multiplied across millions of transactions can materially alter revenue and profitability.



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But the bigger opportunity may extend beyond P&L. AI-led demand forecasting at a large consumer company has improved forecasting accuracy and reduced finished-goods inventory. AI therefore has the potential to simultaneously improve growth and capital efficiency—higher conversion at the front end and better inventory turns at the back.

Telecom represents the cost-productivity side of the AI opportunity. Operators have millions of customers, vast networks, and large service organisations. AI can address customer service, churn, network optimisation, predictive maintenance, sales, marketing, and software development. A large Indian telecom operator's GenAI assistant handles millions of customer interactions monthly, with a high proportion resolved end-to-end. At this scale, even a 10-20% productivity improvement can become material to EBITDA.

Manufacturing could ultimately become an even larger value pool. Here, AI moves from augmenting knowledge workers to optimising physical assets. Computer vision, predictive maintenance, supply-chain forecasting, digital twins, robotics, and physical AI can directly affect uptime, yields, energy consumption, inventory, and throughput. The financial translation is powerful: Lower inventory improves working capital; reduced downtime raises asset utilisation; better yields reduce waste; and higher throughput improves return on capital employed (ROCE).

This leads to a broader conclusion. The sectors generating the highest AI returns today are not necessarily those deploying the most advanced models—they are those embedding AI into the largest measurable economic workflows.

The question for investors should move beyond "Who is adopting AI?" That is the real transition underway—from AI experimentation to AI economics. Ultimately, the companies that convert AI spending into measurable improvements in revenue, margins, working capital, and ROCE will be the ones that create durable shareholder value.

POWER POINT

STRONG BRANDS MAY BECOME MORE VALUABLE AS DIGITAL SHELVES BECOME MORE CROWDED

Who owns the consumer now?

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FOR YEARS, THE most seductive promise of direct-to-consumer commerce was contained in its name. Brands would finally own the relationship with the consumer.

They would no longer depend entirely on distributors and retailers to know who bought their products, how frequently they returned, and what else they wanted. The internet would remove intermediaries, lower distribution costs, and give consumer companies something they had rarely possessed: first-party customer data.

Something rather different has happened. A consumer may discover a skincare brand through Instagram, hear about it from an influencer, compare it on Google, buy it on Blinkit, and pay with a card or wallet. Soon, she may simply ask an AI assistant which moisturiser she should buy. The company that actually developed and manufactured the product can end up knowing less about that consumer than almost everyone standing between them.

This matters because distribution is no longer the only rent brands pay. Increasingly, they must pay for visibility at the point of distribution as well.

Consider what happens when a consumer opens a quick-commerce app and searches for shampoo. A brand that has spent decades building awareness cannot assume it will appear first. A competitor can buy sponsored placement against that search. The incumbent may therefore have to advertise on the platform merely to remain prominent before a consumer it has already spent money acquiring elsewhere.

The supermarket shelf has, in effect, become an auction.

The global precedent is Amazon. What began as an online retailer and marketplace has become one of the world's largest advertising businesses because it possesses something exceptionally valuable: knowledge of what consumers are considering when they are closest to making a purchase. Amazon generated more than $68 billion from advertising services in 2025, with fourth-quarter advertising revenue alone reaching $21.3 billion, up 23% year-on-year.

Walmart is travelling down the same road. Its advertising operation, Walmart Connect, grew 44% year-on-year in a recent quarter. Retail advertising is attractive partly because its economics can be dramatically better than selling groceries: analysts cited by *Reuters* estimate gross margins of 40-70% for retail media networks against roughly 3-4% for traditional grocery retail.

The lesson for India is important because quick commerce is compressing this evolution into a remarkably short period.

Amazon itself has now committed $3 billion to expand its Indian quick-commerce operations through 2030. Its Amazon Now business has already crossed $1 billion in annualised gross sales, while the wider Indian quick-commerce market is projected to grow sharply over the rest of the decade.

Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart have meanwhile created digital shelves where discovery, advertising, transaction, and fulfilment can occur within minutes. For consumer companies, the attraction is obvious. A new food or beauty brand can reach consumers across a city without building a conventional distribution network. The platform provides the warehouse, digital storefront, payments infrastructure, and last-mile delivery. It can create demand that the brand could not economically reach by itself.

But there is a price for that convenience. The platform knows what consumers searched for but did not buy; which competing products they examined; which discount converted them; what else was in their basket; when they reorder; and which substitute they choose when their preferred product is unavailable. The manufacturer may receive an order. The platform receives a behavioural map.

If a brand repeatedly pays intermediaries to put itself back in front of someone who has bought it several times, its apparent customer base may be less proprietary than management assumes

Large Indian consumer companies clearly recognise how important this channel has become. Hindustan Unilever says succeeding in quick commerce requires real-time inventory management because purchase decisions can be made in seconds and visibility is critical. It has established a dedicated quick-commerce organisation and says its service levels on the channel improved by 1,400 basis points during FY26.

That is a striking development. One of India's most formidable distribution machines is reorganising itself around somebody else's digital shelf.

This does not mean brands are becoming powerless. Quite the opposite: strong brands may become more valuable as digital shelves become more crowded. A consumer who explicitly searches for Surf Excel, Dove, or Maggi gives the platform less power than one who searches generically for detergent, shampoo, or noodles. The first consumer arrives with a brand preference; the second can more easily be influenced by ranking, advertising, discounts, or recommendation algorithms.

The strategic objective for consumer companies therefore changes. It is no longer sufficient to maximise digital sales. They must distinguish between sales generated by brand preference and sales purchased through digital visibility.

That distinction should interest investors too. Two companies can each report ₹100 crore of online revenue while possessing radically different businesses. One may have customers actively searching for its brand and returning organically. The other may repeatedly buy sponsored listings, influencer traffic, and discounts to generate each transaction. Revenue looks identical; the underlying brand equity does not.

Nike offers a useful warning from another category. Its aggressive push towards direct-to-consumer sales weakened relationships with retailers including Foot Locker and Macy's. As sales momentum suffered and newer rivals gained ground, Nike began repairing those wholesale relationships. Owning distribution can be attractive, but consumers do not necessarily shop where brands would prefer them to.

This is why the fashionable distinction between D2C and traditional consumer companies is becoming less useful. Successful brands increasingly need to be everywhere: their own websites, marketplaces, quick commerce, modern retail, and traditional stores. HUL itself describes its strategy as omnichannel. The important question is not whether a company sells directly but how much economic control it retains over demand.

Artificial intelligence could push this contest one stage further. Search engines still present consumers with choices. An AI shopping agent could dramatically narrow them. Instead of searching through 20 sunscreens, a consumer might ask for "the best sunscreen under ₹500 for oily skin" and receive three suggestions—or eventually authorise the agent to purchase one.

Then the valuable shelf shrinks from a supermarket aisle or screen of search results to a handful of machine-selected recommendations. Brands will have to understand not merely how to rank on Google or bid for placement on Blinkit, but why an AI system recommends one product over another.

For boards of consumer companies, this makes customer ownership a financial question, not merely a marketing one. They should know how much they pay marketplaces in commissions, how much they spend buying visibility within those marketplaces, how much additional money is spent acquiring the same consumer through Google, Meta, or influencers, and how much repeat purchasing occurs without paid intervention.

A useful metric would be the cost of reacquiring an existing customer. If a brand repeatedly pays intermediaries to put itself back in front of someone who has bought it several times, its apparent customer base may be less proprietary than management assumes.

None of this makes platforms the enemy. They have dramatically lowered barriers to distribution and given smaller brands access to markets once controlled by companies with enormous sales networks. Quick commerce has also given consumers extraordinary convenience. The exchange—reach in return for economics and data—is often rational.

But it does alter where corporate power sits.

The original D2C revolution promised consumer companies a direct relationship with buyers. Instead, commerce is accumulating new intermediaries: social networks, influencers, search engines, marketplaces, quick-commerce platforms, payment systems, and, potentially, AI agents.

The strongest consumer companies of the next decade may therefore not be those that eliminate intermediaries. That battle has largely been lost. They will be those capable of using every intermediary without becoming dependent on any one of them.

And the ultimate test of brand strength may become surprisingly old-fashioned: when the algorithm offers something else, does the consumer still ask for you?

Screening lemons from peaches



AMOL AGRAWAL
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Twenty-five years after a trio won the Nobel Prize, their contribution remains critical as information asymmetry becomes a major cause of today's economic problems

2026 MARKS THE 25th anniversary of the Economics Nobel Prize awarded to the trio of George Akerlof, Michael Spence, and Joseph Stiglitz "for their analyses of markets with asymmetric information".

The anniversary could not be more important as one of the major causes of today's economic problems is information asymmetry. The Tata boardroom fight is keeping shareholders nervous as the board members know more than the investors. Global bond investors are demanding higher yields as the governments know more about their debt levels. Climate change is creating massive economic shocks as there is limited information. The spread of fake news has become a disease of contemporary society. The list goes on and on.

Economics 101 assumes that buyers and sellers have perfect information leading to market equilibrium. In reality, the information between buyers and sellers is highly imperfect with one party knowing more about the product/service than the other, leading to information asymmetry.

In 1961, George Stigler (1982 Nobel laureate) noted these dispersions and added that buyers compare finding cheaper prices with additional search costs. If costs are lower, buyer will try to find cheaper prices and if costs are higher, buyer will settle for the available price. In the same year, William Vickrey (1996 Nobel laureate), while explaining auctions, said that the bidder knows more about the price preferences than the auctioneer. In 1963, Kenneth Arrow (1972 Nobel), while writing on health economics, commented that "the information possessed by the physician as to the consequences and possibilities of treatment is necessarily very much greater than that of the patient". This kind of information asymmetry leads to the problem of moral hazard where an entity provides misleading information about one's health leading to lower insurance premium. The moral hazard not just leads to an inadequate provision of medical insurance — as the insurer cannot differentiate between healthy and unhealthy — but also increases the medical services that are availed as the insurer pays the bill.

In 1970, Akerlof added to the discussions by introducing the quality of goods in a highly cited article titled *The Market for "Lemons": Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism*. Akerlof said that in most markets both high-quality and low-quality goods are sold together, creating an information asymmetry between the buyer and the seller. Akerlof explains this asymmetry in the used car market which has both good cars ("peaches") and bad cars ("lemons"). The seller knows more about the car than the buyer. Buyers do not know the quality of vehicles and prefer to buy at the lowest price. But at the lowest price, only lemons will sell as peaches will opt out of the market. The information asymmetry leads to the second problem called adverse selection where the entity (usually the seller) has more information than the buyer, leading to products of inferior quality in the market.

The rise of digital tech and social media have added several layers of complexity as there is too much noise around information

In the article, Akerlof also cites examples from other markets. He adds to Arrow's research, saying medical insurance too would lead to adverse selection if all the healthy people stopped paying insurance premium and exited the market. This would lead to the insurer company having unhealthier patients and higher claims. There is a difference in adverse selection between car and medical markets. While the higher premiums in insurance will drive away healthier patients, the lower prices in used cars will drive away healthier peaches. The other example is from credit markets, where the lender does not have information about the borrower. This leads to higher interest rates, which in turn attract lower credit-worthy borrowers. In fact, Akerlof referenced the Indian economic history to explain the information asymmetry in credit markets, citing examples from our credit markets. In 1966-67, he was working at the Indian Statistical Institute on a project related to the Bhakra Nangal Dam; he revised the peaches-and-lemons research drawing insights from India's economic history.

A key insight from his research is that the prevalence of lemons leads to inefficient markets and poor policies. This results in the development of market institutions and mechanisms such as guarantees, building of brands, chain stores, franchising, and different types of contracts.

Stiglitz (1973) provided an alternative and said that insurers can get their clients to reveal information about themselves via "screening". For information asymmetry in credit markets, Stiglitz opined that lenders should ration loans instead of increasing interest rates. Landowners and tenants establish share-cropping contracts to deal with information problems.

Spence's (1973) solution to addressing information asymmetry was "signalling", where individuals send some observable action to convince the opposite party of their credibility. In a job market, employees can signal their quality to the prospective employers by highlighting education qualifications. Likewise, firms pay dividends to signal their favourable prospects despite dividends attracting taxes.

The contribution of the trio was not limited to information economics but also applied to many economic fields such as game theory, financial markets, and development economics.

To sum up, the 2001 Nobel in Economics is a major landmark in the history of the Prize. The rise of digital technology and social media have added several layers of complexity as there is too much noise around available information. Signalling and screening the lemons from the peaches remains as important and timeless as ever.

Regd. No. TN/CPMG/722/2000 R.N.I. Reg. No. 37821/80 Printed and published by HS Gadhadar on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Ltd Published at New No.36/47, Eldorado building, Unit No.1C, 1st floor, Nungambakkam High Road, Chennai 600 034. Phone: (044)6679 1000.
Printed at MNS Printers Pvt. Ltd.No.76/1, Bhuvana Nursery Avenue, Velappanchavadi, Poonamallee High Road, Chennai - 600 077. Chairman of the Board: Viveck Goenka, Editor: Shyamal Majumdar, Editor (Chennai): Shobhana Subramanian* (*Responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act)
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OUR VIEW



PTI

GST 2.0 is likely to get a leg up: let's welcome it

Numerous procedural problems that currently get in the way of realizing the full benefits of GST 2.0 will hopefully be done away with at the GST Council meeting this Wednesday

Wednesday could well be a red-letter day for India's economy. A meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is expected to unveil a series of key procedural reforms as a follow-through of GST 2.0, which began with rate cuts last year. On the financial front, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will announce the outcome of decisions taken by its rate-setting panel. The former addresses micro concerns, at the level of businesses; the latter focuses on macro concerns. Together, they could do what the country needs.

In the words of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, "Next-gen GST was conceived with two connected purposes: to reduce and rationalise rates, and to make compliance easier." The former has mostly been done. The latter is still a "work-in-progress." Thus, "between October 2025 and July 2026, the value of reported taxable supplies grew 25.8% over the corresponding period a year earlier... Gross GST collections reached ₹12.46 lakh crore during April–September 2026," up 11.6% from a year earlier. The FM is justifiably proud of GST achievements, though states and the Union government acting together must share credit. Yet, several procedural wrinkles remain that will be discussed at this week's meeting for ironing out. The aim has been signalled: make life easier for enterprises, particularly smaller ones, reduce discretion by use of technology, minimize litigation and deliver consumer benefits through lower transaction costs for trade. The biggest change proposed relates to how offenders are treated. GST authorities are expected to lose their power to arrest taxpayers for tax fraud and other offences; only courts will have that authority. This will require a law tweak. As an easing measure, businesses with turnovers of up to ₹5 crore with only unregistered customers would be able to file returns annually (with quarterly tax payments). GST registration applicants that qualify for the automated route would get it done within three working days. Changes in trade names, partners or directors, apart from add-on business addresses, could move to automatic processing. The GST Council meeting may also take up a proposal that lets small sellers on e-com platforms sell nationwide with a single registered address. If approved, this would benefit sellers that must currently register in every state their products are warehoused for online sales.

Easing input tax credit (ITC), another sore point, could give Indian industry an indirect stimulus by freeing up capital. The supply chains of several items in the 5% rate bracket—food, pharma, textiles and electric vehicles included—face inverted duty structures, which result in ITC pile-ups running into thousands of crores. Releasing this capital could help businesses contain costs and invest more. GST norms are proposed to be aligned with RBI's rules for export payment receipts. Thus, no show-cause notice may be issued where the amount involved is below ₹10,000, with the proposal extending to pending cases. Given that around 95,000 notices a year arise from differences between returns, with recovery adding up to just about 0.08% of the sums involved, this is a long-overdue move. All in all, it's hard to quarrel with the rationale of any of the moves proposed for the GST Council's nod. On the contrary, they are a true example of cooperative federalism, the spirit that has guided India's indirect tax reforms.

THEIR VIEW

The Great Barrier Reef: why it's just refusing to die on schedule

The reef's record coral cover should end the alarms that ecologists routinely sound over its health



BJORN LOMBORG
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Australia's marine scientists recently released their annual audit of the Great Barrier Reef, and it contains news you almost certainly haven't heard: coral cover held steady or increased across most of the reef. In the 40 years that scientists have systematically measured the reef, the five best years on record are the five most recent. That is the sound of a catastrophe not happening.

You haven't heard the good news because the reef has an entire public relations industry built around forecasts of its imminent demise. In 2012, researchers reported that the reef had lost half its coral since the mid-1980s and projected that cover could halve again by 2022. In 2014, *The Guardian* published an interactive obituary for the reef. In 2016, *Outside* magazine agreed, declaring the reef dead at age 25 million.

The patient, it turned out, hadn't read the notices. By 2021, coral cover was higher than at any point since measurements began in 1986. It stayed at unprecedented levels through 2022 and 2023 and climbed to a new all-time high in 2024.

The reef answered two decades of death sentences with more coral than anyone had ever measured.

The scientists stopped publishing the reef-wide statistic—making it harder for a layperson to easily see that the reef was defying predictions. But they continued publishing regional averages, making it possible to effectively recreate their reef-wide average, which clearly kept increasing.

This posed a problem, which the doomsayers solved with a new annual ritual: report the good number, then smother it in warnings.

When coral surged back in 2021, the monitoring institute insisted the outlook remained "very poor". When 2022 set records, the BBC granted that cover was the highest in 36 years but "highly vulnerable."

In 2023, with the reef still near record highs, the official report was headlined as a "pause" in recovery. At 2024's peak, scientists declared the reef one disturbance away from losing it all. The reckoning was always due next year. Next year kept arriving, and so did the coral.

In 2025, much of the media decided the reckoning had finally come. "Great Barrier Reef suffers worst coral decline on record," announced the BBC. CNN pronounced the reef "devastated." What the headlines omitted: that drop came off the highest level ever recorded, and 2025 still ranked as the fourth-best year in four decades of measurement.

In any other field, a fourth best-ever result would be a triumph.

Reef doomsayers pressed on, undeterred. Two prominent marine biologists recently warned that the reef faced a very high risk of "ecosystem collapse." Weeks later, we now have the actual data: coral growing again in the north and centre, stable in the south, helped by a late monsoon that cooled the water. The collapse has once again been rescheduled.

When catastrophe fails to arrive, a second story stands ready: take a bow and send the bill. Australia's federal and Queensland governments have spent more than 5 billion Australian dollars on reef protection programmes since 2014, and when the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) declined in July to put the reef on its "in danger" list, ministers hailed the decision as recognition of Australia's world-leading reef management.

It takes nerve to spend years forecasting an ecosystem's death and then claim credit for its health.

The reef's swings have little to do with Canberra's cheque book. The main spending that has a proven impact on coral cover is dealing with the crown-of-thorns starfish.

When populations spike, these predators consume massive amounts of hard coral. The best estimate is that Australia's spending on killing these starfish has delivered half a percentage point more coral cover.

That is clearly not the main reason for the reef's 10 to 25 percentage point rebound.

Coral cover falls when cyclones, heat waves and crown-of-thorns starfish strike, and rebounds because fast-growing branching corals do what they have done for millennia. Government spending does not summon the monsoon. And if the billions really did explain the record years, what would explain the 2025 drop? Did the money briefly stop working?

This does not mean the reef faces no threat whatsoever. Bleaching events have hit six times since 2016. Coral cover fluctuates, and next year's survey may well be lower.

But fluctuation is not death and an ecosystem that has just delivered the five best years in its 40-year record is not on its deathbed.

Every time a new reef audit arrives, we find that doom has been postponed. Yet, those who predicted the reef's demise go unchallenged.

That should change because the exaggeration is not harmless. Crying wolf has a well-known ending. Despite years of funeral music being blasted by the world's media, the Great Barrier Reef is going strong.

10 YEARS AGO


mint
FinMin signals common ground with RBI on NPAs
STEFANO RICCI

JUST A THOUGHT

Inflation is the most universal tax of all.

THOMAS SOWELL

MY VIEW | MUSING MACRO

Economic warnings point to narrowing policy space

AJIT RANADE



is senior fellow with Pune International Centre

Two recent warnings deserve to be read together. Chief economic advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran has cautioned that the second half of this fiscal year will be tougher, despite first-quarter GDP growth of 7.8%. At the Asia Society in New York, India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar highlighted pressures on four 'F's—food, fuel, fertilizer and finance—and warned of a possible food crisis. American tariffs on Indian exports, oil above $110 a barrel and global monetary tightening are making the external environment less accommodating.

Domestic challenges compound these shocks. Deficient monsoon rainfall threatens agricultural output, food-price stability and rural incomes. The absence of remunerative job growth despite strong GDP growth manifests in long queues for job openings and youth unrest. The third challenge is a widening merchandise trade deficit, at $88 billion last quarter, increasing external financing needs. Fourth, debt burdens and pressure on state deficits limit governments' capacity to cushion households. These pressures reinforce one another and narrow the choices of policymakers.

Despite claims that India's economy has become drought-proof, weak rains remain a key worry. Maharashtra has declared three-fourths of the state drought-affected. Nationwide, inadequate rainfall reduces summer crop yields and leaves insufficient soil moisture for winter sowing. Fertilizer shortages or higher prices would compound the damage. Lower harvests squeeze farm incomes while also raising food prices. Rural purchasing power weakens precisely when households must spend more on essentials. This combination transmits distress beyond agriculture to consumer goods, construction and small businesses. Imports can relieve supply shortages but worsen external finances.

If crude oil stays above $110, it creates a four-way squeeze. It puts pressure on India's trade deficit, exchange rate, fiscal situation and inflation simultaneously. A higher import bill increases demand for dollars and raises transport, manufacturing and fertilizer costs. Rupee depreciation adds to those costs. Higher global interest rates make external financing more difficult. Domestic rates can't be kept low when inflation and currency pressures intensify.

India's services earnings and remittances cushion its goods deficit. But they cannot be assumed to offset an indefinitely expanding merchandise gap. Exports to India's largest market are jeopardized by the threat of steep US tariffs. Foreign institutional investors pulling out funds are another warning sign. A larger current account deficit gets uncomfortable when capital inflows are harder to attract. Both the financing requirement and its terms matter.

There are no quick fixes. Our response must combine relief for the needy with lasting adjustment

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) dollar deposit scheme bought breathing space. Banks swapped dollars with RBI, boosting reserves while creating corresponding future dollar obligations. RBI's net forward dollar liabilities reached $200 billion in August. This useful buffer must be assessed alongside its liabilities. Deposit maturities imply repayment or refinancing needs. The scheme and its abrupt closure illustrate the difficulty of using liabilities to shore up external finances. Borrowing dollars can bridge a tough period. But it can't substitute indefinitely for earning them through exports or attracting durable investment.

Banking-system surplus liquidity reportedly exceeded ₹11 trillion in early September. Abundant liquidity initially lowers short-term rates. But absorbing it imposes costs: RBI bond sales add to securities supply and can push yields up; interest paid on absorption can reduce central-bank earnings, reducing its dividend to the central exchequer. Rising yields can also mean valuation losses for banks. Leaving excess liquidity unabsorbed risks inflation if credit growth outpaces supply. The subsidy implicit in RBI's exchange-rate cover adds to the cost of this borrowed stability.

Government budgets bear these costs through lower RBI transfers and costlier borrowing. States face an additional constraint: salaries, pensions and interest already absorb revenue, while debt stays elevated. Drought relief and household support must compete with development spending. Protecting vulnerable citizens is necessary, but financing recurring commitments through debt reduces resources for future investment. Not to forget the Eighth Pay Commission's effects. We must distinguish spending that strengthens future incomes from commitments that merely add to tomorrow's financing burden.

The changing global order offers limited immediate relief. China's export strength intensifies competition for Indian manufacturers. Dollar diversification is proceeding but alternative payment arrangements do not erase India's dollar needs. Greater geopolitical fragmentation may instead make both trade and capital more costly and unpredictable. A diminishing dollar share of global reserves does not automatically give India greater economic autonomy.

There are no quick fixes. India's response should combine immediate protection with lasting adjustment. Secure fertilizer and energy supplies, manage food stocks transparently and target relief at the vulnerable. Allow orderly exchange-rate adjustments while disclosing the full cost of subsidized dollar borrowing. The Centre and states should protect productive investment and contain unfunded recurring commitments. Stronger exports, predictable investment rules and employment-intensive growth remain durable sources of resilience.

MY VIEW | ECONOMIC GRAVITY

Why states hold the key to make the GST 2.0 reform a big success

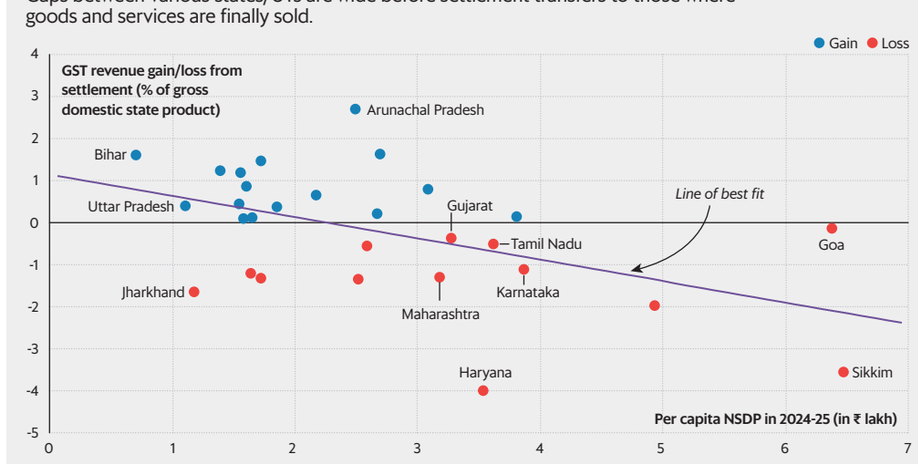
They have the capacity to increase their tax revenues. A small investment today could lead to a wider tax base tomorrow



PRACHI MISHRA & SHOHAN MUKHERJEE
are, respectively, dean of Ashoka School of Economics, director and head of Ashoka Isaac Centre for Public Policy (ICPP), and professor of economics at Ashoka University; and research associate, Observer Research Foundation.

GST revenue: Rebalancing act

Gaps between various states/UTs are wide before settlement transfers to those where goods and services are finally sold.



NSDL: Net domestic state product
Source: RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian States, GST Statistics

mint

PRATEEK KUMAR/MINT

Nine years after its launch, India's goods and services tax (GST) has been rewired. GST 2.0, which took effect on 22 September 2025, collapsed the four-slab structure for consumer goods (5%, 12%, 18% and 28%) into two main rates of 5% and 18%. Special rates of 0.25% and 3% remain, and a new 40% rate applies to a few items. Of the 506 goods covered by the GST Council's recommendations, about 90% saw their rates cut.

Our estimates suggest the effective GST rate has fallen only from 11.64% to 11.30%, a modest sacrifice that follows a familiar logic: lower rates can over time increase collections by widening compliance and stimulating activity. While most of the debate has centred on revenue implications, the more important question is how the transition is managed and by whom. The answer, we argue, is India's states.

How quickly the reform pays for itself depends on two things: whether businesses pass rate cuts on to consumers and how responsive demand is to lower prices. Early evidence is mixed, but the longer view is more encouraging. As effective rates have come down since 2017-18, gross GST revenue as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) has held up. The same is true of its state and inter-state components, apart from the pandemic dip in 2020-21.

The more telling story lies beneath the national totals. State GST collections have two parts: state GST (SGST), retained by the state where a transaction takes place, and integrated GST (IGST), levied on inter-state sales and collected by the Centre, which then passes on the destination state's share. If a Maharashtra manufacturer sells furniture to a Karnataka retailer, it charges IGST, and Karnataka receives its share because that is where the furniture is retailed for consumer use.

Before this settlement, the gaps between states are stark. Haryana collects SGST and IGST equivalent to about 7.7% of its state GDP; Bihar collects about 1.3%, a sixfold difference under the same tax code. Much of it reflects the size of the industrial and services base. After settlement, the gap narrows sharply: Haryana falls to around 3.4% and Bihar rises to about 2.9%. This is not a negotiated transfer. It is built into the destination-based design, a structural form of cooperative federalism that moves resources from where goods are made to where they are consumed.

The stakes for state budgets are high. Roughly half of Indian states' own tax revenue comes from GST. Collection performance largely determines how much room a state has for capital spending, which tends to have the largest growth multiplier. States that pair strong collection with well-targeted spending are best placed to grow faster and contribute to the Viksit Bharat goal of a high-income, developed economy.

PTI



So, how can states raise more? Three steps can be taken, all of which are within their own control.

The *first* is to know the tax base better. Measurement is the starting point, and it is good news that states already hold rich data. Also, the digitization of GST makes it easier to map the informal and under-registered economy against potential collections. Maharashtra built a data warehouse on GST Network data that risk-profiles its entire taxpayer base, with parameters refined every year. Karnataka worked with IIT Hyderabad to bring registrations, returns and e-way bills into a single analytics portal. Earlier analytics work there produced a 15-fold rise in the detection of bogus entities, blocked about ₹278 crore of fraudulent input tax credit claims and flagged fake turnover of around ₹4,250 crore. Neither state needed new legislation or a rate change, and both drew on partners, from Capgemini and PwC to IIT Hyderabad. States need not build this capability alone.

The *second* is to make compliance easier. Compliance rises when the benefits of registering and reporting honestly outweigh the costs, and those costs are mostly administrative: the time spent filing, reconciling invoices and resolving disputes. Simpler processes, faster refunds and clearer rules help. So does smarter enforcement. Andhra Pradesh uses artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, with a 35-parameter risk matrix, to score taxpayers and select cases for scrutiny. Directing attention to higher-risk cases spares compliant businesses needless checks and makes enforcement more credible. The aim is to make honest compliance the simplest and most predictable choice.

The *third* is to re-use the data. States investing in granular GST taxpayer and transaction databases need not limit them to GST. Excise on alcohol, stamp duty and registration fees, vehicle taxes, electricity duties and land revenue together account for roughly 25-35% of states' own tax revenue. Yet, weak taxpayer identification has left much of this revenue uncollected. Cross-referencing these against an existing GST information system is a high-return, low-cost way to unlock more from an asset already built.

The end of GST compensation also removes a distortion in incentives. When states were compensated for revenue shortfalls, the marginal return to improving tax collection was weaker. Every additional rupee collected could reduce the compensation received. With compensation now ended, every rupee gained through better tax administration directly strengthens state finances.

The short-term cost of GST 2.0 is small, and it is the price of a system designed to expand over time rather than extract more today. The path to stronger state finances may run not through higher rates, but through a wider base and deeper voluntary compliance, both squarely within states' own capacity to deliver on.

Ashutosh Dikshit, Vijay Singh Chauhan and the ICPP team contributed to this article.

MINT CURATOR

Why Andy Burnham's 'theory of growth' seems flaky at best

Combining statism with localism is unlikely to boost GDP growth



MIHIR SHARMA
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Burnham needs to question his and his party's economic instincts. AFP

Andy Burnham's speech at the Labour Party's annual conference was memorable. Unlike his predecessor, the new British prime minister sounded heartfelt and hopeful. He took a few big swings at hard policies as well. Reform is promised for elderly care and Britain's bloated welfare regime, as is a "national conversation" on the relationship with the European Union and the UK's outdated winner-takes-all electoral system.

He also offered up "a theory of growth," sharing it with the same passion that ran through the rest of his pitch. But—unlike with the EU, social care and voting reform—he didn't seem open to a conversation about this. The PM's mind is made up on growth. And that's a problem because his theory of how to reboot the economy is, at best, thin. At worst it's a recipe for decline.

Burnham sees two essential steps to growth, and an Edenic end-point once they're taken. *First*, the state should control "the basics." *Second*, power must be devolved to regions to unleash their animal spirits. The result of doing both, according to him? "We optimize the conditions for businesses to grow."

There's quite a bit missing there, and a couple of very dubious assumptions.

On state control, it's not hard to see why Burnham thinks this might be a vote winner. A recent survey found that more than 80% of Britons want publicly run water companies and 70% want the same for energy firms. My heart's with them. No two words are more feared in my household than 'Thames Water.'

But it wouldn't be the first time that I, or a large majority of people, have been mistaken about what we want. Publicly run companies aren't necessarily more accountable to those who use them. They tend to be frustratingly unresponsive. More to the point, state control can't be the basis of a theory of growth. There is no reason to suppose publicly run companies would be better at allocating scarce resources or slashing costs in the way Burnham hopes.

In fact, Britain's public sector is becoming more unproductive. Research from E&Y found that a shortfall in public-sector productivity costs the UK about £80 billion a year, which might reach £170 billion of lost output annually by 2030. So what you gain by cutting out profiteering you can just as easily lose through inefficiency.

Then there's devolution. It might boost growth if you let regions set their own tax and policy regimes, and to compete for investment and people. But that is not what the government plans at all.

If anything, Britain's economic growth problem is born of local authorities having too much power. They usually use it to block investment.

A handy example of that came this week from the prime minister himself. When asked about plans for a third runway at Heathrow, Burnham brushed past the possibility that it would enhance growth, and instead implied it was something that London's mayor and members of Parliament should decide on. Britain needs a leader willing to say that, when a regional preference conflicts with a national need, he will choose whichever boosts gross domestic product for everyone. Burnham has flunked his first test on that.

Provincial politicians will always object to stuff like new airport runways, nuclear-power plants or reservoirs. Local panjandrums are today the biggest obstructors of UK infrastructure spending. How can they also be the connecting link in any coherent theory of growth?

It's telling that Burnham reckons his ultimate goal of "optimizing the conditions for businesses to grow" can be achieved by embarking on his two steps of statism and localism (and by "supporting workers"). In other words, companies and entrepreneurs will start investing once the central state is wisely setting the overall direction of the economy and town-hall officials are empowered to do the same locally.

This is just not true. The private sector is wrestling with larger concerns: It's constrained by depressing amounts of red tape; borrowing costs are too high; the planning system is a disaster; poor transport links limit where firms can expand and recruit. All of these are fixable, some even before the next election. They should be the essential building blocks of any workable theory of growth for the UK. Burnham needs to make sure he includes them, quickly.

The prime minister has made a reasonable diagnosis of what's gone wrong for Britain. He has proven willing to pose difficult questions about the UK's welfare state, its democracy and its place in Europe.

He should be willing to ask them of his own—and his party's—economic instincts as well. The optimism running through his speech was refreshing. But a more hopeful leader does not mean we have more reason to hope. ©BLOOMBERG

MY VIEW | A VISIBLE HAND

New state governments are putting policy shifts to test

NARAYAN RAMACHANDRAN



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One of the most famous and widely studied natural experiments in modern history is the division of North Korea and South Korea at the end of World War II. A natural experiment occurs when a naturally occurring event creates a situation where similar groups are exposed to different conditions, letting policymakers study the outcomes. In economic prosperity, life expectancy and much else, South Korea has had vastly different outcomes than the North, even though they were once a single nation with a shared language, culture, geography and ethnic background.

A broadly similar thing is underway in three Indian states that held legislative elections over the last couple of years—Odisha, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. In all three cases, long-standing incumbents and attendant political ideologies were displaced. In Odisha, the Biju Janata Dal, with Naveen Patnaik as chief minister, had been in power for nearly a quarter of a century before being ousted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, who leads the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), ruled as chief minister for 15 years before being deposed by the BJP. And in Tamil Nadu, the Dravidian parties, both the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), had ruled for a combined six decades before being replaced by Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay and his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK).

This is not exactly a natural experiment, which requires both a 'control' situation (a part of the population that sees no change) and a 'treatment' one (a part that is subject to an exogenous shock). What has transpired in these states is actually 'regime change' for endogenous reasons, manifest through legislative election cycles. For narrative argument, however, I will go with the natural experiment idea, since one can always create a 'synthetic control group' of similar states or perform tests in the border areas of a state so that control groups lie just outside the state's boundaries.

During the tenure of Patnaik, Odisha represented a model of centralized, charismatic populism under a single leader, focusing heavily on direct welfare delivery, women's self-help groups and disaster resilience. Under both the DMK and AIADMK, Tamil Nadu represented a model of ideological, institutionalized populism deeply rooted in social justice, anti-caste mobilization and aggressive industrialization. Banerjee's West Bengal represented a case of aggressive cash redistribution to manage a de-industrialized economy, offering a stark structural contrast with Tamil Nadu's asset-building model.

There will be much to learn from policy revisions in Odisha, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu

Unsurprisingly, one thing that the new governments in Odisha and West Bengal have done is tack sharply towards accepting central government ideas and programmes in areas such as health insurance, law enforcement and immigration. Cash giveaways continue with new monikers. In West Bengal, time will tell whether the agrarian and small-business protectionism favoured by the AITC will be replaced by a Tamil Nadu-style preference for large industry.

Similarly in Odisha, it is not yet clear how far the new government would go towards large-scale modern manufacturing (semiconductors) versus the old idea of redistributing profits from mining. One project that is likely to create some societal angst in both states is a potential shift from regional pride (Odia Asmita in Odisha and Bangaliyana in West Bengal) to a more Hindi-based nationalist identity.

The case in Tamil Nadu appears quite different. Vijay has cleverly avoided the term 'Dravida' in his party name and substituted it with 'Tamilaga,' meaning people who speak Tamil. On his very first day in office, he visited the memorial of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, the founder of the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. Both in that action and his policy pronouncements, the TVK has signalled continuity with the rationalist and social justice philosophy of Dravidian parties.

Vijay has rolled out a sweep of high-profile welfare schemes: a ₹2,500 monthly grant for women heads of households, six free cooking gas cylinders annually (subsequently scaled back to three), free bimonthly electricity for households consuming under 500 units, and an Annan Seer Scheme offering eight grams of gold paired with a silk saree for eligible brides. This heavily welfare-centric approach is cut from the same political cloth as the legacy populism of former chief ministers M.G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalithaa. The 'how' of Vijay's administration does differ, deploying key performance indicators and vision documents to hold his cabinet ministers accountable, and using technocratic delegation and institutional channels to claw back funds from the Centre. To protect the administration's image, he has instituted strict rules on internal optics, going as far as banning ministers from posting informal content online like Instagram reels.

And so, open experiments have begun. In Odisha and West Bengal, after decades, greater centripetal alignment has begun. In Tamil Nadu, centrifugal forces have seen little change, but the rhetoric of governance has become technocratic, institutional and a tad unemotional. Early results of these experiments should be available well before the end of the new governments' first terms.

P.S: "All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better," said American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson.

On the Right Path of Easing Ease of Biz

Include energy, housing in GST's ambit

Reforming GST administration, as Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday, is a necessary follow-up to last year's rate rationalisation. That the GST Council will take up a series of measures to ease compliance and reduce disputes when it meets on Thursday, while welcome, indicates imperfections arising from design compromises. These tackle legacy issues from the complex GST structure that existed prior to 2025. But India is headed in the right direction, with fewer GST rates freeing up the bandwidth needed to administer the tax. This incremental reform is a significant achievement, but skirts key structural issues with the improved GST version we have today.

GST's main attraction is that it reduces cascading of taxes that drive up prices. Yet, energy remains outside GST's ambit, which tends to make India's economic growth more inflationary than necessary. Again, India's energy intensity of growth is rising, and this perpetuates trade distortion. India's transition to an export-driven high-growth low-inflation economy requires a hard look at why energy remains outside GST. The property market draws a significant share of India's household savings, and GST as it applies now tends to introduce distortions. There is scope to integrate housing transparently into the input tax credit chain. The effects of a streamlined GST administration in the property market will be felt across the economy due to extensive linkages.



It's not just about how efficient GST is. Policymakers need to look at why states are losing agency in raising their tax revenue. The GST revenue-sharing formula must accommodate the structural decline in states to strengthen fiscal autonomy. There is also a case for directing a part of the GST collection to municipal bodies to push sustainable urbanisation that generates more economic growth. Alongside creeping reforms, the council would do well to apply itself to some of the core restructuring GST needs to keep delivering economic efficiency. Throw in a big-ticket item occasionally.

Next UNSG's Top Task, UNmaking Irrelevance

Three months are left before secretary general António Guterres hands over the keys of the UN to his successor. There are 7 candidates in the fray. To get the job, one must garner support of 9 of the 15 UNSC members, including a yes-vote from all 5 permanent members. There's talk of dark horses, and of an understanding between Xi and Trump on who takes over from Guterres. But whoever comes in will have the daunting task of steering the 81-yr-old organisation through escalating geopolitical tensions and fragmentation, complex global challenges like AI proliferation, climate change, debt, increased defence spending, unresolved developmental challenges, as well as funding shortfalls. And, above all, to make UN relevant.



Seen largely as a bully pulpit for rival or antagonistic nations or blocs to snipe at each other 'politely', UN as Virtue Signalling Central is apparent even to its staunchest supporters. It is now all gums, no teeth. Which is why the next UNSG needs to be equal-parts diplomat, advocate, civil servant and CEO. Making the UN relevant again will require leveraging the changed world through its still-unmatched reach and convening power. That means looking beyond the conventional to make the UN fit for purpose. Reforms will be tough in the current geopolitical climate. But that should, paradoxically, make its role of trust-builder clearer and more pragmatic.

India must be an active player in this effort. Even as it keeps up the pressure for UN reforms, it must engage in making possible the small yet *real* changes that will make the UN not a 'mock United Nations'. New Delhi must not just articulate a 'global south' PoV, but also work across aisles to develop approaches that reflect and negotiate the world as it is.



JUST IN JEST

Greying will be the next big thing for the young to be taken seriously

A New Groom Boom: #WhiteHairMatters

For ages, people, especially women, have openly expressed how concealing grey hair is something they are willing to dye for. Capitalism has helped colour this view, persuading people that white hair strongly suggests non-hair fallibility of some kind. But it may shortly discover there is more money — and power — in putting follicular ageing out there as high-street window-dressing. Because #WhiteHairMatters. Status largely depends on scarcity. When everybody in the boardroom is dyeing, wigging or even balding — a satirical, AI-generated parody meme depicting bald tech leaders on a Time magazine cover with the headline, 'The Future is Bald', even went viral recently — the 57-yr-old person who looks 57 acquires instant distinction. Grey hair becomes not evidence of ageing but conspicuous confidence: proof that its owner can afford to look old.

For women, the signal is particularly potent. Men have long been permitted to become 'distinguished', while women merely became 'older'. Grey says: I'm not auditioning any more. A silver head implies its bearer has survived restructurings, recessions, difficult boards, and run-ins with powers-that-be. Which is why the next grooming boom may involve ambitious younger men and women actually artificially greying themselves. The truly ambitious will ask: how grey must I go to become a partner in this firm?

The regulator's proposal is tantamount to addressing the symptom, while ignoring the cause

Misselling Misunderstood





Ateesh Tankha & Ashish Dave

In FY25, the insurance sector collected ₹11.93 lakh cr in premium and issued 41.84 cr policies. Insurance penetration — premium as a share of GDP — stood at 3.7%, unchanged from the year before. Life insurance penetration slipped to 2.7% from 2.8%, while non-life penetration stayed flat at 1%. In FY26, however, ₹13.30 lakh cr of premiums were collected, reflecting growth of 12.5% in life insurance and 11% in non-life, respectively. Once again, life and non-life insurance penetration stayed flat.

So, the industry was selling more than ever, while failing to drive two key IRDAI objectives: reach, and access. Instead, the industry was more successful at selling to existing customers than it was at acquiring new customers or retaining clients of recent vintage. Something had to be done. But what?

Premature withdrawals and surrenders, plus a public rebuke from the FM to banks for misselling life insurance policies, forced IRDAI to act



According to RBI's June 2026 Financial Stability Report, the commission ratio of private life insurers doubled between FY22 and FY26, to 9.1% and rose sharply for private general insurers. This, by itself, was not an issue. The report, however, went on to state that instances of premature life insurance policy withdrawals and surrenders reached 38.3% of total payouts, while benefits stood at 36.9%.

Premature withdrawals indicate customer dissatisfaction arising from poor product fit, while surrenders pointed to deferred mis-sale. This evidence, coupled with a public rebuke from the FM to banks for misselling life insurance policies, the surrender of which impacts reinvestment in government securities and infrastructure bonds, forced the regulator, IRDAI, to act.

Thus, on Sept 23, IRDAI's consultation paper, 'Recalibrating Economics of Insurance Distribution', proposed to reintroduce product-wise commission caps (something it had removed in 2023 to aid greater penetration) to reduce misselling. But this is tantamount to addressing the symptom, while ignoring the cause.

Unsurprisingly, the market's reaction was visceral. Share prices of PB Fintech and Turtlemint fell 36% and 20%, respectively, while insurance brokerage firms trimmed earnings estimates by 12%.

Of course, benefits of reduced misselling — a more affordable, transparent and customer-centric market — need no justification. IRDAI's action has taken cognisance of one specific industry malpractice to restrict future incidences: bundling of insurance products with loans by bank personnel, who need to meet liability-product income targets at any cost.

But the bancassurance channel — partnership between a bank and an insurance company — while significant, is not the only distribution line to be affected. And it's in the inflexible, one-size-fits-all nature of the remedy — in which smaller companies may be disadvantaged and brokerages may see up to 1 mn jobs lost by 2030 — that the discussion paper falls short.

Misselling, after all, is driven by a person paid to complete the sale, rather than make the right one. So, while the discussion paper aims its sights at remuneration tied to a coercive transaction, it's likely to target worst offenders, while leaving core mechanisms of this sharp practice intact for 3 reasons:

❶ The cap reduces the incentive but not the intent, by rewarding a lower volume of sales with a smaller incentive.

❷ Any IRDAI regulation to attack the cost of a problem, rather than the issue itself, is likely to migrate the object of misselling from one product to another — from a capped one to a less capped one, from unit margin to cumulative volume, even replacing commissions with fees to make up the earning deficit.

❸ Any such action will only affect the direction of future policies, not salvage millions of policies already sold and surrendered that constitute a breach of trust as much as poor business practice.



Don't take it out on apples

When Australia faced a similar issue, it simultaneously introduced commission ceilings with clawbacks. If a policy was surrendered in the first 2 yrs, almost the entire commission had to be returned. By redirecting the incentive to reward renewal and penalising a one-time transaction, the seller was invested in making sure that a customer was sold an appropriate product.

A progressive commission cap, along with performance refunds, is something the Indian regulator should consider along with the introduction of 3 other actions:

❶ **Name and shame** With teeth like those of RBI and Sebi, the insurance ombudsman should use its grievance portal, Bima Bharosa, to publicly list insurers and distributors that consistently missell and reject claims, so customers can make informed decisions. Furthermore, being listed should carry a commercial penalty commensurate with the violation.

❷ **Training before selling** Misselling often occurs on account of incompetence, rather than malicious intent. Mandatory and rigorous annual training should be enforced to build accountability, traceability and long-term compliance.

❸ **Track the trail** Tracking continuous, data-driven supervision can provide early warning triggers and actionable insights to reduce misselling and lapse rates.

Ultimately, pushing a distribution commission reform as a panacea for misselling and under-penetration would defeat the purpose IRDAI has set itself.

A more nuanced approach, in which the market sets the terms of sale and scale of commission, while the regulator facilitates awareness and knowledge, and penalises malpractice and non-compliance, is more likely to promote India's objective of universal insurance coverage in the future.



The market setting terms of sale and scale of commission, while the regulator penalising malpractice and non-compliance, is more likely to promote universal insurance coverage

Tankha is MD, eTrans Solutions. Dave is co-founder & CEO, Embark Brokers

Bengal, Count Plants, Not Promises



Diva Jain

Last week, West Bengal finance minister Swapan Dasgupta stated that the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act 1976 has to go. That reform would be instrumental, he said, in unlocking land for development and attracting fresh investments. This, and other measures, are on the anvil for the 5-mth-old BJP government's plans to put the state on an industrial path.

Bengal's industrial history is unusual, not because it started late but because it started so early and lost so much. Five decades of Left and Trinamool politics squandered the inheritance of one of India's earliest cotton mills near Calcutta, car-making by Hindustan Motors at Uttarpara, locomotive-making at Chittaranjan, steel at Durgapur.…

The new government's industrial policy, due before Durga Puja next week, promises land pooling and direct purchase, a ₹5,000 cr investment framework with incentives linked to employment, and faster clearance for projects above ₹100 cr. Investors read a state's promises off its balance sheet. Fiscal and legal capacity are complements. States that build one tend to build the other. The first tells an investor whether a state can pay, the second whether its commitments can be enforced. Bengal offers evidence of weaknesses in both.



Will industry follow?

In 2025, the previous government legislated away 10 industrial incentive schemes dating back to 1993. NITI Aayog's 2026 Fiscal Health Index gives Bengal a score of 23.8, ranking it 16th out of 18 major states. The 16th Finance Commission has also cut its share in the divisible pool from 7.52% to 7.22%.

Where states begin with unequal endowments, stronger states can compete harder, while weaker ones have less incentive to do so. The question is not whether Bengal can announce incentives. It's whether it can credibly commit to paying them.

Odisha began this century in a deeper fiscal hole. Today, it tops the same index with a score of 73.1. In 2001-02, Odisha ran a revenue deficit of 5.48% of GSDP, a fiscal deficit of 7.68%, and debt of 46.48%. Its response included a white paper, a recruitment freeze and abolition of vacant government posts, tighter limits on guarantees to state enterprises, and a defined-contribution pension system for new employees.

In 2005, the state enacted its FRBM law, putting deficit and debt reduction into statute. The first revenue surplus, ₹481 cr, followed in 2005-06 after 22 yrs of deficits. Administrative reform ran alongside fiscal repair.

A 2004 law gave the single window statutory backing. Large projects went to a clearance authority chaired by the CM. Industrial land was assembled and mapped online. Approvals and government services later moved onto a single portal. For 2026-27, Odisha budgets a revenue surplus of 3% of GSDP, liabilities of 14.1%, and interest payments of 3.3% of revenue receipts. Bengal budgets a revenue deficit of 1%, liabilities of 38%, and an interest bill of roughly 17% of revenue receipts.

Odisha offers Bengal an important lesson, but not a template. The lesson is state and administrative capacity, not industrial composition. In 2022-23, manufacturing accounted for 18.8% of Bengal's employment. Its geography provides ports in the south and Siliguri in the north as a gateway to the north-east and neighbouring markets. It also favours logistics and distribution.

Chief minister Suvendu Adhikari is right to link incentives to employment, rather than investment alone. There is need for administrative discipline. A state must be able not only to grant support, but to monitor it, enforce its conditions and withdraw it when it fails. For Bengal, that comes down to 4 tests:

❶ **Land that is ready** Publish how much industrial land is actually available, where it is, and when it will be serviced. Acreage is not enough. Investors need clear title, usable plots, road access, power and water.

❷ **Approvals that bind** The new mechanism for projects above ₹100 cr must do more than route applications through same departments. Give it decisions that stick and deadlines with consequences. The 2025 revocation makes continuity a test in itself. Investors need certainty that benefits will survive a future change in policy.

❸ **Incentives that can be paid** The new budget provides for 1 lakh posts and raises dearness allowance to 38%. Investors need to know what the incentives will cost, and where the money will come from. Publish the liabilities, budget for them and disclose when they fall due.

❹ **Results that can be counted** Odisha tracks projects through approval, grounding and commissioning. Bengal should publish the same ledger every quarter.

Deliver the land, make approvals stick, and pay what is due. Then, count the factories, not the promises.

The writer is director, Arrjavv

Give States a Reason to Cheer



Najib Shah

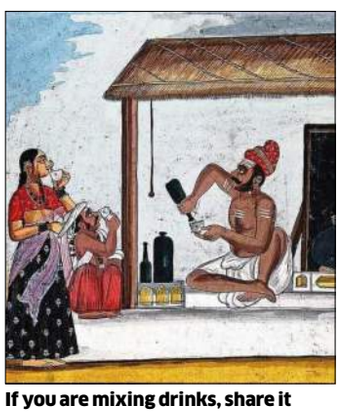
GST Council is a forum where Centre-state partnership is seen in full force. In the spirit of federalism, there is one issue that the council should decide on when it meets on Thursday: industrial alcohol.

Industrial alcohol and potable (drinkable) liquor are both made from rectified spirit, a concentrated spirit containing up to 95% alcohol. Rectified spirit is further processed, and its alcohol strength reduced — to up to 42.5% in the case of whisky, and lower depending on the beverage — to make it drinkable. When rectified spirit undergoes 'denaturation' — making it unfit for human consumption — it becomes industrial alcohol, a critical input for the pharma, chemical and cosmetic industries.

GoI and states have long contested who has legislative competence over industrial alcohol, with confusion arising from overlapping jurisdictions under various lists of the Seventh Schedule.

▶ Entry 52 of the Union List empowers GoI to regulate industries that Parliament declares to be of 'public interest'. Through Section 18-G of Industries (Development and Regulation) Act 1951, Parliament has vested the Union with the power to regulate specified products related to scheduled industries, primarily to ensure that such goods are sold at reasonable prices.

▶ Entry 8 of the state list empowers a state to make laws relating to intoxicating liquors. Production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale of intoxicating liquors fall within the ambit of the states.



If you are mixing drinks, share it

▶ Entry 33 of the concurrent list, however, gives both the state and GoI the power to make laws on the products of any industry, even where Parliament has declared that the Union should assume control in the public interest.

This overlap has created confusion, with both GoI and states believing they have the power to regulate industrial alcohol. Litigation on the matter dates to 1956, when a 5-judge Constitution Bench of Supreme Court held that Parliament's intent behind Section 18-G did not bar a state from exercising its powers to legislate on matters under Entry 33 of the concurrent list. That case, however, related to sugarcane.

The matter travelled back and forth between the top court, Allahabad High Court and the UP government before reaching a 9-member Constitution Bench in 2024. The court upheld states' power to regulate industrial alcohol by a 9-8 majority. It held that 'intoxicating liquor', over which states have competence under Entry 8 of List 2 of the 7th Schedule, includes industrial alcohol.

In effect, this could have opened another source of revenue for states. Yet, despite the apex court's order, industrial alcohol continues to be under GST. It's classified under HSN Code 2207 and attracts 18% GST. How, then, should the matter be resolved going forward?

▶ States should not rush to levy excise. The council must take cognisance of the top court's order and recommend that states be free to levy excise under their laws. GoI should ensure that this decision is implemented immediately.

▶ States should also take cognisance of the fact that the 18% GST levy was imposed with input tax credit (ITC). It is unlikely that they can put in place a mechanism to provide credit for taxes paid on inputs, all of which will remain within the GST regime. States should, therefore, fix an excise rate that broadly mimics the effective GST burden after ITC is availed.

▶ States have lost what is their legitimate revenue was from Oct 23, 2024, the date of the Supreme Court order. GoI could consider proportionately distributing revenue collected from industrial alcohol to the manufacturing states concerned. That would be a magnanimous step, one that would strengthen Centre-state fiscal relations and build trust.

The writer is former chairman, Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs

THE SPEAKING TREE

Knowing Nobody

SHIBANI BELWALKAR

In 'Tales of Kitagaki', the powerful Governor of Kyoto arrives to meet the Zen Master Gasan. He sends ahead his ornate calling card engraved with his grand political title. Gasan glances at it and flatly refuses entry. 'I have no business with such a fellow,' he shouts. Realising his mistake, Kitagaki takes the card, draws a sharp line straight through his title, and sends it back. Gasan smiles warmly and says, 'Ah, is that Kitagaki? Show him in. I would love to meet the man.' Kitagaki's crossed-out title holds up a mirror to our modern reality — a world deeply anchored in corporate designations, personal branding and an exhausting race for external validation.

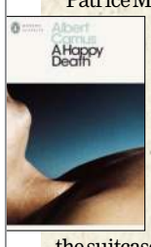
We often spend lifetimes curating a 'Somebody'. The sum of our visible achievements. Underneath all the layers we build for our identity, who are we? Ancient Indian philosophical texts identified this as Svarupa, with connotations of reality's essential, unchangeable, intrinsic nature. Unalterable and pure. Existentialist thought echoes this. Dissolve the ego-identity — name, career, status, possessions — and what remains beneath the Somebody is a Nobody. Svarupa, however, beyond the contrast of nobody and somebody, is what is underneath all along, waiting, whether the Somebody was ever built or not. Even Odysseus, a king, had to become 'Nobody' to escape the Cyclops' cave. His ego couldn't bear the lightness of it, so he quickly succumbed and announced himself as a 'Somebody' once more.

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY Paragraphs From Fiction

A Happy Death

Albert Camus

It was ten in the morning, and Patrice Mersault was walking steadily towards Zagreus' villa. By now the housekeeper had left for the market and the villa was deserted. It was a beautiful April morning, chilly and bright; the sky was radiant, but there was no warmth in the glistening sunshine. The empty road sloped up towards the villa, and a pure light streamed between the pines covering the hillside.



Patrice Mersault was carrying a suitcase, and as he walked on through that primal morning, the only sounds he heard were the click of his own footsteps on the cold road and the regular creak of the suitcase handle.

Not far from the villa, the road crossed a little square decorated with flower beds and benches. The effect of the early red geraniums among grey aloes, the blue sky and the white-washed walls was so fresh, so childlike that Mersault stopped a moment before walking on through the square. Then the road sloped down again towards Zagreus' villa. On the doorstep he paused and put on his gloves.

Translated from French by Richard Howard

Chat Room

Multiculti Policy Flavour, Please

Apropos 'Ok, It's Time to Raise Rates' by Mythili Bhusnurmath (Oct 5), (1) as on many occasions and at present, our monetary policy is influenced more by external (uncontrollable) factors than internal (controllable) factors. So, the flexible inflation targeting framework alone isn't fit and proper. India is a large, growing macroeconomy, but it is saddled with numerous microeconomic and sociopolitical rigidities. The country needs a multi-target approach instead of transplantation of policies from developed economies. (2) The monetary policy needs to be suitably communicated not only to the financial sector players but also to the common man who provides business opportunities to the former by availing their products and services. There's a lot the monetary policy authors can learn from the budget language. (3) When the monetary policy per se is constrained to do much (like now), it should focus on the Developmental and Regulatory Policies, i.e., Part II of the Policy, in a forward-looking manner.

Manas R Das
Pune



A thought for today

Making new petroleum should be as simple and straightforward as brewing beer

GEORGE M CHURCH

Abnormal Normal

Oil supplies through Hormuz now frequently exceed pre-war levels, but prices remain stubbornly high

For seven months, more or less, crude prices have tracked oil flows through Hormuz. So with Brent over $100 a barrel now, you'd assume the flow remains a trickle. And you would be wrong. In fact, in the last week of Sept, supplies through the strait exceeded pre-war levels on four of seven days. Global shortfall over pre-war levels is down to just 1.6mn barrels a day. You could even say oil supply is back to "normal" despite Washington and Tehran maintaining hostile positions. But you'd be wrong again. Firstly, because as external affairs minister Jaishankar said, "You can't have oil above $100 and pretend that things are near normal." And secondly, because this "normal" flow of oil is being kept up in the most abnormal way.

While significant volumes now move via pipelines and Red Sea – Saudi repaired its damaged pipeline fast – most oil and gas still have to run Iran's gauntlet through Hormuz. This is where things get abnormal, and unsustainable. Instead of tankers loading at W Asian ports, and sailing to their final destinations, a "shuttle system" has been implemented, to avoid Iranian fire. Small vessels fill up at Saudi, Iraqi and other ports, and carry fuel to a safe point in Gulf of Oman, where it's transferred to large tankers. Problem is, this wastes time and fuel, and ties up tankers in the Gulf, pushing up sea freight rates. And with the risk of strikes remaining high, ship insurance is also prohibitively expensive.



Where a large tanker charged around $80,000 a day this time last year, the going rate is over $1.2mn. So, freight now adds 27% to the delivered price of oil, as against 3% before the war, and has become a hurdle for lower prices. Nobody knows how long this will continue, although a Republican setback in next month's US midterms might bring pressure on Trump to lift his siege of Iran. After all, high petrol and diesel prices are biting Americans too. So far, he's sensibly refrained from imposing a penalty on India for buying Russian oil, which would upset the global supply calculus.

Meanwhile, in good news, Saudi has discounted Nov supplies to Asia, to soften the freight burden and maintain its market share. Russia has also started exporting oil via the Arctic route, from its new Bukhta Sever terminal. It hopes to ship an additional 600,000 bpd by mid-2027. So, things will get better, only not tomorrow.

Baby Doomers

Stories of two third daughters in two countries remind us of a terrible Indian reality

In US, Kolkata-born Sharmila Mona Sinha has deployed non-elite philanthropy to promote women's rights globally. It's her career and life mission, and she has gone on to become only the second Indian woman to make it into the New York-based National Women's Hall of Fame. Her worldview, she has often said in interviews, was shaped by her childhood where she never could shake off the feeling that her parents would have preferred a son, not a Daughter Number 3. The care she received was no less than for her sisters, yet Daughter Number 3, as a kid, internalised her parents' "disappointment". Sinha is a rarity for the strides she has made, but her words will have struck a chord with any number of desi, Asian, women worldwide. In patriarchy's terminology, they are "lucky". For, large numbers of baby girls – in the Hindi belt of MP, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, UP – aren't allowed to live, killed by parents and kin at birth, simply for their gender. The latest such murder reported was in Madhya Pradesh – of a baby, a few hours old, a Daughter Number 3 for the family, second daughter to her parents, allegedly strangled by kin.



Per UNFPA, post-birth female mortality (infanticide) accounts for about 33%, and prenatal sex selection (foeticide) for about 66% of India's total "missing girls" (estimated 4.6L to 5L annually, world's highest). This is defined as the demographic shortfall in India's female population – because baby girls are unwanted. The MP case is just one such. Female infanticide is notoriously hard to track, and grossly underreported. Often, newborns are simply neglected – denied nutrition, vaccines, medication when sick. Left to wither away. The cruelty of families, poor law enforcement, negligible convictions, remain a most shameful Indian fact. The chilling reality is that for every high achiever like Mona Sinha, there are far too many who, crushingly, simply don't see the light of day.

Pavement Not Found

So you jump, step, pray and it's all good for you

Jairam N Menon



Pavements in India are like the latitude. Imaginary lines on either side of the road, drawn in tacit agreement, between careening vehicles and careworn pedestrians looking nervously over their shoulders. Within that unmarked corridor, we must pass single file simultaneously intoning a prayer and a curse. Praying the next darting two-wheeler doesn't catch you in the small of the back while questioning, under your breath, the antecedents of all creatures great and small that come in your way. Just sometimes we pause mid-stride and ask ourselves, wasn't this space supposed to be exclusively ours?

But our voice is lost, devalued in the fluctuating scale of significance. Like the broke uncle in a money-minded joint family, footpaths are habitually ignored. Highways make headlines. The charms of a road stretching sinuously around a lake or sparkling bay are the staple of travel brochures. Bridges make photo-ops, whether they arch poetic over a river or earn bad press when they cannot make both ends meet.



In every road-widening exercise, the sidewalk is an early casualty. Eventually, the margin left is so narrow, it serves as practice ground for aspiring tightrope circus artistes. Else, it vanishes into the urban undergrowth, contributing another leaf to the mystery of India's GDP – Great Disappearing Pavement.

All this may sound as if being a pedestrian in India is an unending ordeal. On the contrary, it is a moral science class. There's a lot that the humble pavement hanging tenaciously to a suburban side street can tell us, which branded promenades simply can't. A brisk walk along upmarket Marine Drive, or its counterparts in other cities, can do wonders for the body but offers little oxygen for the soul. That's where your common or garden variety of pavement comes in.

You don't just stroll along with a whistle on your lips and your hands in your pockets. You hop, vault, dodge, sidestep and skirt, cherry-picking the parts not already occupied by parked vehicles, encroached or spat upon or reduced to rubble. Half an hour of this, and you return home having imbibed infinite patience. You have learnt to cast a benignly forgiving eye on obstructions along your path. Not because they are any less of a damned nuisance but because you have stumbled upon a profound truth – they are all maya. And so is the footpath.

Is Fourth Good Enough?

India aspires to host the 2036 Olympic Games. That means we celebrate the Asian Games stars, but also examine why certain medals were lost and why so many sports remain beyond our competitive reach

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With the tricolour held high, trap shooter Neeru Dhanda led India at the Asian Games closing ceremony on Sunday. Not so long ago, we would have looked at the 85-medal haul here and called it a terrific campaign. Today, we celebrate it and then instinctively ask, could it have been even better? That, in itself, says plenty about how Indian sport has changed.

India finished the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games with 21 gold medals, 27 silvers, 37 bronzes. It was our second-best medal haul ever. It also fell 21 medals short of the 106 won at Hangzhou, including 28 golds. India did well. India should have done better. Both facts can be true.



It's also true that numbers can conceal as much as they reveal. A medal tally cannot tell us that India's women archers ended South Korea's 28-year-long reign, in the recurve team event. Or the significance of Kumkum Mohod becoming the first Indian woman to win an individual recurve gold at Asian Games. Or what 3 boxing golds, 2 wrestling golds, gold medals in both hockey competitions, as also in cricket and kabaddi, or India's first-ever women's golf gold represent for a sporting system known for a far narrower medals map.

There were also breakthroughs beyond the expected routes. Neeru Dhanda emerged as a star, winning 2 golds and a silver in shooting, including India's first individual Asian Games trap gold in 48 years. In squash, Anahat Singh became the first Indian woman to reach an Asian Games singles final, with Abhay Singh making the men's singles final, and India adding medals in the team and mixed doubles events.

Somewhere between the celebration and the statistics, lies the more important story. India has become a much better sporting nation over the past decade. The old stereotype of a country that occasionally produces an exceptional athlete but lacks the ecosystem to sustain excellence, has been steadily eroded. Better funding, targeted support, professional coaching, foreign expertise, improved equipment, sports science, nutrition, competition exposure, plus programmes such as Khelo India and TOPS have changed the landscape.

This means Aichi-Nagoya should be viewed neither as a triumph to be blindly applauded nor as a setback to be harshly judged. It is a reality check.

Take shooting – 15 medals and 3 golds represent a substantial contribution to the final tally. Except, shooting had entered the Games with expectations of being one of India's principal gold reservoirs. At Hangzhou, it had produced 7 golds. The sport's very success over the years has raised expectations around it. That is a good problem to have, but a problem nevertheless.

Or take athletics – 24 medals made it India's biggest medal-producing sport in Aichi-Nagoya. But only one was gold – the women's 4x400m relay. The fall, from 6 athletics golds at Hangzhou, is impossible to overlook.

In badminton, a sport that has supplied Olympic and world champions in recent years, India managed only one medal in Aichi-Nagoya. This is not a reason for panic but a reminder that a superstar or two is not the same as having an ecosystem that constantly replenishes the top tier.

An even larger concern is about the sports in which India barely exists. Swimming/aquatics and gymnastics are not peripheral in the Olympic equation. Countries with genuine multi-sport ambitions, build their depth precisely in such disciplines.

China's dominance (341 medals, including 169 golds) provides the clearest illustration of this. It has extraordinary depth in swimming/aquatics, athletics, gymnastics, shooting, cycling, among several others. That is what a sporting superpower looks like. Not simply a collection of champions, but a production line of competitiveness.

It isn't fair to expect India to get there overnight. It retained its Hangzhou fourth position at Aichi-Nagoya, but fourth is also an uncomfortable number. Always behind China, Japan (269 medals, including 83 golds), and South Korea (150 medals, including 39 golds).

Los Angeles 2028 is two years away. Asian Games have provided useful evidence about where India stands, but Olympics will expose the gaps even more brutally. Paris 2024 produced 6 medals, and a feeling that several opportunities had slipped away. In LA, India will need its proven performers to deliver. Plus it will need new sports and new athletes to enter the medal conversation. It cannot meaningfully aspire to be an Olympic top-10 nation, while remaining largely absent from significant portions of the Olympic programme.

This is where the sporting ecosystem must now move from supporting excellence to manufacturing depth. Federations need to be held to higher standards. States, Centre, private organisations, and the corporate sector must work with greater coordination. Successful models in one sport must be replicated elsewhere, rather than remaining isolated pockets of excellence.

All this is even more urgent given our aspiration to host the 2036 Olympic Games. Building infra or having the world's largest audience is okay. But India's best argument for hosting would be that it has become a sporting nation competing with the world's best.

Aichi-Nagoya has shown that the country's moving in an earnest direction. Its medal base has become broader. Women athletes are increasingly central to the story. New disciplines are producing champions. Traditional strongholds remain competitive. There is a growing pool of athletes who expect to win rather than merely participate.

But ambition has to be matched by standards. That's why the right response to missing the Hangzhou benchmark is not to chase an arbitrary number at the next Asian Games. It is to ask why certain medals were lost, why certain sports continue to struggle, and why entire Olympic disciplines remain beyond India's competitive reach.

Saving City Of Joy's Yellow Icon

Kolkata's Ambassador taxis are being retired by law. But there is still a way to keep them. Proper planning, maintenance, and capitalising on heritage and brand value are the way forward

Bilwadal Bhattacharya & P Promoth



The yellow taxi is not disappearing from Kolkata because passengers stopped wanting it. It's disappearing because the law says it must go.

For two decades, India's transport policy has bent decisively towards cleaner air. For the Ambassador cabs that have plied in Kolkata since 1962, that shift arrived as a Calcutta high court order in 2008, upheld by Supreme Court in 2009, and reinforced since by National Green Tribunal. Together, they fixed a firm 15-year age limit on commercial vehicles across Kolkata Metropolitan Area.

The arithmetic has been brutal. A fleet of more than 18,000 in the mid-2010s had shrunk to roughly 7,000 by early 2024. With 4,493 retired that year, and another 1,500 due by the end of 2026, the number still on the road is set to fall below 3,000. Add the app-based cabs, and the Ambassador's exit looks less like decline than scheduled demolition.

Built at Uttarpara from 1957 to 2014, and adapted from the British Morris Oxford, the Ambassador was once the "King of Indian Roads". In Kolkata, it became something more intimate – a fixture in Sunil Gangopadhyay's fiction, in Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar* (1963), and Aparna Sen's *Paromitar Ek Din* (2000), and later a visual shorthand for the city itself in *Kahaani*, *Piku,* and *Detective Byomkesh Bakshy*.

Rather than let these cars drift into scrapyards one by one, we propose the city take charge of them. We propose a state-owned company, styled as Kolkata Yellow Taxi Corporation Limited (KYTCL), wholly owned by Kolkata Municipal Corporation, with a corporate body's freedom to earn, lease, and contract. Much would still need working out: who runs it day to day, and how it sits alongside the Transport Department that ordered the taxis off the road in the first place. These should be settled before the corporation is born.

Three legal steps make it work. The first is a right to buy yellow taxis going for scrap. KYTCL alone would purchase yellow Ambassadors as they retire, with an independent panel of valuers fixing a fair price from each car's condition. This is not confiscation. The Constitution permits the State to take private property only under a clear law and a stated procedure, which is why the scheme must be written into statute.

The second is an exemption. Central rules today grant "vintage" status only to vehicles over 50 years old. A narrow local amendment would grant it immediately to exactly 1,000 taxis, provided each passes an enhanced safety inspection, and is converted to CNG or an equivalent low-emission system. Because motor vehicle law is shared between Centre and state, the exemption must take the right legislative route.



The third is design marking. The roof-mounted TAXI sign, and the "NO REFUSAL" lettering can be registered as trademarks; the yellow body with its blue stripe can be registered as a design, down to the exact shade. That stops ride-hailing companies from borrowing a public symbol for nothing, and channels licensing income into a preservation fund instead.

The active fleet would be capped at 1,000, housed in KMC depots. Taxi No. 1 could be reserved for the chief minister and state receptions, No. 1,000 for the mayor and civic functions. Nos. 2 to 999 could form a rotating pool for heritage tourism, film shoots, exhibitions, and diplomatic gifts, confined to heritage zones and low-emission corridors, and audited annually.

That pool is also the revenue engine. The cars can be hired with a chauffeur, insurance, and geographical limits for weddings, photography, and films. Hotels, airports, and corporate lobbies can take five-year display leases, carrying binding maintenance and return obligations. An annual Yellow Taxi Parade Day, with ticketed viewing, sponsorship, and licensed merchandise, would round it out. What the plan still needs is arithmetic restoration cost per car, realistic rental rates, the bookings needed to break even.

It also needs the drivers, who operate independently rather than as salaried staff and stand to lose the most. They should have first claim on chauffeur positions, and a share of rental income stakeholders in preservation, rather than its casualties, and the political base the scheme will need.

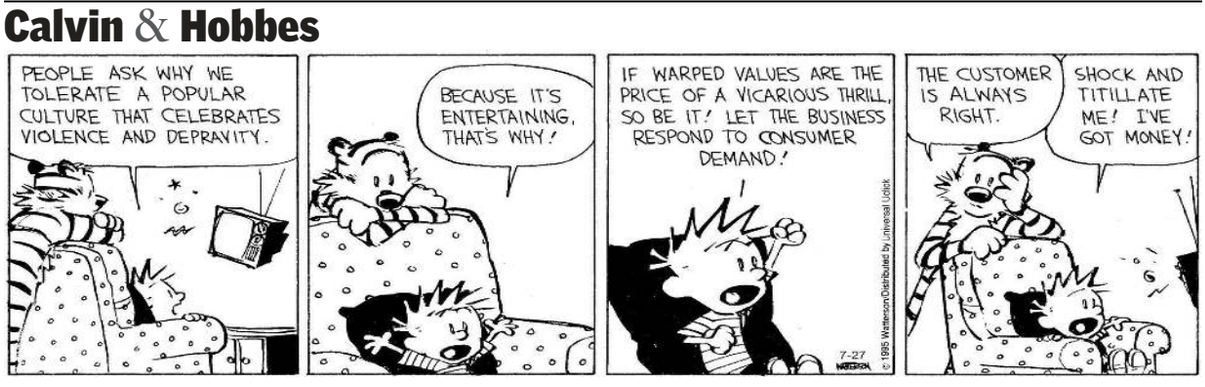
Germany gifted more than 130 segments of the Berlin Wall to public spaces abroad, including UN, turning a barrier into a symbol of reconciliation. China lends pandas. Japan sent cherry trees to Washington in 1912. Kolkata has nine sister cities, from Dhaka and Incheon to Naples, Odesa, and Jersey City. A restored taxi in a civic square or museum in each, with a QR code and a modest display, is a permanent advertisement for this city.

London regulates the design of its black cabs, and New York guards the look of its yellow ones, but neither ever took its cabs off the road, which is what makes Kolkata's case different. The closer parallel is Havana, where pre-1960s American cars have outlived their economic life on private ingenuity alone. We propose a more orderly route to the same end.

The choice before the city is between losing the Ambassador by default, and keeping a thousand of them by design.

Bhattacharya is Additional Advocate General, and Promoth is IAS, Bengal govt

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacred*space*



Practise loving those who do not love you. Feel for those who do not feel for you. Be generous to those who are generous only to themselves. If you heap hatred on your enemy, neither he nor you can perceive the inherent beauty of your soul.

Paramahansa Yogananda

How Beliefs Take Flight

Anil Bhatnagar

In Sept, the flydubai co-pilot attacked his captain mid-air – prima facie, an act of terrorism, as Israeli and American leaders have suggested. Aviation experts are reconstructing every second of the flight to prevent a recurrence. As they do so, we could reconstruct the process that drives human minds to commit acts like 9/11 or incidents like this. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras advise us: 'The suffering yet to come is to be avoided' (2.16).

I once watched a crowd cheer a master archer who repeatedly hit the bull's-eye, blindfolded, back turned, even with his toes. One man sat unimpressed. 'Anyone could do it with practice,' he said. The archer challenged him to try. The man declined and instead presented a lifelike sketch of the archer drawn during the performance, explaining, 'I practised sketching, not archery.'

Through neuroplasticity, we master whatever we practise repeatedly, whether archery, sketching, or hatred. Practised enough, thoughts of fear, victimhood, and revenge become unshakeable convictions.

Our brains crave coherence and detest ambiguity. For our ancestors, presuming any rustle in the grass was a predator proved lifesaving; waiting to be sure could be fatal. Applying the same reflex to existential riddles of origin, purpose, and afterlife, they turned speculation into beliefs passed down through generations. Over time, repetition hardens these inherited beliefs into felt truth and, through attachment, into identity.

Differing beliefs can therefore appear to threaten identity and survival. Research by Matthew Lieberman and others shows that when people feel their group is criticised, the brain's pain circuits light up. Under sustained threat, the brain's alarm system overpowers reason and perspective, reducing complexity to opposites: right and wrong, us and them.

Unexamined beliefs crystallise into three illusions that psychologists have identified. Surety: repetition makes even false beliefs feel true (Robert Zajonc's *mere exposure effect*). Superiority: believing we see what others are too blind to see (Lee Ross's *naïve realism*). Saviourship: the conviction, 'If i don't act, my people will be destroyed' (Roy Baumeister's *idealistic evil*).

THE SPEAKING TREE

Gita mapped this descent millennia ago: dwelling on objects breeds attachment; attachment leads to desire, desire to anger, anger to delusion, and delusion clouds memory until discernment is lost – and with it, the person. Dwelling is repetition; attachment, surety; delusion, superiority; lost discernment, saviourship – hatred masked as heroism.

Consider Anders Breivik, who in 2011 killed 77 Norwegians, most of them young campers. Neighbours recalled him as well-mannered and unremarkable. Outside, radicalisation is invisible; inside, it feels like finally finding truth and one's purpose.

Fortunately, the same neuroplasticity that builds hatred can also cultivate curiosity and compassion. Schools can encourage students to wear their beliefs like a loose shirt, ask regularly, 'What evidence would change my mind?' and welcome ambiguity.

Flexible beliefs can absorb disagreement without violence; hardened ones turn harm into moral duty. One man in that cockpit seems to have rehearsed hatred until it felt righteous. The man beside him, stabbed and bleeding, held on for 174 strangers. Every mind practices something. The more unsettling question is what our repeated thoughts are training us to become.

The Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Middle powers can bring peace

India has long held out the belief that middle powers can come together to rescue the world from the vagaries of a uni or bipolar global order

"One of the great tragedies of life is that men seldom bridge the gulf between practice and profession, between doing and saying." So said Martin Luther King and it is clear that New Delhi understands him all too well. Foreign minister S Jaishankar's speech at the Munich Security Conference signals India's graduation from words to action, especially as geopolitical deadlocks appear in different parts of the world today and superpowers no longer bring any semblance of order and stability. It is this interregnum, this in-between stage of changing orders that Jaishankar sees as a space for the middle powers to assert themselves. The middle powers, a gamut of large developing economies and small developed countries, are more visible than ever today. And they are holding out against the superpowers. Spain is unrelenting in its strong stand against US-backed Israeli action against Palestine; Iran, ravaged by decades of economic sanctions, has not yet lost the ongoing existential war against the US; India has refused to capitulate against unilateral economic policies of the US or China's territorial claims; South Korea, Phillipines, and Taiwan are checking China's influence in the Indian Ocean; and Ukraine is meeting Russia on an almost equal footing in the fifth year of the war.

Jaishankar acknowledged that India has moved ahead of its stated position by getting "a little bit more involved beyond advocacy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict". Earlier last week, Ukrainian foreign minister Andrii Sybiha lauded India's peace proposal out of all four — including those by Türkiye, Egypt and the US — as the most comprehensive one. By standing shoulder to shoulder with the US in peace-making efforts, India and others are doing exactly what the middle powers are supposed to do: channel their capacity to pivot to exerting global influence.

India has long held out the belief that middle powers can come together to rescue the world from the vagaries of a uni or bipolar global order. Peace and stability cannot be left to the economic heavyweights. New Delhi's insistence on BRICS solidarity marks one such way of middle power consolidation as an economic bloc to reckon with. The current trend of weaponisation of any leverage by any country, cited by Jaishankar, can only be reversed through cooperation between middle powers. It is time for them to do this out of choice, not compulsion.

Lessons from the Asian Games 2026

In July 2026, India categorically decided that the Asian Games would not be treated as an exposure tour. The idea was that the contingent would be filled with medal prospects, rather than athletes who met the qualification quota but didn't really have a genuine shot at a podium finish. So, while India cut the size of its contingent by more than 15% — 495 athletes in Aichi-Nagoya compared to 661 athletes in Hangzhou — the 85 medals won (second-highest ever Asiad medal tally after Hangzhou) show that the country is on the right path. Massive contingents do not necessarily lead to more medals; depth and specialisation do.

The other big takeaway is that, to strengthen its chances both at the Asian and Olympic levels, India must continue to focus on its core sports: archery, boxing, hockey, shooting, badminton and wrestling. The others need attention, but not as priority sports. Of course, there can always be an outlier like Neeraj Chopra. In these core sports, India has depth, which leads to internal competition that tempers the athletes even before they start battling on the international stage. It hones the kind of instincts that breed medals.

At the Olympics, India has won 41 medals over the years. The sports that have contributed to this tally — apart from the heroics from Neeraj Chopra and weightlifters Karnam Malleswari and Mirabai Chanu — are field hockey, shooting, wrestling, badminton and boxing. India's next goal must be to find a way to double down and maximise these returns. Treat this sharpened focus as a short-term strategy for the current Olympic cycle. The bigger picture matters, and every athlete deserves a shot, but to inspire the next generation, India need medals, medallists, and images of the Tricolour rising behind the podium.

Reform the Raj-style politically useful police

The relationship that existed between the police and the colonial administration has continued in the modern Indian State, despite talk of reforms



Prakash Singh

As far back as 1903, the Fraser Commission recorded that "the police force throughout the country is in a most unsatisfactory condition, that abuses are common everywhere, that this involves great injury to the people and discredit to the government, and that radical reforms are urgently necessary." The need for "radical reforms" in the police was thus felt 123 years back, and ironically we are still struggling to achieve that. Time seems to have stood still for the police all these years.

After Independence, while the Constitution was being drafted, there was a great opportunity to redefine the role and functions of the police, but it was missed because the founding fathers of the Constitution probably felt that the All India Services would henceforth function as servants of the people. However, the relationship that existed between the police and the colonial administration was, unfortunately, allowed to continue; the only change, as recorded by the National Police Commission, was that "the foreign power was substituted by the party in power". As the years rolled by, a symbiotic relationship developed between the politicians on the one hand and civil servants on the other. The Emergency (1975-1977) exposed the brutal face of the administration, when thousands of people across the country were arrested not because they had committed any crime but only because they were opposed to the ruling dispensation. As observed by the 1977 Shah Commission, "the manner in which the police was used and allowed themselves to be used for purposes, some of which were, to say the least, questionable" and that "some police officers behaved as though they are not accountable at all to any public authority." The Commission warned that "if a recurrence of this type of subversion is to be prevented, the system must be overhauled with a view to strengthen it in a manner that the functionaries working in the system do so in an atmosphere free from the fear of consequences of their lawful action". The suggested overhaul was never taken up.

A National Police Commission was appointed in 1977 as it was felt that despite radical changes in the political, social, and economic situation of the country, there had been no comprehensive review at the national level of the police system after Independence. The Commission produced a comprehensive report covering the entire gamut of police workings in eight volumes. But, its salutatory recommendations received no more than cosmetic treatment at the hands of government.

In 2006, the Supreme Court delivered a historic judgment on police reforms in the form of seven directives, six of which were meant for the state governments and the remaining one for the Union government. The Court clearly emphasised that "the commitment, devotion, and accountability of the police has to be only to the rule of law" and that "the supervision and control has to be such that it ensures that the police serves the people without any regard whatsoever to the status and position of any person." The judgment raised great expectations. However, the states have dragged their feet on implementing these orders and, although 18 states claim to have passed laws purportedly in compliance of the judicial directions, a close examination shows that these laws violate the letter and spirit of Supreme Court's directions. The Union government has also not shown any keenness to implement the directions. They have not passed even the Delhi Police Bill, which Soli Sorabjee had drafted way back in 2006. The political class is apparently not enthusiastic about the reforms because these would dilute their authority over the police. The bureaucracy is also opposed because it has become addicted to lording over the police. And so, the executive stranglehold over the police continues. The prime minister has repeatedly pushed for doing away with all vestiges of colonialism, but the colonial system of policing bequeathed to us by the British continues.



The political class is not enthusiastic about policing reforms because that would dilute their authority over the police. SANTOSH KUMAR/HT PHOTO

The British could be excused for having drafted the Act of 1861, which was designed to raise a "politically useful" police force. However, there could be no justification for our leaders continuing with the same construct after eight decades of Independence.

The suggested reforms are imperative on two counts: political and economic. The country's democratic structure is being threatened by the rising number of persons with a criminal background entering Parliament and the state legislatures. Amongst parliamentarians, 40% face criminal charges; this share stands at 45% in the state assemblies.

In the Rule of Law Index developed by the World Justice Project, India figures at number 86 out of 143 countries. This is not a happy situation. The criminal justice system of the country should be enabled to prevent at least those with serious criminal charges against them from entering the temples of democracy.

From a purely economic point of view, according to the Institute for Economics & Peace, internal disturbances cost the country $1.23 trillion in 2023, which is equivalent to about 6.7% of the GDP. This is a huge cost. A professional police would be able to reduce this economic burden. Effective law and order should not be only a security or social objective — it is, in fact, an important prerequisite for sustained economic growth. A Viksit Bharat must have a progressive, modern police committed to serving the people and upholding the rule of law.

Prakash Singh is a retired director general of Police. The views expressed are personal

Caste bias has made empathy impossible



Dhrubo Jyoti

The world's longest written constitution may have taken 165 sittings across nearly three years to draft, but India's founding document encountered its first controversy just six months after enactment, at the hands of a 35-year-old Brahmin woman from Tamil Nadu. Champakam Doraiarajan earned a science degree from the University of Madras in 1934 but shelved her dream of studying medicine for want of money. When she revived it 15 years later, she found her path to medical college narrowed by a Madras government order that apportioned seats by caste population. Indignant before she had even applied, she petitioned the Madras High Court against the so-called communal order, alongside CR Srinivasan, another Brahmin engineering student. The ensuing case raised profound questions of equality for the infant republic and its promise of social justice. The high court struck down the order and the Supreme Court endorsed that verdict in 1951, holding that religion, race, and caste could not be grounds for admission. The ruling dealt a body blow to reservations, decided the case on a strict textual reading of fundamental rights, and established their primacy over directive principles.

Its caste-blind privileging of individual non-discrimination over State-led welfare produced a deadlock that eventually led to the first amendment to the Constitution, which, among other controversial provisions, added a clause protecting affirmative action. During the debate, law minister BR Ambedkar was a vocal critic of the verdict, arguing that the judges erred in treating caste and merit differently.

"Every Hindu has a caste — he is either a Brahmin or a Mahratta or a Kunby or a Kumbhar or a carpenter. There is no Hindu — that is the fundamental proposition — who has not a caste," he said in Parliament.

India may have transformed in the seven decades since, but feelings about reservation haven't; if anything, the upward mobility and political empowerment of some marginalised castes have only calcified upper-caste resentment. From the spectacle of a medical student setting himself ablaze against the Mandal mandate to women students agitating on behalf of their imaginary unemployed husbands, upper-caste groups have conjured chasms between caste and merit for decades. Anti-reservation votaries don't care that caste has mutated into more insidious but equally vicious forms — the accident of birth still governs access to classrooms and campuses, job-interview callbacks, love and loss, and even final resting places. Nor do they care that many of their own are now beneficiaries of reservation through the EWS route — effectively an upper-caste quota — which has attracted none of the stigma reserved for "quota students". That dominant communities can now agitate for quotas after decades of violently opposing a leg up for the more marginalised is a reminder of this peculiar amnesia. It lets them attribute every connection, reference or opportunity to individual perseverance and merit rather than network effects and community mobility. As Harvard historian Ajantha Subramanian has demonstrated, this constructed intimacy between caste and merit births the assumption that identitarianism is principally a politics of the marginalised, allowing some to believe they have transcended caste.

This perverse discourse has made reservation, rather than caste, the byword for discrimination, and Dalits, rather than those who enjoy the perks of bias or actively discriminate, as its most visible marker. Electoral realities forced political parties to back reservation, but their historical ambivalence towards quotas shows in their dubious commitment to the transparent filling of reserved seats or improving the lives of marginalised students on campuses. What more damning indictment of this hollowed-out social justice is there than parties whose control remains with upper-caste politicians who rarely field Dalit candidates outside reserved constituencies — the consequence of social justice becoming an electoral totem rather than a nation-building project.

This miasma of ignorance, bias, and cynical politics has opened a gulf so wide that empathy is impossible; it is now entirely possible for an upper-caste Indian to never have Dalit friends or colleagues, fall in love with a Dalit person, share a meal with one, or stand in grief at their funeral. Many upper-caste Indians feel quotas rob them of opportunities they consider theirs by right, depriving the nation of their talents. This makes reservation the culprit behind every national failing (poor air to global educational standing), instead of genuine structural shortcomings. It doesn't matter that reservation is patchily implemented or that the public sector forms a shrinking share of employment today. Dalit communities, for their part, are aggrieved by the indifference to their daily indignities or that degrading jobs remain the preserve of their men and women, and correctly perceive the constant attack on their one ladder for social mobility as hostility to their emancipation.

Some of this disconnect is plainly visible after the suicide of an IIT-Bombay student. The precise circumstances remain under investigation, but that has not stopped unequivocal condemnation of quotas and the boy, or CCTV footage of the deceased minor being splashed across television with slanted commentary. With AI tools now ubiquitous in students' hands, used to frame everything from emails to assignments, it is worth noting that caste bias can make the difference between a kind word and a harsh one, the discretion that affords an errant student a second chance or a lenient sentence, or the respect for due process that withholds judgment until the investigation concludes.

Caste stalks our campuses, and our leadership has done little to make education equitable. Countless testimonials from marginalised students point to visible and invisible bias, to the subterranean ways in which overt caste interrogation has evolved into subtler inquiries about rank, surname, family background or hostel allotment. On the other side of the divide stand professors and peers who believe some people don't belong on their campuses. In the middle are academic and institutional authorities who refuse to bolster integration initiatives, mount sustained efforts to help those struggling, or even admit that non-functional diversity initiatives and government-mandated cells are symptoms of a larger malaise. Until we confront that original sin, callousness at the avoidable loss of a young Indian will remain the norm.

The views expressed are personal

{ SANAE TAKAICHI } PRIME MINISTER, JAPAN

China is an important neighbour, and... we have built up a long-standing relationship... We will work to ensure communication... promote dialogue... and build a constructive and stable relationship



Protect children growing up in the shadow of AI



Pragya Misra

For teenagers around the world, including in India, artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming a part of everyday lives. They are using it to study for exams, understand difficult concepts, create content, and learn new skills. Global OpenAI data suggests that nine in ten teens already use ChatGPT for learning and skill building in a single week. Users in India are twice as likely to turn to ChatGPT for learning and education queries compared to the global median.

The question, then, is how that use will shape the way they learn, think, and navigate the world.

AI has the potential to personalise learning, bridge educational gaps, and make knowledge more accessible through native-language and voice experiences. But greater access also entails greater responsibility. Teens need protection from harmful and age-inappropriate content, and from patterns of use that could weaken independent thinking or encourage over-reliance.

This is why teen safety has to be about more than simply restricting content. AI products should also help teenagers develop the skills and judgement to use them safely, critically, and independently. That requires building on the safeguards already designed into AI systems with additional protections for teens. This means thinking about age-appropriate content and parental controls, but also how the system responds, what defaults it sets, when it slows interactions down, and how it reinforces real-world support.

In India, age-appropriate design must also reflect how teens actually access technology. In many Indian households, access happens on shared devices, with some surveys suggesting that such usage for teens may be well over 70%. Personal device ownership is likely even lower among girls than boys. These nuances need to be accounted for in how protections are designed.

On shared devices, an age declared or verified when an account is created may not always reflect the person actually using an AI service. Age-prediction mechanisms can then provide an additional layer of protection by using a range of signals to assess whether a user is under 18 and adapting the experience accordingly. ChatGPT relies on such age estimation, using behavioural and account-level signals to identify under-18 users and activating additional protections automatically.

But AI companies cannot solve for teen safety alone. Parents, educators, and trusted adults have an important role in helping teens build agency. This means knowing AI can be wrong, recognising unhealthy patterns of use, and stepping away when needed.

That shared responsibility creates a second challenge of helping the adults around teenagers keep pace with what constitutes responsible use. Parents and educators are being asked to guide a generation growing up with a technology many are only beginning to understand themselves. That makes teen safety not just a product question, but a societal one. Good design should not force a trade-off between oversight and independence; it should help families navigate with more confidence and less guesswork.

For teens, safety is also about what AI encourages them to do. Does it nudge them to develop judgement, curiosity, and independent thought?

That means prioritising learning over speed and convenience. While products for adults may prioritise quick answers and productivity, AI for teens should help them ask better questions and work through problems. The aim should be to make AI a tool that strengthens learning and independence, rather than one that simply makes it easier to avoid the work of learning.

These principles should inform how AI products are designed in practice. For example, parents can be given tools to shape how their teens use AI, including settings that make new chats default to a learning-oriented mode during designated study hours, guiding teens through problems step by step rather than simply providing answers.

New uses of AI will create new risks and our understanding of how teens interact with these systems will continue to evolve. Companies need to keep testing and improving their systems, including by listening to teens, parents, educators, and experts.

India now has a chance not just to adopt AI for young people, but to help define the norms for what responsible AI should look like globally for teens. Given its scale, diversity and distinct access patterns, lessons from the Indian experience have relevance well beyond its borders.

If AI is going to grow up alongside this generation, we should make sure that this generation can grow with it safely.

Pragya Misra is head of strategy and government affairs, OpenAI India. The views expressed are personal

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PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY MANHAR KAPOOR for and on behalf of HT Media Ltd. 18-20, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi-110001 and printed at HT Media Ltd. Presses at Plot No.-8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar. (UP). Pin-201306.
BOARD: (011) 23361234 ● EDITORIAL: (011) 66561234 Extn. 1254, 1268 ● CIRCULATION: (011) 66561111 ● ADVERTISING: (011) 66561389 ● FAX: (011) 66561270.

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Forex pressure?

India's foreign exchange reserves have crossed an important threshold ~ not because their absolute level is inadequate, but because the speed at which they are being drawn down deserves attention. The reserves fell by $18.3 billion in the week ended September 25, taking the total to $747.6 billion. That followed a decline of $14.88 billion in the preceding week. Two consecutive weeks of such large reductions cannot be dismissed as an ordinary fluctuation, particularly when they coincide with sustained pressure on the rupee.

The Reserve Bank of India has accumulated a formidable reserve cushion over the years precisely so that India does not become hostage to sudden movements in global capital and commodity markets. It is therefore entirely legitimate for the RBI to use that cushion to prevent disorderly movements in the currency. The objective of intervention, however, cannot be to defend a particular exchange-rate level indefinitely.

That distinction is becoming important. The rupee has weakened amid higher crude-oil prices, elevated US Treasury yields and continuing turmoil in West Asia. India, as a major importer of crude, is especially exposed when oil prices rise. More expensive energy increases the country's dollar requirements, while higher US yields can make dollar assets more attractive to international investors. The pressure can consequently reinforce itself.

Nor should the entire $18.3-billion decline be interpreted as dollars physically leaving the RBI's vaults. India's reserves include assets denominated in currencies other than the dollar. Changes in the value of the euro, pound and yen against the dollar can alter the reported value of foreign-currency assets. Gold valuations can also move independently of actual intervention.

But these accounting effects do not make the broader signal irrelevant: the reserve position is declining at the same time that the RBI is under pressure to support the rupee.

This raises a larger policy question. A central bank can use reserves to buy time; it cannot use them to repeal the underlying economics of an external shock. If oil remains expensive and global financial conditions remain unfavourable, some adjustment in the rupee may ultimately be unavoidable. Attempting to resist every downward movement could consume reserves without eliminating the forces producing the pressure.

There is, therefore, no reason for alarm. A reserve stock of $747.6 billion remains substantial and provides India with considerable external resilience. But neither should complacency be the response. The important indicator is not merely how many dollars remain in the reserve account, but how rapidly they are being used and whether the pressures requiring intervention are temporary or becoming structural.

For policymakers, the challenge is to preserve the credibility of the reserve buffer without treating it as an inexhaustible defence fund. For the wider economy, a weaker rupee will eventually feed into imported inflation, particularly through energy. The latest numbers are consequently less a crisis signal than a warning: India still has considerable room to manoeuvre, but the cost of buying that room is rising.

Police Power

The treatment of women journalists at a political protest is not a peripheral matter of crowd control. It goes to the heart of the relationship between state power, public dissent and the press. Allegations by three women journalists of sexual harassment and inappropriate touching by police officers during a demonstration in Delhi therefore demand more than an expression of regret. They require a credible investigation and, if established, consequences. There is an important distinction between policing a protest and policing the people who report it. Officers may have to disperse an unlawful assembly, remove barricades or detain demonstrators. None of those responsibilities gives them licence to intimidate, humiliate or sexually harass journalists doing their jobs. A journalist does not surrender professional rights merely by entering a protest site.

The allegations are disturbing because journalists are supposed to be witnesses to the exercise of state authority. Their cameras, notebooks and reports provide the public with an independent record of what happens when police confront citizens. If those documenting such encounters are themselves subjected to intimidation or physical abuse, the public loses not merely the confidence of individual journalists but an important mechanism of accountability.

The response of the Delhi Police will therefore be closely watched. Transferring the complaint to the Crime Branch seems a perfunctory first step, and an investigation cannot be allowed to become a procedural burial ground. The complainants should be heard without intimidation, available video footage and other evidence should be preserved, and the findings should be made public to the extent permitted by law. If misconduct is established, disciplinary and legal action should follow. There is a wider significance because the protest itself concerns the integrity of the electoral process.

The controversy surrounding the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls has already generated political distrust and public demonstrations. In such an atmosphere, the conduct of the police acquires an importance beyond the immediate confrontation. Heavy-handed treatment of protesters can deepen suspicion; mistreatment of journalists can deepen it further. That does not mean every allegation against the police should automatically be accepted as fact.

Due process matters precisely because the accusations are serious. But due process must operate in both directions. Police officers are entitled to a fair investigation, while complainants are entitled to have their allegations taken seriously and examined independently.

Democracy is tested not only at the ballot box. It is tested on the street, when citizens protest, when journalists record what is happening and when the police exercise coercive authority. The state demonstrates its strength not by making dissent disappear, but by showing that even in moments of confrontation its power remains bounded by law.

If women journalists were indeed subjected to sexual harassment while covering a protest, the appropriate response is neither political counterattack nor institutional defensiveness; it is accountability. Anything less would send a damaging message: that those entrusted with enforcing the law may themselves escape its discipline when the cameras are turned on them.

The Fifth Pillar

The scale of the challenge is revealed in hard numbers. India's youth unemployment stands at nearly 16 per cent, three times the overall rate of 5.4 per cent. In urban areas, one in four young women is jobless, despite women now surpassing men in employability at 54 per cent. This paradox reveals the gap between education and opportunity



India possesses a treasure that no other nation can claim in such abundance ~ a vast reservoir of educated and semi-educated youth, brimming with energy, ambition, and the desire to contribute. This demographic dividend is our greatest strength, a force that could transform every sector from healthcare to technology, from agriculture to green energy, from the automobile industry to digital innovation.

Yet the question that confronts us is whether we are truly doing justice to this gift. Are we harnessing this immense potential for nation building, or are we allowing it to dissipate into frustration, agitation, and low wage survival work?

The recent NEET paper leak and the agitations that followed were not isolated events; they were a mirror reflecting the anxieties of a generation that feels cheated of its rightful place in the future. These young men and women, having invested years in education, find themselves stranded between degrees that do not translate into employable skills and a job market that increasingly pushes them into gig work with little dignity or security.

The sight of graduates delivering food parcels or riding motorcycles for survival wages is not a reflection of their lack of ambition, but of a system that has failed to align education with employability. Their anger is therefore not only about fairness in examinations, but about dignity in work, about the right to a future that matches the promise of their education.

This is not a new story. The unemployability factor has long haunted our youth. In 2024, the National Skill Development Council reported that nearly half of graduates remained unqualified for industry jobs, while surveys revealed that 70 per cent of engineering graduates were unemployable and more than 80 per cent lacked advanced digital skills. These numbers are not just statistics; they represent millions of young lives caught in a cycle of frustration, impatience, and cynicism.

The automobile sector, with its untapped potential in electric vehicles, diagnostics, and AI driven technologies, could have absorbed thousands of trained youth; yet outdated curricula and lack of practical exposure have left them unprepared.

Similarly, the mushrooming of mediocre professional colleges has produced graduates who remain unfit for industry, contributing little to nation building.

Large scale manufacture of utility items, from household goods to industrial components, remains the strongest pillar of economic independence. When produced with quality and competitive pricing, such manufacturing not only stabilises domestic demand but also strengthens exports, creating jobs at scale and ensuring that national growth rests on self reliance rather than dependence.

Years have been wasted in formalising a workable and nation-oriented education policy for pan-India application. Larger interest and the need for uniform national development demand rejection of party-based agendas that insist on only Hindi as the primary language and show prejudice against English, which in our Indian background, has universal acceptance. It is the universal application of the education medium that must matter, not regional or partisan choice. The quality and professional application of skill training must match the pace of developing technology and industrial growth in defined sectors, otherwise the gap between industry and graduates will continue to widen.

Agriculture, organised waste management, and recycling offer immediate avenues for dignified jobs. Safe water supply, sewage discharge, and recycling also hold immense potential for training and absorbing large numbers of youth meaningfully. Yet these areas remain neglected, even though they could provide employment while simultaneously improving the quality of life for citizens.

The female potential is equally under-utilised. A large number of girls drop out simply because of inaccessible schooling, unreliable security environments, and the absence of even basic sanitation facilities. Unlocking this half of the talent pool is not just a matter of justice but of national necessity.

Most important is the growing indiscipline amongst the youth - the impatience, anger, hurry, and the addiction to the mobile world where, instead of utilising its potential for learning, valuable time and energy is wasted in watching and making reels. The country needs a very large number of affordable hospitals and diagnostic centres. It is incumbent on any government to adopt serious austerity measures, save that amount, and redirect it to create and maintain job-oriented service centres that improve the quality of life for citizens. There is definite scope for drastic cuts in government expenditure, and austerity must become the guiding principle.



S S SAXENA

The writer is a retired Air Commodore, VSM, of the Indian Air Force

It is time for the nation to understand that for sustained progress and achieving excellence, it is disciplined, uniform work culture ~ not the promotion of faith in our day today lives ~ that must matter. The youth must not be swayed to find solutions for their success at the altar of rituals. Decongestion of our choking cities, sick with bulging populations and massive traffic volumes, is another urgent need. The exercise to shift and relocate institutions to other areas will not only lighten the weight on choking cities but will also create more job opportunities in service sectors at alternate sites. Green and social infrastructure missions led by youth ~ river cleaning, waste recycling, renewable energy projects ~ can create jobs while addressing ecological crises.

Digital and AI readiness programmes, such as YUVA AI for ALL and Future Skill Prime, must be expanded to ensure every graduate has exposure to AI, data, and digital tools. Community entrepreneurship platforms can encourage small scale industries, handicrafts, agro processing, and local start-ups, supported by micro-credit, mentorship, and market linkages. Public private apprenticeships must be scaled up, linking universities, ITIs, and industries to absorb graduates into short-term apprenticeships with clear career pathways.

The scale of the challenge is revealed in hard numbers. India's youth unemployment stands at nearly 16 per cent, three times the overall rate of 5.4 per cent. In urban areas, one in four young women is jobless, despite women now surpassing men in employability at 54 per cent. This paradox reveals the gap between education and opportunity.

The gig economy, employing 1.2 crore workers, contributes Rs 2.35 lakh crore to GDP, yet 40 per cent of its workforce earns less than Rs 15,000 a month. Unless gig work is formalised into apprenticeships with social security, it will remain a trap rather than a bridge. Girls' dropout rates have fallen to 8 per cent, but in Ladakh and Assam they remain above 13 per cent, showing how safety and sanitation still dictate female participation. India commands 16 per cent of global AI talent, yet less than 7 per cent of graduates secure permanent jobs within a year. The dividend is real, but unless discipline, skill alignment, and austerity measures converge, it will be wasted.

Lessons from history and global experience offer inspiration. John F. Kennedy's Peace Corps mobilised American youth in the 1960s, sending them across the world to serve poorer communities, building self awareness and employability through service. Mother Teresa and her nuns, working in the slums of Chicago as much as in Calcutta, demonstrated how service can become a pathway to dignity and purpose.

Germany's dual system of vocational education, where students split their time between classrooms and industry workshops, has ensured that graduates are job ready from day one. Japan's Kaizen culture, with its emphasis on continuous improvement and close collaboration between industry and education, has produced a workforce that is both disciplined and innovative. India must learn from these examples, adapting them to its own scale and diversity.

The NEET leak protests have shown us that youth anger cannot be contained by promises alone. It demands structural change. India's demographic dividend will become an economic liability if we fail to act decisively. The way forward lies in reclaiming dignity in work, aligning education with employability, and creating pathways where service, innovation, and discipline converge. The message is clear: our youth do not need sympathy, they need opportunity; they do not need slogans, they need skills; they do not need survival wages, they need dignity of work. If we can harness their energy into nation building, the demographic dividend will not be squandered but transformed into the foundation of India's future.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Human face on foreign policy

For most Filipinos raised on the Catholic faith, Israel has always been regarded as a nation of God's "chosen people," the multitude led out of the desert by Moses, and for whom the Red Sea parted so they could reach the Promised Land. That the Nazi regime exterminated millions of Jews during World War II only firmed up sympathy for Israel whose people, through Britain's Balfour Declaration, were eventually settled in Palestine in 1948.

Today, Israel has become a pariah in many parts of the world, given its relentless military campaign, territorial occupation, and displacement of Palestinians decades before the indefensible October 2025 attack and hostage-taking by the Hamas, a militant political faction in Palestine.

On Sept. 24, the Philippines joined a mass walkout during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the United Nations General Assembly to express solidarity for peace in the Middle East and support for a two-state solution in the conflict. What prompted this surprising stance was Israel's approval last year of a major settlement project in the West Bank, where it plans to build around 1,200 homes on land it calls E1, or East 1, to expand its Ma'ale Adumim settlement. Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which Israel occupied in 1967, are illegal under international law.

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The settlement plan is seen as further displacing Palestinians and splitting the West Bank into two to ensure, in Netanyahu's words at the signing ceremony of the controversial plan, that "there [would] be no Palestinian state to the west of the Jordan River."

In a statement, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said that "The Philippines views these actions, which may contravene international law, as detrimental to finding a just, lasting, and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict..." Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro, in her speech at the 81st UN General Assembly on Sept. 26, said: "We firmly believe that the two-state solution remains the only viable path to lasting and durable peace, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, and all others respecting their peaceful coexistence." It is the same position contained in the UN resolution that was supported by 142 nations, but opposed by 10 countries including Israel and the United States. Twelve countries abstained.

For most Filipinos, the DFA action may seem far removed from their more immediate reality of rising gas prices, soaring inflation, and even the political intramurals leading up to the 2028 elections.

It may even be seen as being unnecessary antagonistic toward Israel, which hosts over 30,000 overseas Filipino workers, some 80 percent of whom are caregivers.

Recall however how the Philippines has always supported the Jews, even sheltering thousands of them when they fled Nazi persecution in Europe between 1934 and 1940 under Commonwealth President Manuel L. Quezon.

IN MEMORIAM

ROY AJIT MOHAN (I.R.S.) — Retired Assistant Collector, Customs, Kolkata. Left us for Heavenly Abode on October 6, 1995. May his soul Rest in Peace. Remembering your presence always. — Bulai, Mumi, Kalu, Buju.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Pertinent

Sir, I read with great interest the two-part article "Reorienting Education", (September 27 and 28) written by Dr. Saumitra Mohan. The arguments advanced therein are not only logical and thought-provoking but also highly relevant to the present educational scenario.

The article rightly draws attention to the tendency to equate education with academic qualifications, degrees and employability. Education, however, ought to accomplish something much greater: it should develop a person's intellect, character, empathy, ethical sense and capacity for responsible citizenship. Employment is undoubtedly important, but education should prepare a person not merely to earn a living, but also to live a meaningful life.

The emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach is particularly pertinent today. At a time when technology and artificial intelligence are transforming almost every sphere of life, students need not only technical competence but also the ability to think critically, distinguish right from wrong, understand society and appreciate literature, history, philosophy and the arts. These disciplines nurture qualities that technology alone cannot provide.

I would add that education should also cultivate curiosity, civility, resilience and respect for divergent views. Examination-oriented learning often rewards the ability to reproduce information, whereas the real test of education lies in one's ability to understand, question, reason and apply knowledge wisely. Moreover, learning should not cease with the acquisition of a degree; lifelong learning has become indispensable in a rapidly changing world.

The ultimate objective of education, therefore, should be to create not merely qualified individuals, but wise, humane, responsible and socially conscious citizens. Such a reorientation would make education an instrument not only of personal advancement but also of the betterment of society.

Yours, etc., Amit Kanti Jana,
Kolkata, 29 September.

Artisans hit

Sir, Durga Puja is just days away. While the city prepares for its biggest festival, Kumartuli and other idol-making centres are witnessing a very different struggle. Artisans are working tirelessly against the clock, but relentless rain and the threat of cyclonic weather have emerged as formidable obstacles.

After the clay work is completed, an idol must be thoroughly dried before painting and decoration can begin. But with little sunshine and continuous rain, drying is taking much longer than usual. Time is running out and the weather refuses to cooperate. The artisans are therefore facing mounting anxiety and uncertainty.

Some are considering blow lamps and other artificial methods to speed up the drying process. But these alternatives mean additional costs at a time when their earnings are already under pressure. The rain is also affecting the availability of labour, further increasing their workload and difficulties.

Durga Puja is not merely a festival; it is the livelihood of thousands of traditional artisans. Their hardship deserves attention. Authorities and concerned organisations should consider practical assistance wherever possible.

Yours, etc., Babul Chattopadhyay,
Kolkata, 29 September.

The contrast at the UN

HARSHA KAKAR

India and Pakistan have traditionally clashed on every stage, including the sports arena. An annual diplomatic clash takes place at the UNGA. Invariably, it is the Pakistani representative, normally their PM, who delivers their national statement. The Pakistan PM's speech is more intended for their domestic audience than the global body. Ninety per cent of the speech is aimed at India, indicating that Pakistan's entire global view is through an India lens.

Who can forget Imran Khan, who as Pakistan's PM rambled for 50 mins against the allotted time of 15-20 mins in his maiden address in 2019. Invariably, Pakistan attempts to project itself as a nation facing terrorism avoiding the fact that it houses most of the global terrorists. Last year, Shehbaz Sharief stated that if Pakistan had not 'encountered' terrorists, they would have been 'roaming on the streets of New York and London and God knows, Far East,' admitting that the world's terrorists are based there.

India, as a norm, chooses the right to reply, and a junior member of the Indian permanent mission at the UN responds, tearing up the Pakistani PM's address to shreds. This year was no exception. India has in recent years avoided mentioning Pakistan, as it has grown beyond that nation and has a global role. It does hint at Pakistan, without naming it, when it raises the subject of terrorism, which is an international concern. The world looks forward to the Indian representative's statement, most of which is aimed at the global south, India's contribution to the world and enhancing effectiveness of global bodies. India is known to be the nation to support those in need, while Pakistan only exports terrorists and terrorism.

This year Sharief rambled on about the IWT, claiming, as many have done in Pakistan, that stopping water is an act of war, a subject of no global interest. Not a single nation, including its allies, raised the subject. Sharief claimed victory in Operation Sindoor, an act which either is of no interest to most nations or those concerned are aware of the reality of destruction of Pakistan's assets. The intent this year for Sharief was to praise his lord and master, Asim Munir, and Donald Trump, whom it credits for stopping the conflict, hoping for further US support.

Kashmir, a subject Pakistan can never do without, was as expected raised in the UN. In the past Pakistan compared Gaza with Kashmir, claiming both were jails and unfinished agendas of the UN. It was repeated this time again with an added warning that to avoid conflict in South Asia, a solution had to be found for Kashmir. Other than Pakistan and Turkey, no single nation mentioned Kashmir. It appears Pakistan has a single script, which is repeated each year, with minor changes.

As against its official claims of India sponsoring terrorism, in the UN it accuses Afghanistan of doing so. This is the same Taliban whose arrival was celebrated in Pakistan with then PM Imran Khan terming it as 'breaking the shackles of slavery.' Why did Sharief leave out India? Was he aware of a strong Indian rebuttal at the UN or was it because Afghanistan is not represented in the UN and cannot respond to fake accusations?

Another common subject in the Pakistan PM's speech every year is holding a begging bowl for aid on some pretext. In 2025 Sharief spoke about debt relief and fair financing for nations facing conflict impacted by climate change and economic contractions. This year, he begged for debt relief and long-term financing options. A common subject every year is climate justice and finance. The begging bowl is visible wherever Sharief goes.

As expected, Pakistan claimed to have been involved in attempting to stop the ongoing Iran-US conflict and sought global credit, which did not emerge. Over the years, there is nothing new which emerges in the speech of the Pakistan PM. The topics are the same, wordings may vary, with an odd addition or subtraction.

The Indian response too is almost similar. A junior member of the mission, in its right to reply, tears apart the Pakistan PM. In 2025 and this year also, it was first secretary Petal Gahlot who responded. Last year she called out Sharief's claims of victory as 'absurd theatrics' and 'drama and lies.' She accused Pakistan of glorifying terrorism, sheltering extremists, and maintaining a double standard of claiming to uphold security by day, while supporting terror by night.

This year was no different. She described Sharief's claims as 'hypocritical homilies, deceit and absurd theatrics.'



She reminded Pakistan of their history of sheltering Osama Bin Laden and that J and K is an integral and inalienable part of India. She also raised the subject of ongoing protests in POK and warned on continued response to terrorism. Baloch and Pashtun activists also staged protests outside the UN to coincide with Sharief's visit, an annual feature.

In contrast, S Jaishankar, conveying the Indian statement, highlighted its contribution to the world. He mentioned that India is currently undertaking 600 developmental projects in 78 countries, in aspects pertaining to 'infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture, IT and capacity building,' being the first responder by sending medical supplies and support to nations in conflict zones, facing endemics and natural disasters.

However, he had to hit back against Pakistan for its weird claims on justifying terrorism. He stated, "Yesterday, a serial practitioner of terrorism, misrepresented facts before this Assembly. Arguments were invoked to normalize terrorism, and claim immunity from its consequences. That will not stand." Since Pakistan was not named directly, the response to his speech came from statements by their foreign office in the media and their UN representatives.

In summary, while Pakistan's concerns are largely localized as it has little to offer, India's interests go way beyond its borders as it is now an important member of the global community. India's statement is aimed at global audiences, while Pakistan plays to its national gallery, largely because its PM must praise its army chief and army as they ensure his continuity. Pakistan begs for financial support in every address while India mentions the assistance it provides to nations. India responds to Pakistani accusations, while there is nothing for Pakistan to respond to in the Indian statement. The two nations are definitely a study in contrasts.

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

Iran's Axis of Resistance is now decentralised

ADVITYA MADAN

Iran's "Axis of Resistance" was designed to keep war away from Iranian territory. The irony of the recent conflict is that when Iran itself came under direct attack, the network did not respond as a single military formation. Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iraqi militias and Hamas each calculated their response through the prism of their own interests, constraints and vulnerabilities. The lesson is significant: Iran's regional network remains an important instrument of power, but it is increasingly a network of partners with divergent priorities rather than a command structure that Tehran can activate at will.

I encountered an early indication of this complexity while commanding 15 Punjab in Lebanon in 2007 as part of the UN peacekeeping force. I spent considerable time with Lebanese Armed Forces officers trying to understand their institution and, at times, asking the blunt question of why the Lebanese Army was not stronger than Hezbollah.

One explanation I encountered was rooted in Iran's strategy since the 1980s. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran began cultivating armed partners abroad and deployed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to train Hezbollah in Lebanon. The underlying logic was straightforward: a relatively weak conventional military could compensate by developing forward defences through allied armed groups, projecting Iranian power while keeping the battlefield away from Iran.

For decades, this strategy worked remarkably well. Hezbollah became Iran's most formidable regional partner, while Iranian support helped build a network stretching through Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and, in a different ideological category, the Palestinian movement Hamas. The network provided Tehran with strategic depth and multiple pressure points against Israel and the United States.

But the events since 7 October 2023 have exposed the limits of the model. The Hamas attack triggered a regional cascade that eventually brought direct war to Iran itself. Hezbollah has been severely weakened, the Assad regime in Syria has disappeared, and Iran's land corridor through Syria to Lebanon has been disrupted. The Iraqi government is also pressing armed groups to bring weapons under state control, although powerful militias continue to resist full disarmament. Hezbollah illustrates the problem most clearly. Before the recent wars, it possessed an arsenal estimated at more than 100,000 rockets and missiles and had developed a sophisticated military organisation. Its fighters also acquired extensive battlefield experience in Syria while helping preserve Bashar al-Assad's regime. Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's long-standing leader, projected an image of considerable autonomy even while remaining deeply connected to Tehran.

That autonomy has now been sharply reduced. Nasrallah was killed, numerous Hezbollah commanders have been eliminated, and the organisation faces growing domestic pressure over its weapons. Lebanon's government has sought to establish greater state control over arms, while Hezbollah's military capacity has been significantly degraded. The organisation remains capable of violence, but its political and military circumstances are fundamentally different from those before 2023.

Iran is unlikely to abandon Hezbollah. Its value to Tehran is no longer simply what it can do militarily. Hezbollah's survival itself preserves an Iranian foothold in the Levant and prevents the complete dismantling of a decades-old strategic investment. Iran may therefore seek to preserve the organisation even as it adapts to a much more constrained environment.

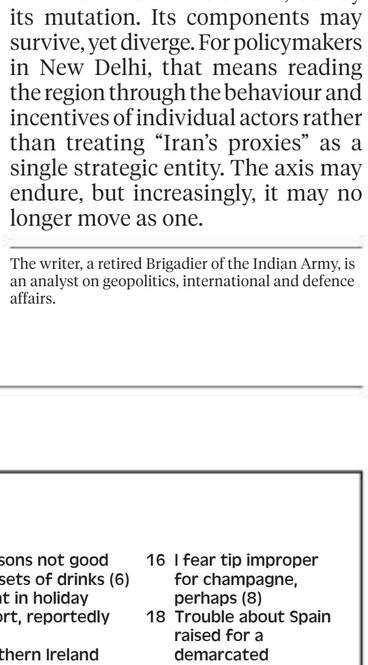
The Houthis present a different case. The movement began as a local insurgency in northern Yemen in the 1990s. Iranian financial, military and technological assistance subsequently transformed its capabilities. From lightly armed insurgents, the Houthis developed missiles, drones and anti-ship capabilities that have enabled them to threaten shipping around the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb. Their resilience has made them one of the most consequential non-state armed actors in the region.

Yet the Houthis are not simply an Iranian instrument. Their strategic interests are rooted in Yemen, and their participation in regional conflicts has fluctuated according to their own calculations. The recent war has again demonstrated this autonomy. Even when they act in concert with Tehran, their objectives cannot automatically be assumed to be identical to Iran's. Their growing domestic weapons production, independent political relationships and outreach beyond Iran's immediate network further reinforce this distinction. This matters because Iran's ability to exercise influence does not necessarily translate into command. The Houthis share Tehran's hostility towards Israel, the United States and Saudi Arabia, but shared enemies do not eliminate independent interests. Recent reporting also indicates growing coordination between Houthi and Iraqi armed groups, suggesting that Iran's network may be evolving horizontally as well as vertically.

Iraq may become the most consequential arena for this evolution. Many of the country's Shia militias emerged or expanded following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, with Iranian support becoming an important source of weapons, money and military expertise. Some were subsequently incorporated into the Popular Mobilisation Forces and became embedded within the Iraqi state. Baghdad's current attempt to bring their weapons fully under state control therefore confronts not merely an armed group, but a deeply institutionalised political and security constituency. Powerful factions have resisted disarmament, making the September deadline for weapons control difficult to implement.

Hamas was always an awkward fit within the predominantly Shia network. Its Sunni Islamist identity and Palestinian nationalism gave it an independent political logic. Its relationship with Tehran was also strained by Iran's support for Assad during the Syrian civil war. Yet the relationship survived because both sides regarded Israel as a common adversary. Even now, Hamas's internal calculations include competing possibilities of closer alignment with Iran or greater engagement with countries such as Turkey.

The strategic consequence is not that Iran's Axis of Resistance has collapsed. Rather, it is becoming more decentralised. Iran has lost important assets and spent enormous resources sustaining its regional posture. Its conventional deterrence has also been tested directly. But the surviving groups retain local constituencies,



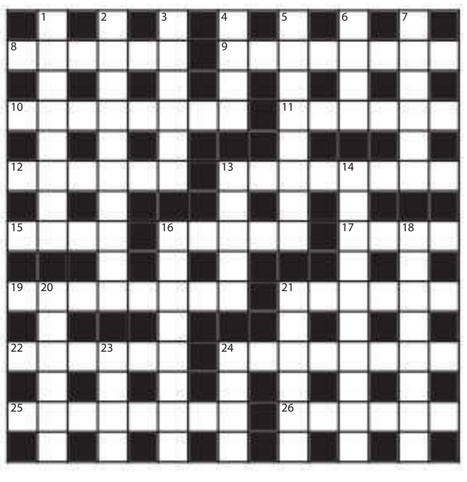
weapons, organisational structures and political interests. These characteristics make them harder to control, but also harder to eliminate.

For India, the distinction is important. A weaker Hezbollah does not necessarily mean a weaker Iranian influence; a more autonomous Houthi movement does not necessarily mean less regional instability. The strategic environment may instead become more fragmented, with Iran acting less as the commander of a unified axis and more as the principal node of a network whose members increasingly pursue their own interests.

The future Middle East may therefore be shaped not by the disappearance of Iran's Axis of Resistance, but by its mutation. Its components may survive, yet diverge. For policymakers in New Delhi, that means reading the region through the behaviour and incentives of individual actors rather than treating "Iran's proxies" as a single strategic entity. The axis may endure, but increasingly, it may no longer move as one.

The writer, a retired Brigadier of the Indian Army, is an analyst on geopolitics, international and defence affairs.

Crossword | No. 293601



Yesterday's Solution

A	N	D	E	S	■	R	E	P	E	L	L	E	N	T
L	■	E	■	T	■	A	■	A	■	E	■	N	■	O
L	A	N	C	A	S	T	E	R	■	A	L	T	E	R
T	■	I	■	T	■	E	■	T	■	V	■	O	■	S
H	U	M	B	U	G	■	R	I	T	E	N	U	T	O
U	■	■	■	T	■	I	■	C	■	N	■	R	■	■
M	I	L	L	E	N	N	I	U	M	■	H	A	N	D
B	■	Y	■	S	■	F	■	L	■	E	■	G	■	I
S	O	M	E	■	T	R	E	A	S	U	R	E	R	S
■	■	E	■	T	■	I	■	R	■	P	■	■	■	A
M	E	R	C	H	A	N	T	■	S	H	R	I	M	P
O	■	E	■	R	■	G	■	B	■	O	■	D	■	P
D	O	G	M	A	■	I	N	E	B	R	I	A	T	E
E	■	I	■	C	■	N	■	A	■	I	■	H	■	A
M	E	S	S	E	N	G	E	R	■	A	M	O	U	R

ACROSS

8 Defiant expression from boorish lout around bar's entrance (3-3)
9 Pressure a daily feature, maybe? Just a bit (8)
10 Northern priest engaged by big story as source of humour (3-5)
11 Skinned tuna left to be distributed as a quantity of fish (6)
12 Those strongly pressing get fast food but no starter (6)
13 One admitted to organisation, say, in debt leaving Britain–cue for reform? (8)
15 Ambassador occupying middle of area is former Asian president (4)
16 Leading poster about male article (5)
17 Go without fixed purpose in pilgrimage site reportedly (4)
19 Young troublemaker, ordinary figure close to delinquent lacking strength (8)
21 Top area almost cultivated for south African shrub (6)
22 A slow system of exercises? Excellent champion in it making a comeback (3,3)
24 Dim element deprived of love the second time in a fantasy trilogy (8)
25 This man surprisingly tours India, a former settlers' leader (3,5)
26 European detective in underworld location (6)

DOWN

1 Nervously ran into river in very cold region? (3,5)
2 I love bees flying around second of hives? That's fairly sure (1,7,2)
3 Reasons not good for sets of drinks (6)
4 Fight in holiday resort, reportedly (4)
5 Northern Ireland director among a group of three in Caribbean location (8)
6 Colour encapsulated by Fauvist in theory (4)
7 Bullies first off put in order for rough conduct? (3-3)
13 Foolish patient forgetting a time for treatment (5)
14 Gracious fellow beginning to buy foreign bread of a very high culinary standard (6,4)
16 I fear tip improper for champagne, perhaps (8)
18 Trouble about Spain raised for a demarcated demographic? (3,5)
20 One hosting man in garden is Scottish engineer (6)
21 Critically analyse constant astronomical measurement (6)
23 Argument, something that's unpacked in lawsuit (4)
24 Admission of stupidity by American in Middle East capital (4)

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

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 06 October 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

IF any surprise is felt at the knight¬hood conferred upon Mr. Alan Cobham it is that this fitting recognition of his services to aviation was not extended to him long ago. He has stirred the emotions of his countrymen; the welcome that awaited him at Westminster last week was a genuine tribute of affectionate appreciation. He has done marvellous things, but with such care and thought and competence that he has almost made them look ordinary. When the history of flying comes to be written some decades hence he will certainly appear among the greatest and most educative of pioneers. He tells us that his last long flight is done, and that he intends to settle down to a quiet life. Whether that will be allow¬ed remains to be seen, but whatever may be in store for him he will stand out as one of the most attractive figures of the age.

News Items

"RACIAL DOG-FIGHT"

SOUTH AFRICA'S PUZZLE POLITICS

("TIMES" SPECIAL SERVICE) LONDON, OCT.

"IT is extraordinarily difficult to sum up the attitude of South Africans toward Imperial questions," says the Times' Capetown correspondent.

"'Imperialism' is the worst reproach many of the South African Dutch can apply to their opponents. Members of the Cabinet habitually claim that the Hertzog Government's chief merit is concentration on South African affairs.

"Hertzog's critics are convinced that relations with the Empire contain the surest guarantee for their welfare and prosperity.

"They ask why Hertzog's colleagues still declare that the Nationalists' goal is sovereign independence. The Nationalists reply that it merely means the utmost development within the Empire. To this their opponents retort 'South Africa has already attained that condition and many listeners believe that such declarations mean secession.'

"The truth is that Hertzog is conscientious and tries to be fair. When he talks of sincerest co-operation with the Empire he means what he says, but he is hampered by tradition and the early belief of the South African Dutch that they were under the British heel."

Hertzog seeks a formal declaration by the British Premiers assembled at the Imperial Conference that the Dominions shall be free and inde-pendent within the Empire and that their standing should be internation-ally recognized.

The Dutch Press emphasises that unless the Dominions are assured of international independence equivalent to Britain's in the eyes of foreigners they are in a position of galling inferiority.

The Cape Times replies that "Britain's international independence is now qualified by membership of the Empire Commonwealth just as the Dominions would be in the event of such a declaration.

"Nevertheless such a statement at the Imperial Conference may disperse the fog from Hertzog's mind regarding Anglo-South-African relations. The other Empire premiers may not understand Hertzog's viewpoint, which is due to sharing his compatriots' belief that Englishmen despise and desire to keep down the Dutch.

"The English demand that Hertzog shall recant his earlier utterances and forbid his lieutenants constantly to refer to independence, and definitely recognize the British connexion, but Hertzog is an obstinate man and not likely to accede to such demands.

Consequently the old racial dogfight continues mischievously and no-body knows how it will end."

MISSIONARIES' FATE

ABDUCTED BY CHINESE BANDITS

NEW YORK, OCT.

A MESSAGE from Hankow says that a party of American missionaries were proceeding to their stations with a hired escort of Chinese soldiers, but the latter fled on the approach of bandits, who robbed the party and carried off three persons, including two young women.—Reuter.

Editor's TAKE

Pakistan's Catch-22 over Yemen

By honouring its commitment to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan risks deepening its sectarian fault lines, while staying out could undercut its defence pact

For eleven years, Islamabad has dodged one question: will it fight for Saudi Arabia? In April 2015, Parliament unanimously chose neutrality in Yemen while promising support if the kingdom's territory or holy sites were threatened. That formula survived because nobody tested it. Now someone is. Pakistan has since signed two defence pacts. The Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement of September 2025 treats aggression against either party as aggression against both. The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, signed with Türkiye on August 7, extends the principle to three. Meanwhile, Yemen's 2022 truce collapsed in July. The Houthis have declared a naval blockade of the kingdom and hit its tankers and oil sites.

Islamabad's response has been calibrated. On September 10, the Foreign Office said military action against the Houthis was not under discussion. A week later, the army's spokesman said Pakistan stood with Riyadh "physically" as well as diplomatically. On October 2, the corps commanders endorsed the Makkah pact and condemned the Houthi attacks. Now the pact's political and defence committee meets in Riyadh, just as Yemen's Saudi-backed government opens a major offensive against Houthi-held territory.

It is a catch-22 situation for Pakistan.

Neither yes nor no is cheap. Saying yes means confronting Iran, the Houthis' principal patron, which shares a roughly 900-kilometre border with Pakistan. Islamabad has spent months brokering between Washington and Tehran, and it hosts one of the largest Shia populations outside Iran. Its army is stretched between India and a Taliban-run Afghanistan, and the PTI's march on Islamabad shows politics at home is anything but quiet.

Saying no is no cheaper. Pakistani troops and fighter aircraft have been at King Abdulaziz Air Base since April, and Pakistan heads the alliance's new secretariat in Riyadh. The 2015 refusal severely strained ties with Riyadh; backing out after two treaties and loud assurances would cost far more.

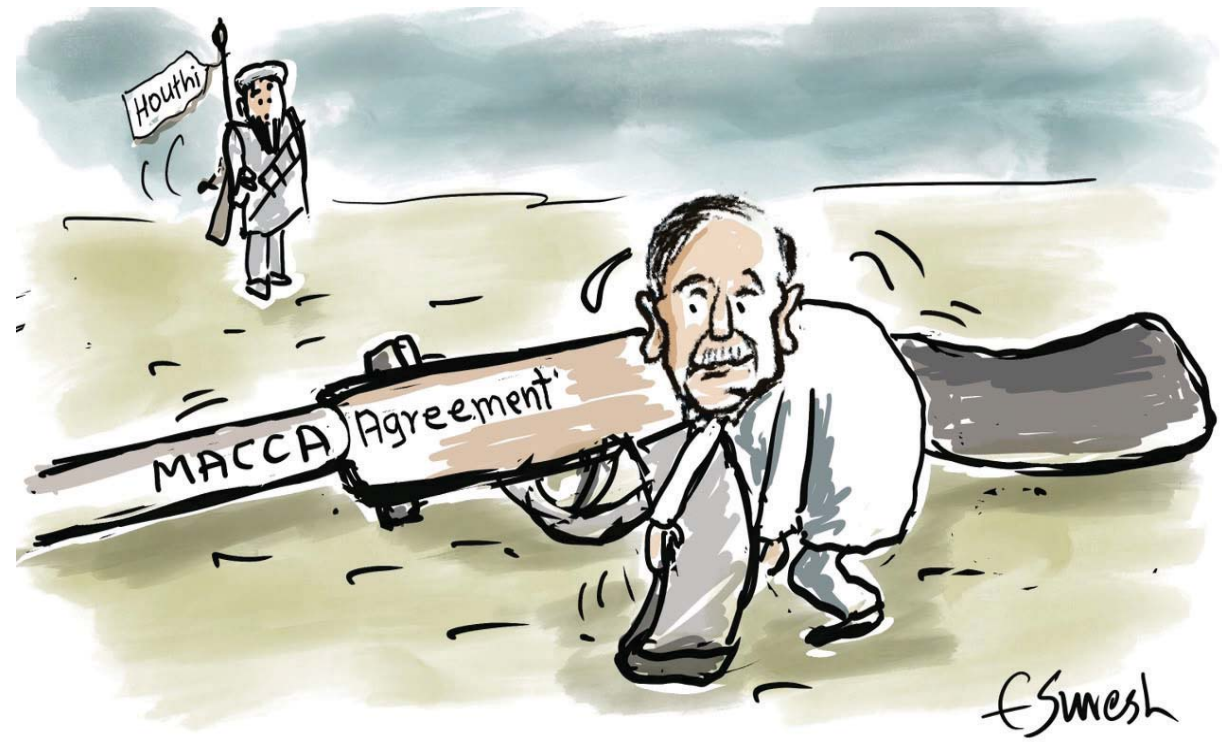
The way through is a distinction Pakistan must now draw in public: defending the kingdom is not fighting in Yemen. Protecting Saudi airspace, bases and holy sites is one commitment; storming Houthi territory is another. But because the attacks originate in Yemen, the line blurs fast. Air defence becomes naval escort, and escort becomes strikes on launch sites. Pakistan's Parliament, which settled this question in 2015, should debate it again before any deployment. Pakistan could pursue the political track and engage the Houthis diplomatically. Islamabad's rare asset is that it can talk to both Riyadh and Tehran. Spend it on mediation before spending soldiers. A pact is a promise made in peacetime. Pakistan must decide, before the next missile lands, what it will pay to keep it.

Pakistan's Yemen dilemma deepens

For a decade, Pakistan has drawn a careful line between defending Saudi Arabia and fighting its war in Yemen. The Makkah defence pact may be eroding that distinction



BHOPINDER SINGH



For years, Pakistan maintained an extraordinary military relationship with Saudi Arabia while carefully avoiding one commitment, ie, boots on the ground in Yemen. When Riyadh intervened against the Houthis in 2015, Pakistan's Parliament called for neutrality. Islamabad continued training and deploying personnel to Saudi Arabia and made clear that it would defend the Kingdom against threats to its territory, but it would not become a combatant in Yemen.

The recently signed Makkah Joint Defence Agreement may have changed that equation. Signed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye on August 7, 2026, the agreement provides that an armed attack against one member is to be regarded as an attack against all. Islamabad has described it as a defensive arrangement and linked it to the right of collective self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

The crucial question now is whether Pakistan is actually preparing the political, public and institutional ground for acting on that commitment. From solidarity to military coordination, the recent change in language is striking. As recently as September 10, Pakistan said that no military response under the Makkah pact had been discussed following Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia. Since then, the rhetoric has moved considerably further.

Pakistan condemned a reported Houthi attack directed towards Makkah as a threat to Saudi sovereignty and the security and sanctity of the Two Holy Mosques. The military chiefs of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye subsequently met to discuss intelligence sharing, military coordination and capability integration. Then came the most consequential statement. Pakistan's Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif, said Pakistan was bound to defend Saudi Arabia and that "whatever means" Pakistan possessed would be available to the Kingdom. He stopped short, however, of confirming Pakistani participation in airstrikes.

None of this proves that Islamabad has decided to enter the Yemen war. But it does suggest that the machinery, and increasingly the political language, for possibly doing so is being assembled. For that eventuality, Pakistan has to overcome its ghosts of sectarianism that linger subliminally and violently, should the Shia Houthis in Yemen be attacked. Unlike predominantly Sunni Türkiye, Pakistan has a substantial and wary Shia population, comprising about 25 per cent of the population, across various denominations. Such a move could inflame and implode Pakistan from within.

THE RECENTLY SIGNED MAKKAH JOINT DEFENCE AGREEMENT MAY HAVE CHANGED THAT EQUATION. SIGNED BY PAKISTAN, SAUDI ARABIA AND TÜRKIYE ON AUGUST 7, 2026, THE AGREEMENT PROVIDES THAT AN ARMED ATTACK AGAINST ONE MEMBER IS TO BE REGARDED AS AN ATTACK AGAINST ALL

The writer is a former Lieutenant Governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry, and a military veteran

In 2015, Islamabad had an easy distinction available: defend Saudi Arabia, but do not fight Yemen's war. The Makkah Agreement makes that position harder to sustain. If an attack on Saudi Arabia is formally characterised as an armed attack covered by the agreement, Pakistan can no longer treat the issue simply as a bilateral Saudi request for assistance. It becomes a question of whether a treaty commitment is being honoured.

That does not necessarily mean Pakistani troops must enter Yemen. Collective defence could involve air defence, intelligence, logistics, maritime security, reinforcement of Saudi territory or other military assistance. But the political cost of doing nothing becomes greater. A treaty that declares an attack on one member to be an attack on all ultimately has to demonstrate what "all" means.

Preparing the public narrative will always be key. This is where the growing emphasis on Makkah and the 'Haramain' becomes particularly significant. A Pakistani government asking its population to participate in the Yemen war would face the same question that confronted Islamabad in 2015: why should Pakistan become involved in another country's conflict? But the emerging narrative offers a different answer: Pakistan is not joining a Yemeni civil war; it is defending Saudi Arabia under a collective-defence agreement.

And if the attacks are presented as threatening Makkah and the Two Holy Mosques, the political argument becomes even more potent. Religious rhetoric could go further, with some political or religious voices portraying the Houthis as reckless sectarian or even 'kufr' actors threatening the Holy Land. Such descriptions are theological and political polemic, not objective classifications. But their political function is clear: they can shift the public question from "Should Pakistan fight the Houthis?" to "Can Pakistan stand aside while the land of the Two Holy Mosques is attacked?"

That is a profoundly different proposition. The threshold may be moving towards one of eventual case-building towards a 'justifiable' action from the Pakistani side. That is not yet an announcement of Pakistani combat participation, but seemingly a directional work-in-progress. But it is a marked departure from the cautious position Pakistan maintained in 2015, and even from Islamabad's statement earlier this month that no military response under the pact had been discussed.

The decisive next step would be for Islamabad to explicitly declare that Houthi attacks constitute an "armed attack" under the Makkah Agreement, followed by a formal Saudi request for a specific Pakistani military response. If that happens, the question will no longer be whether Pakistan supports Saudi Arabia. It will be whether Pakistan is prepared to make the Makkah Agreement mean what it says. For now, Pakistan still has room to remain outside direct offensive operations in Yemen. But the political ground for crossing that line appears to be taking shape.

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

The Boy Who Insisted on Seeing God

Vivekananda, before becoming a monk, was known simply as Narendra, a sharp, restlessly questioning young man thoroughly unwilling to accept matters of faith purely on authority alone.

He visited several respected and well-known religious leaders of his time, asking each one directly and without hesitation whether they had personally, actually seen God, only to receive vague, evasive, or unconvincing answers in return each time. When he finally posed that same blunt question to Ramakrishna, expecting a similarly evasive response, Ramakrishna answered plainly and without any hesitation that yes, he had indeed seen God, as real and as clearly present as he could see Narendra standing directly before him in that very moment, and that he could help Narendra see the same truth for himself. This direct, unhesitating answer, unlike anything Narendra had ever encountered before in his search, became the true beginning of his gradual transformation into a devoted disciple and, eventually, a world-renowned spiritual teacher.

Narendra's sheer persistence in demanding a real, honest answer, rather than simply accepting comfortable ambiguity, was ultimately what led him to genuine, lasting conviction.

We often accept vague reassurances about what matters most to us, faith, purpose, relationships, rather than continuing to ask honest, searching questions.

Today, ask one honest question you've been avoiding, even if the answer that comes back might prove genuinely uncomfortable.

–DAIV

PIC TALK



Rescued baby orangutans during their quarantine period at Nandankanan Zoological Park, in Bhubaneswar. PHOTO: PTI

Artificial Intelligence and the Anvil of *Ahimsa*, *Satya*, *Sarvodaya*





HARPREET KAUR | NIRANJAN RAJPUROHIT

2ND OPINION

Advocates of Artificial Intelligence (AI) promise an era of unprecedented productivity and abundance, scientific breakthroughs and economic growth. Its critics, on the other hand, warn of job displacement, surveillance, loss of human control, and new forms of inequality. Beneath such competing predictions, we are confronted with a more fundamental question: what kind of human beings and what kind of society should our technologies help us become?

This is a question worth asking through three ideas that were central to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), and Sarvodaya (welfare of all).

Gandhi's Ahimsa did not mean reducing the idea of non-violence to the mere absence of physical violence. It was a much broader ethic and discipline of refusing to inflict harm, humiliation or exploitation on another human being. This principle demands today that we examine an AI system's broader consequences for human dignity. An AI system used for efficient surveillance can contribute to the erosion of privacy. An algorithm used for efficient recruitment may reproduce and amplify biases. Autonomous weapons make us ask the question: should decisions related to warfare ever be delegated to machines? The fact that something can be done does not mean that it should be done. Gandhi would remind us that Ahimsa in the age of AI would mean that human dignity and the minimisation of harm must come before technological prowess. AI safety should not just mean averting a distant catastrophe; rather, it should be a part of everyday guidance in dealing with such technology.

The second principle is Satya. For Gandhi, truth was more than avoidance of lies. It meant a lifelong discipline of seeking reality and aligning one's conduct with what one believes to be right. A society that may fail to distinguish truth from machine-generated fabrication becomes vulnerable to manipulation. Gandhi's idea of Satya asks us to build systems that encourage transparency, accountability and verification. In the absence of these, the very honesty and openness that Satyagraha demanded of the powerful remain unfulfilled. Gandhi regarded truth and non-violence as inseparable, like two faces of the same coin. A means that deceives can never serve an end that liberates. At this critical juncture of the AI development trajectory, we should resist both technological utopianism and technological pessimism. That brings us to Sarvodaya, the Gandhian principle of welfare and advancement of all. Gandhi's reservations about machines were not about opposing technology as such. His concern was with an economic order where machines could lead to concentration of wealth, displacement of livelihoods and subordination of human beings to systems of production. Today, machines are moving beyond factories. They are entering classrooms, hospitals, offices, courts and creative professions. For the first time, technology is not just replacing physical labour but is entering the realm of the mind. We need to ask ourselves whether machines are extending human capabilities or merely concentrating power in the hands of those who own them.

This is where the Gandhian idea of Sarvodaya offers an important test. Progress is only meaningful when it enlarges human opportunity. The talisman he offered in 1947 tells us to recall the face of the poorest and weakest person we have seen, and ask whether the step we contemplate will be of any use to her. We must ask who benefits, who is displaced, who has access and who is left behind. The future of AI will ultimately be determined not only by engineers and entrepreneurs, nor only by governments and regulators, but by the values that society chooses to embed in the systems it creates.

Harpreet Kaur is Vice-Chancellor, National Law University Jodhpur, & Niranjan Rajpurohit is Associate Professor, NLU Jodhpur

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Indian democracy faces new challenges

Indian democracy is, no doubt, dynamic enough to resurrect itself whenever it is challenged by political forces. The declaration of Emergency was resisted by a nationwide people's movement. When the democratically elected government led by Mr N.T. Rama Rao was dismissed and a government was installed in Andhra Pradesh, a powerful people's movement emerged, forcing the restoration of N.T. Rama Rao as Chief Minister.

Of late, however, developments that threaten democratic institutions require citizens, especially the youth, to remain vigilant. The alleged misdeeds and erratic functioning of the Chief Election Commissioner have raised serious concerns, while the Union Government's response has further fuelled public discontent.

Allegations of police excesses, restrictions on transportation, misconduct towards women participants and media personnel, and denial of media access have intensified concerns surrounding the protests. Questions have also been raised about the Election Commission's functioning, including allegations of voters being removed from electoral rolls through Form 7.

Officials found to have acted unlawfully should face action under the law. Protecting democracy requires vigilance, accountability and lawful public participation.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

Citizens seek constructive dialogue

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to express my views on the ongoing demonstrations led by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) and the wider discourse surrounding public accountability, governance and the right to peaceful assembly. Recent events, ranging from youth-led mobilisations concerning examination and institutional transparency to discussions on public gatherings in major cities, highlight a growing demand for transparent dialogue between citizens and the administration.

While civic groups have the democratic right to voice their concerns, authorities face the continuing challenge of balancing public order, safety regulations and residential zoning laws.

It is crucial that administrative bodies handle permission requests and public demonstrations with consistency and clarity, avoiding heavy-handed crackdowns that may amplify public discontent. At the same time, organisers must respect local regulations and designated public spaces to ensure that civic life is not unduly disrupted.

A healthy democracy relies on responsive governance and peaceful, lawful expression. I hope the administration and citizen groups engage in constructive dialogue to address the issues at hand rather than allowing friction to overshadow genuine grievances.

JUBEL D'CRUZ | MUMBAI

Remembering a fearless innovator

The passing of Singeetham Srinivasa Rao, a pioneering filmmaker and fearless innovator, marks the end of a remarkable chapter in Indian cinema. His career was defined by curiosity and a willingness to challenge conventions. Films such as *Pushpaka Vimanam*, *Aditya 369*, *Bhairava Dweepam* and *Apoorva Sagodharargal* reflected his ability to move across genres while retaining a distinct creative identity. What deserves appreciation is his readiness to experiment. He explored technology, fantasy, humour, social themes and unconventional narratives when such departures from mainstream formulas involved risk. His work demonstrated that popular cinema could be imaginative and intellectually engaging.

His passing should prompt more than ceremonial remembrance. Films from his career deserve systematic restoration and preservation so future generations can experience them. Film institutes and archives could document his methods, interviews and collaborations for younger filmmakers to study. Singeetham Srinivasa Rao's greatest contribution was the confidence he gave Indian cinema to ask, "Why not?" His legacy lies in that spirit of experimentation. The most meaningful tribute would be to keep that spirit alive by encouraging filmmakers to take risks and explore unfamiliar forms.

A MYILSAMI | COIMBATORE

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | TUESDAY | OCTOBER 6, 2026

Product endorsement: Let the stars be role models, not salesmen

President Droupadi Murmu's appeal to film stars not to endorse substances harmful to health raises a larger question than celebrity advertising: what responsibility do those who command the admiration of millions bear towards the health, values and future of the generations that idolise them?



JS RAJPUT

On September 22, 2026, President Droupadi Murmu made a poignant appeal to the film industry while addressing the winners of the 72nd National Film Awards in Kevadia, Gujarat. She reminded the glittering gathering how intensely the young admire and idolise popular heroes from the world of celluloid, who become role models and influence their formative years. Everyone in India is convinced beyond doubt that the roles played by successful and popular stars are emulated by "crores of children and youth". Against this backdrop, the President gave voice to millions of concerned parents when she appealed to all artists not to endorse "substances that are harmful to health". The injurious impact of such endorsements is not confined to the young; it is equally, if not more, harmful to adults and the elderly.

The Presidential observations would reverberate in the heart of every parent seriously concerned about the changing food habits among children under the media blitzkrieg launched by the market. Its impact rises manifold when junk food products are endorsed by stars who are popular for their on-screen performances. It is indeed disturbing that culinary choices are influenced far more by peer-group pressure among children than by parents. Is it not worth analysing that food preferences are increasingly decided by multinationals?

On a broader scale, we must analyse what is responsible for the creation of such an anomalous situation. As a society and as a nation, why is the market not responding to its social, ethical and moral expectations? For decades, the injurious impacts of pan masalas, as a case in point, have been well known, but has anything improved? No, manufacturers find ways and means to circumvent any change in rules. The manner in which law enforcement agencies work at the grassroots level remains an open secret. Further, political parties and candidates need financial support to 'fight' elections. Less said, the better.

In urban and semi-urban areas, the market has tightened its grip over the food preferences of children, even grown-up young persons, and elders in a fairly large proportion. The variants of pan masalas and bhujias are so well known and so freely available, even outside the premises of schools and learning centres. Junk food already rejected and even banned in several countries flourishes without any impediments in India.

As a teacher, one would find it difficult to support the monetisation of the love and affection of fans, be it in films, cricket, or any such venture. This personal preference would probably find little support in the legalised economic pursuits prevalent in the second quarter of the 21st century in India. One just can't give up the hope that, after the appeal from the President, at least those heroes of the children and youth could ensure that nothing is endorsed which they themselves have discarded from their menus. After all, how many packets of well-fried bhujias could an aged person in the age group 80+ consume on a daily basis?

One often recalls the famous story by Tolstoy, "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" How much more money do these mega-stars need to accumulate, and that too at the cost of possible damage to the health and the process of natural growing up of the future generations of India? One wishes they would give serious thought to becoming role models for the young of India in empathy, compassion and values! Maybe the universally adored heroes could lead this process of change of heart! One could be sure it would pick up swiftly, as these heroes have talent, credibility, acceptability and skills to earn through means that would be considered genuine and justified, in no way injurious to the future generations. Henceforth, let them never forget the golden words of the President: "Star vahi hai jo Roshni deta hai, star vahi hai jo Roshni failaye".

These stars could become the torch-bearers of a movement of celebrities dedicated to making India drugs-free and adulteration-free. It would save millions of lives; it could give them a far larger purpose in life, an ethical and morally sound target to achieve.



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

FOOD ADULTERATION IS A GREAT SLUR ON THE FACE OF ANY CIVILISED SOCIETY. THE SAME APPLIES TO THE PROMOTION OF JUNK FOOD BY CELEBRITIES, PARTICULARLY FOR CHILDREN. INDIA'S LITERACY TOUCHES A MUCH-FANCIED PROPORTION OF AROUND 80 PER CENT, RISING FROM A MERE 12 PER CENT AT THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE, AND THIS BECOMES FAR MORE IMPRESSIVE WHEN ONE THINKS OF A POPULATION RISE OF 100 CRORES DURING THE INTERVENING PERIOD

The writer is an educationist, a Padma Shri awardee, and works in the fields of religious amity and social cohesion

Earlier this year, in her message to the nation on the eve of Republic Day, the President had expressed similar concerns on the health and well-being of children in these times of increasing complexities of life, which adversely impact their mental and emotional health as well. Every nation needs to ensure the availability of all the necessary physical, nutritional and emotional inputs to ensure proper growth of healthy, vibrant and enthusiastic future citizens. And that requires coordinated efforts of parents, schools, society and the governments. Such a synchronised initiative requires adherence to ethics, values and morals. Should our leaders not ponder over the root cause of severe deterioration in the discharge of social obligations? It is shameful even to recall instances like a recent case in which mid-day meals were distributed only on paper for over two years, a reference to the Rajasthan mid-day meal scam unearthed in January 2026, where supplies were shown only on paper during the pandemic.

One must hasten to add that the blame can't be put squarely on celebrity endorsements only. In Maharashtra, a special drive was conducted during the first three weeks of September 2026, the great Ganesh Utsav period. A total of 3,068 establishments were examined; 6.34 lakh kilos of adulterated foodstuff were confiscated, which was worth ₹9.76 crore. The items that are adulterated most include those definitely purchased on festive and auspicious occasions: modak, laddus, ghee, curd, oils, sabudana, and several more. During the next Diwali, this adulteration drive would be launched again. There would be some raids, some notices, even fines, followed by a quiet transition back to "status quo ante".

The gravity of the damage being inflicted by unscrupulous persons on the people of India could be seen in Punjab. In the age group 18-75, around 6.6 million use drugs. Children in the age group 10-16 are victims of what is known as substance abuse. Alcohol, opium, hashish, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are freely available in Punjab. Pakistan ensures more than sufficient supply. Obviously, some handlers must be facilitating the transition. Junk food and adulteration are also gaining in popularity.

Every year, during the festival seasons, one learns about raids being conducted on certain sets of shops selling sweets, including eating joints. Occasionally, the anti-drug squads also become active. These are all widely publicised. Adulterated items, invariably recovered in alarming proportions, are destroyed with considerable fanfare. All such big news dies down quietly within a few days. No media ever reports on how many were found guilty and incarcerated.

Food adulteration is a great slur on the face of any civilised society. The same applies to the promotion of junk food by celebrities, particularly for children. India's literacy touches a much-fancied proportion of around 80 per cent, rising from a mere 12 per cent at the time of Independence, and this becomes far more impressive when one thinks of a population rise of 100 crores during the intervening period. It is obvious that our education expansion lagged behind in imparting human values to the young and old alike. Should our education system not realise the gravity of food adulteration, increasing popularity of junk food and extensive drug abuse? While the establishment may follow its own methods, the long-term solution would emerge from teacher education institutions and the schools. There is no other alternative.

Let experience into the classroom



SHOBHIT MATHUR | YASHOWARDHAN TIWARI

India is full of people who have spent decades solving hard problems: founders, engineers, designers, bureaucrats, physicians, artists and technologists. Its universities, meanwhile, struggle to fill faculty positions. Yet the rules governing higher education have let only a trickle of these practitioners into lecture halls, and mostly as short-term guests.

That is the contradiction behind the stalled push for academia-industry integration: a system that welcomes real-world knowledge as a visitor but refuses it a permanent seat. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, with its stress on skills, pointed towards fixing this. In 2022, the University Grants Commission (UGC) issued guidelines for appointing "Professors of Practice" (PoP), drawing on the NEP's vision of mixing general education with vocational training and pulling industry closer to higher education institutions (HEIs). The document argued that learners should think like employers and employers like learners, and that such appointments would carry lived experience into classrooms while adding to thin faculty ranks. It allowed eminent experts to teach without the usual degrees or publication records. Yet the same guidelines undercut themselves. PoPs cannot exceed 10 per cent of an institution's sanctioned faculty posts. Tenure runs three years, with one extra year only in exceptional cases, and no institution may keep a PoP beyond four years in total, which effectively shuts the door on reappointment. India built a channel for practical expertise and then narrowed it to a trickle.

Those limits look even harder to defend given the scale of vacancies. The parliamentary standing committee on education, in its report on the 2025-26 Demands for Grants of the Department of Higher Education, found that 28.56 per cent of sanctioned teaching posts across IITs, IIMs, NITs, IISERs and central universities were vacant as of January 31, 2025. At the professor level, 56.18 per cent of posts sat empty. A Hindustan Times analysis put the picture at the IITs alone: 4,804 of 12,498 sanctioned posts, or 38.4 per cent, were unfilled as of January 30, 2026. IIT Patna and IIT Kharagpur had more than half their posts vacant, and twelve other IITs had over a third.



Two problems are tangled together here. One is a shortage of regular faculty. The other is a shortage of people with hands-on experience in the classroom. The PoP framework targets the second and could ease the first along the way, but its design keeps it from touching either at scale. The appointment data confirms this. According to UGC figures released earlier this year, private and deemed universities account for 76.8 per cent of PoP appointments. Central universities, where vacancies bite hardest, account for 0.8 per cent, a mere 15 appointments. The institutions that most need practitioner faculty are the ones using the provision least. This should be read alongside the UGC's January 2024 guidelines on university-industry linkages. They aim to tie higher education directly to MSMEs and regional industry through joint R&D clusters, with an Industry Relations Cell in every academic institution and a University Relations Cell in every industry partner. The vision stretches past internships and campus hiring. It imagines students and faculty working with local industry on local problems, backed by incentives for technology transfer and IP creation. But such partnerships need people who can speak both languages, and permanent practitioner faculty are the obvious candidates.

Elite universities abroad handle the role in different ways. SOAS and Harvard treat it as honorary and fixed-term: appointments sit outside the tenure system and can be renewed, but depend on continued relevance rather than scholarly output. Princeton offers multi-year appointments reviewed by the Dean, also outside the tenure ladder, with clear and deadline-bound notice on renewal. The Technion - Israel Institute of Technology goes furthest, allowing real tenure and promotion to full Professor of Practice, assessed on criteria suited to practice, such as patents, industry impact and competitive grants. India's model looks most like SOAS's, without the option to renew.

The case grows stronger in the age of artificial intelligence. As machines take over much of the transmission of information, a teacher's value shifts towards judgement, tacit knowledge, problem framing, professional ethics and decision-making under uncertainty. These are the skills that come from experience, and accomplished practitioners hold them in abundance. Some knowledge simply does not travel well through textbooks: the instinct that comes from having built something, run something or repaired something under real constraints. This applies well beyond engineering and management. Every sector now needs graduates who understand society as well as technology, so the social sciences benefit as much as any technical field. Professors of practice should be seen as strategic assets in designing curricula and training for a future-ready workforce, not as a conduit to industry contacts. Talk of academia-industry integration will stay a pipedream until industry's experience can enter the classroom more easily. The NEP 2020 was drafted before AI reshaped the workplace, and the PoP rules need recalibrating for the world universities now work in.

The uniform 10 per cent ceiling is the place to start. A university teaching computer science, design, entrepreneurship, public policy, healthcare management or media may reasonably need far more practitioner faculty than one focused on pure mathematics or theoretical physics. Instead of one number for everyone, the cap should vary by discipline, allowing much higher proportions in practice-intensive fields under transparent academic governance. A figure such as 40 per cent could serve as an illustrative upper limit. The UGC should also drop its blanket ban on reappointment. Resource-strapped universities that manage to attract a few practitioners should not be forced to lose them after four years. India's universities need people who have built companies, run cities, designed technologies, treated patients, founded institutions and solved public problems, and they need them as a lasting part of the faculty, not an occasional presence. Whether Indian higher education makes room for that is the real policy question.

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A small shift in take-home pay, a bigger gain in social security



PB VERMA

The enhancement of the statutory wage ceiling under the Employees' Provident Fund framework from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 per month, effective from September 17, 2026, has naturally raised questions on both sides of the employment relationship. An employee sees the change through the prism of take-home salary; an employer looks at the additional contribution to the wage bill. Both concerns are understandable. Yet, the real impact of the change cannot be measured only through the arithmetic of one month's salary slip or payroll.

The ₹15,000 ceiling had remained unchanged since September 2014. In the twelve years since, wages, minimum wages and the cost of living have moved substantially. In several States and Union Territories, minimum wages in relevant categories have already crossed ₹15,000. A threshold intended to define the reach of mandatory social security was thus gradually leaving out workers earning relatively modest wages. The revision to ₹25,000 seeks to bridge this gap and is expected to bring more than 51 lakh additional employees within mandatory EPFO coverage.

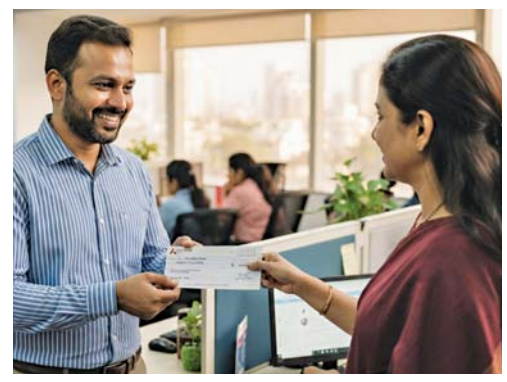
For an employee, however, the first question is simpler: what happens to my take-home salary?

Consider an employee whose PF wages are ₹20,000 but whose contribution was earlier restricted to the ₹15,000 ceiling. His monthly contribution was ₹1,800. At 12 per cent of ₹20,000, it becomes ₹2,400. The additional ₹600 may immediately appear as a loss in take-home salary. But the money has neither disappeared nor been spent. It has simply moved from one pocket of the employee to another, from his "take-home pocket" to his "social-security pocket".

And there is an important difference between the two pockets. Money in the first is available for consumption today; money in the second becomes an asset for tomorrow. It earns interest, benefits from compounding and builds a corpus in the employee's own name. The real comparison, therefore, is not between keeping ₹600 and losing ₹600. It is between ₹600 available for spending today and ₹600 set aside to grow into financial security for tomorrow.

There is something more. The employee does not make this journey alone. On PF wages of ₹20,000, while he contributes ₹2,400, the employer also contributes ₹2,400, apportioned between EPF and EPS as applicable. What appears on the salary slip as a deduction is thus part of a much larger arrangement comprising the employee's own savings, an employer contribution, investment returns, pension and insurance.

Yet disciplined saving need not mean locking away money beyond reach. EPFO has simplified the partial withdrawal framework, enabling members to access their savings for important needs during their working life while preserving a minimum balance for long-term security. It attempts a practical balance, making an employee's own savings accessible when genuinely needed without losing sight of their primary purpose of providing security for the future.



But provident fund accumulation is only one part of the story. EPFO membership brings together provident fund, pension and insurance. EPS provides pension protection to eligible employees and their families, while EDLI presently provides life-insurance protection of up to ₹7 lakh in the event of death during service, without any contribution from the employee.

Social security, therefore, is ultimately also about family security. This has particular meaning in India, where the earnings of one employee may sustain an entire household. The financial consequences of premature death or permanent disability do not end with the worker; they travel to the spouse, children and dependent parents. The true worth of social protection is often felt not during an ordinary month of employment, but when a family encounters an extraordinary difficulty.

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has spoken of "protective security" as an essential freedom. That idea captures the purpose of social security well. Its value may not always be visible in the monthly salary credited to a bank account, but becomes critical when a family faces old age, disability, death or an unexpected loss of income.

Another side of the story, the employer's side, is equally interesting. The higher ceiling undeniably means an additional contribution in relevant cases. But to treat social-security contribution only as an additional labour cost is as incomplete as treating an employee's PF contribution only as a salary deduction. An employer does not merely pay for the hours worked in a month; he also depends upon the continuity, experience and productivity of the people who work for him.

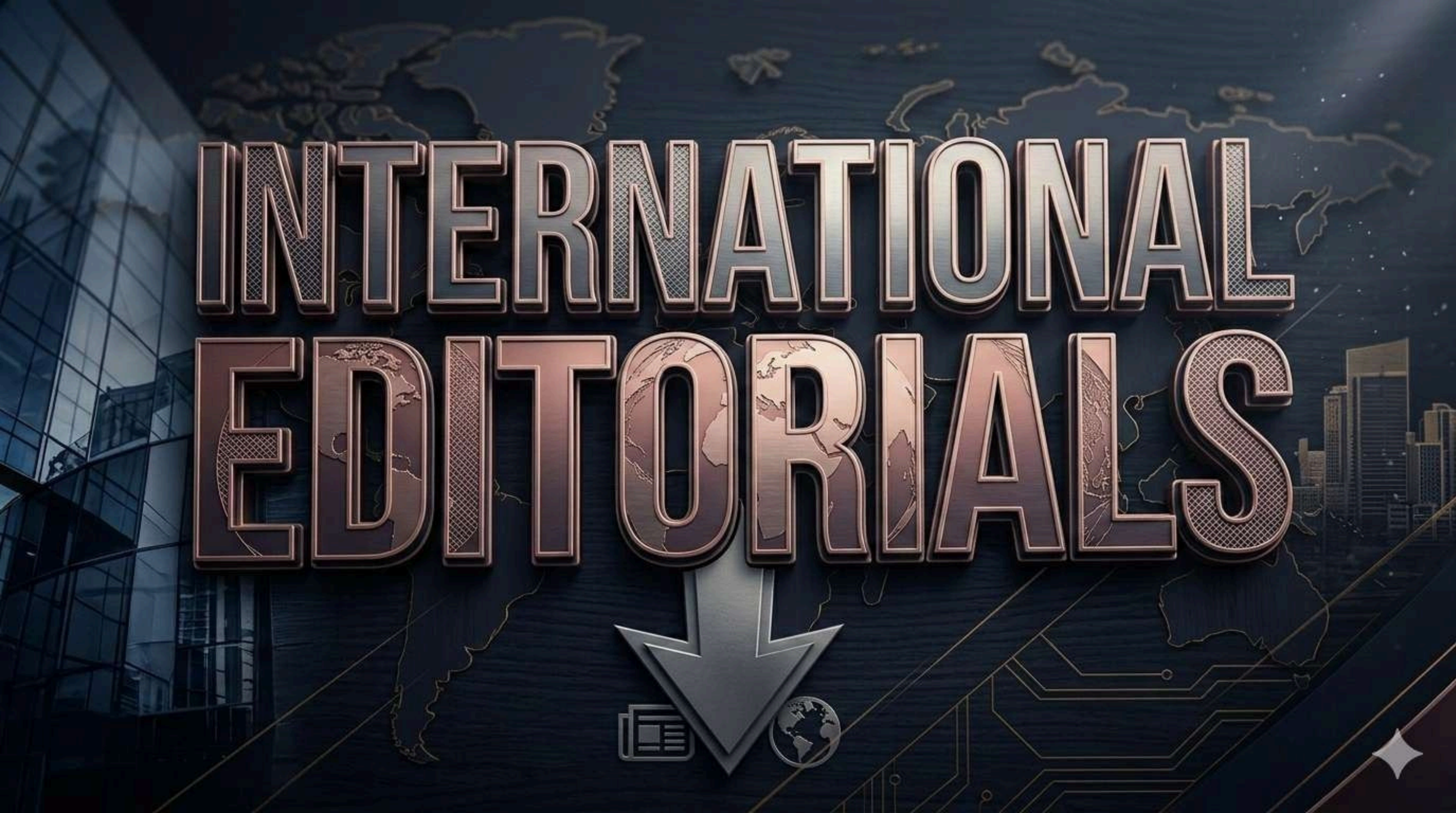
There is a wider business consideration too. Large domestic and global companies increasingly expect enterprises in their supply chains to demonstrate responsible labour practices and verifiable social-security compliance. A transparent record of compliance strengthens an enterprise's standing as a responsible employer and supports its participation in organised domestic and global supply chains.

At a macro-economic level, social security is not necessarily a zero-sum transaction in which a rupee contributed is a rupee lost to the economy. International research referred to in the ILO-led Global Accelerator progress report found that an additional dollar invested in social protection was associated with about $1.52 of additional economic output after two and a half years. This illustrates a larger economic principle: money spent on social protection can return to the economy through consumption and economic activity.

The logic is straightforward. Social security helps families absorb financial shocks and sustain consumption through provident fund savings, pension and survivor benefits. This spending, in turn, becomes income for others in the economy, keeping the economic cycle moving.

A large economy cannot sustain domestic demand through higher wages alone if millions of workers face illness, disability, death or retirement away from serious financial distress. Social security provides a cushion against such shocks. Employees are also consumers; greater security for workers ultimately contributes to greater stability in the economy. Seen in this light, the higher wage ceiling is more than an increased PF deduction. For employees, it shifts income from present consumption to future security, strengthened by employer contribution, returns, pension and insurance. For employers, it supports a more secure and stable workforce; for the economy, it strengthens formalisation, household security and resilience. A salary supports an employee today. Social security seeks to protect his tomorrow, and the future of the family that depends upon him.

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Britain's Budget needs to tame spending and boost growth

Chancellor Healey can still make a low-key fiscal event a constructive one

The last time Britain had a chancellor called Healey it was grappling with high inflation, an oil shock and a wide fiscal deficit. Today, the pressures facing the latest one — John Healey, the former defence secretary — are similar, if less extreme. The buffer against the government's fiscal rule has shrunk. Last week, a further sell-off in global bonds pushed UK 30-year gilt yields above 6 per cent for the first time since 1998. Instability in the Middle East, meanwhile, continues to push up fuel prices.

Against that backdrop, Healey and Prime Minister Andy Burnham appear to be planning a largely steady-as-she-goes Budget on October 28. After two years of tax-raising fiscal events and policy rumours, that would be welcome. But mere stability should not be the limit of their ambition. Having set out their long-term vision at last week's Labour Party conference, they should use the coming weeks to ensure the Budget lays the foundations for sounder public finances and stronger growth in the remaining years of this parliament.

Healey committed to "fiscal discipline" in his conference speech. But that need not mean rebuilding all the headroom the government is estimated to have lost against its rule to balance day-to-day spending by 2030, partly because of global economic turmoil. Restoring too much, too quickly risks sapping growth. Gilt investors have signalled some tolerance for a smaller cushion.

Whatever tightening proves necessary, it should come primarily through spending restraint. Further tax rises on employers, investors and wealth creators would be another blow to economic dynamism, making it harder to improve the debt-to-GDP trajectory. Burnham's pledge to remove the generous "triple lock" on state pensions in the next parliament is promising. But its potential savings will be offset by his costlier plan for a national social care service.

What is needed above all is a credible plan to contain spending in the near term. The government hopes a new apprenticeship programme will get young people into work and ease the burden on benefits. In time, it may. But direct reductions in welfare spending are needed too. Annual expenditure on personal independence payments, which are made regardless of employment status, is forecast to rise from around £30bn this year to £41.5bn by 2031. Significant savings may be unrealistic in this Budget. But Healey can at least spell out how welfare costs will be contained and signal a tougher spending review, slated for next year.

There is also time to be ambitious on growth. Healey and Burnham's re-industrialisation push has been short on specifics. They should focus on concrete reforms that remove barriers to work and investment. Britain's tax system, for instance, is riddled with distortions, from income-tax kinks that discourage work to inefficient property levies. An immediate overhaul is unlikely, but the Treasury can set out a roadmap for simplification.

> He should use the coming weeks to work with businesses and the Office for Budget Responsibility on which reforms would be most fruitful

Other measures need not wait. Further liberalisation of planning rules, fast-tracking significant infrastructure projects and grid connections, and slowing plans to raise the minimum wage could all help unlock business activity now. Healey should use the coming weeks to work with businesses and the Office for Budget Responsibility on which reforms would be most fruitful.

A lot can change before Budget day and impact what level of buffer is indeed prudent — so the chancellor should remain flexible. Still, Burnham and Healey can achieve plenty in the coming weeks. By bearing down on costs and doing more to unlock growth, they could deliver a Budget that is not only stabilising, but uplifting too.

Opinion Technology

Today's youth would like to give back modernity

Ben Hickey





Jemima Kelly

It wasn't so long ago that acts like Coldplay were actively encouraging audiences to use smartphones during live performances. The band's frontman Chris Martin would ask crowds to create a sea of phone flashlights during the song *Yellow*, or to create a "cell phone lights wave". "Forget cigarette lighters, mobile phones are the new glow-sticks!" one of the band's roadies enthused on their official tour blog back in 2008.

Perhaps, if we're being generous, it sounded cool back then. Today, it feels rather depressing — *démodé*, even. Indeed, these days the band gives out LED wristbands so the crowd can create the sea-of-lights effect without their phones, and Martin routinely asks audiences to put their phones away entirely for a single song.

Others are taking further the wacky idea that going to see a gig should be about a shared human experience rather than content-gathering. Phoebe Bridgers, a 32-year-old indie-folk singer with a fan base that stretches from young teenager to ageing Boomer, has brought in an all-out smartphone ban for her current tour, requiring audience members to lock their devices in pouches that are magnetically sealed for the duration of the event (also banned are smartwatches, AirPods and Meta glasses). She's not the only one: Harry Styles and Bob Dylan have recently brought in similar bans, and tech-free events are proving increasingly popular.

> Has any previous generation been so down on the present?

You might think it is stodgy old technophobes or techno-incompetents who are driving this trend, but no. A study from gig-booking website Eventbrite earlier this year, which reported a 567 per cent increase in the number of explicitly phone-free events listed between 2024 and 2025, found that 49 per cent of Gen Z and millennial respondents agreed they wanted live experiences "to feel less curated and more real".

Yet if you look at imagery or footage from live events at which smartphones have not been banned, that 49 per cent is hard to detect. Where there were once mosh pits and dance floors, there are now jumbles of upstretched young arms topped by phones that seem like extensions of their limbs. It appears that even those who would *like* experiences to feel "more real" still feel the need to capture the moment they are ostensibly living, so that after the event they can show others what a great time they were filming — sorry, having.

A paradox seems to be emerging: young people might be the heaviest users of emerging technology, but they also seem to be the ones least positive about it. A recent Pew survey of more than 5,000 Americans found that while 18-29-year-olds were the most likely to use chatbots, they were also the most pessimistic about AI. Some 48 per cent said its impact over the next two decades would be negative for society, while just 14 per cent said it would be positive (compared with 40 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively, for all adults). A YouGov survey in 2023 found that Britons aged 18-24, the heaviest users of smartphones, were the most likely to say they use their phones "too much" and were trying to do something about that.

'Twas not ever thus. The rate at which young people are falling out of love with technology is striking. An Ipsos survey found there had been a huge increase in people of all ages who agree with the idea that "technological progress is destroying our lives" over the past decade, but in the UK the jump was the biggest among 15-24-year-olds. In 2013, only 26 per cent of them agreed with that statement; by 2026, that figure was 62 per cent.

So pervasive is the youth's tech fatigue that many of them wish they had been born in an altogether different era: a large-scale NBC poll released in April found that 47 per cent of 18-29-year-old Americans would, if they had the option, choose to live in the past. (Just 38 per cent said they would rather live in the present, while 15 per cent would like to live in the future.)

Has any previous generation of young people felt this way? Sadly, we don't have comparable data for earlier cohorts, but the prevalence of this modernity malaise strikes me as unprecedented. Yes, kids in the 1960s and 1970s might have wished the nuclear bomb didn't exist, but that didn't mean they wished to be born in the past.

I used to consider it a given that now was the best time to be alive, and that would continue to be the case while we remained at (relative) peace. That this is no longer so is, of course, rather troubling — as is the fact that so many of us seem to be enslaved by technology we resent. But I am reassured, somewhat, by the growing appetite for restriction. If freedom is something we want to be freed from, it's not really freedom at all.

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How do you price universal extinction risk?

John Foley's otherwise excellent "Lex in depth" article on the prospective value of Anthropic surely contains a fallacy about the impact of the extinction of the human race on the valuation (Anthropic at $2tn isn't far-fetched", The Big Read, September 21).

If there is a probability that AI is the human race's last mistake then the shares of Anthropic are indeed worth nothing. But then again, so are T-bills, gold, cash under the mattress and, for that matter, the mattress. No one is left to be better off by not having participated in the IPO. The relevant investment comparison is surely between the pay-offs of investing in Anthropic and of investing in alternative investments in the scenario where there are still people left to enjoy those pay-offs. Universal extinction risk does not belong in one company's discount rate merely because that company might actually cause it.

Of course, there are reasons that the value may be less because of the perception of that risk — more regulation, litigation, slower roll out of new products, all of which can be priced in a half decent cashflow model. And it is not that unreasonable to have moral concerns about investing in the end of times. But the first of these is about the perception (which is known, ex ante), the latter about the ethics. Neither reflect the probability of the event per se.

There is little point constructing the perfect portfolio for the day after the end of humanity.

Richard Kemmish
Culmhead, Somerset, UK

Prediction markets and the wisdom of crowds

The rapid expansion of prediction markets will naturally prompt debates about the economic, social and institutional utility of this emerging financial exchange.

While David Booth is right to test the merits of platforms such as ours, by conflating gambling and trading event contracts, he fundamentally misunderstands the model ("Beware the false promise of prediction platforms", On Wall Street, FT Weekend, September 12).

What we provide is true price discovery, offering a platform for event contract trading where users trade on diverse categories like economic releases, commodity and crypto prices and other publicly verifiable events. This helps to forecast future trends, conduct research and assist institutions and investors as well as the general public in making decisions.

On the contrary, while a casino game in Las Vegas is designed so the house wins over time, a prediction market is a mechanism for aggregating dispersed information into a single, continuously updating price.

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This is exactly why Polymarket US is licensed by the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission as a derivatives exchange.

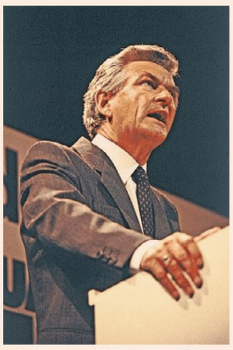
Prediction markets are a nascent financial exchange and, just like trading in other markets, there will be attempts at misconduct. We've created strong deterrents already — matters are worked by expert investigators with backgrounds including the FBI. When wrongdoing is substantiated, we enforce wallet-level restriction, take legal action, or refer to law enforcement.

And while it is true that prediction markets are a relatively new development in the financial ecosystem that regulators and market participants will discuss and debate, to ignore the information utility of prediction markets as this piece does is to miss the point entirely.

People use prediction markets to gain leverage from the wisdom of crowds to price in the probability of events they care about.

Credible platforms must always monitor user behaviour, but dismissing price discovery on real-world events as gambling misunderstands how these markets function and the participation, transparency and technological innovation that they can offer to financial markets.

Neal Kumar
Chief Legal Officer, Polymarket, New York, NY, US



Bob Hawke's trade union accords helped change Australia's economy

Burnham could take a leaf from Bob Hawke's playbook

You report that the prime minister has ruled out calling an early general election ("No 10 rules out early election as rumours swirl", Report, September 25).

Yet much of the reaction to Andy Burnham's speech has been that he will be unable to do much until after he has called (and won) an election, and hence his suggested reforms imply an early election.

But this is foolish reasoning. The proposed reforms are of great potential importance. They need to be reflected on carefully, with all the arguments and counter-arguments heard. Other political parties and many groupings need to be engaged in that debate; and it is essential that the public be, and feel that they have been, consulted.

All this takes time. Too many poor decisions in this country have been caused by ill-thought-out policies, brought in with undue rush from Westminster (think Brexit; water privatisation; HS2; the poll tax; and more).

A model of how to do this properly was provided by the former Australian prime minister Bob Hawke (1983-1991). His series of prices and incomes "accords" with the trade union movement — of which he had until very recently been the leader — were at the core of his success.

They laid the basis of what became the central, and fundamental, achievement of his government, namely the ending of protectionism, the freeing of trade with Asia, and the cascade of internal reforms that this provoked. These reforms stuck; and they have served Australia well.

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David Vines
Emeritus Professor of Economics and Emeritus Fellow of Balliol College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

A more immediate threat is the 'abliterated' AI models

Pope Leo is right that the warnings of AI specialists should be taken seriously ("Pope criticises Huang for playing down safety threat", Report, September 30).

The debate he has joined, which last month also dominated the UN Security Council, remains fixed on the prospect of AI escaping human control. However, a more immediate threat to international peace and security receives almost no attention: the malign use of AI by criminals, terrorists and hostile nation states to cause real world harm.

Designated terrorist organisations, including Islamic State, are discussing and, by our assessment, downloading open-weight models whose safety refusals have been deliberately stripped out.

These "abliterated" models are freely available on mainstream model-sharing platforms for anyone to download and use.

Nvidia's new tools may help developers police their own systems, but anyone who downloads the weights can remove any guardrail a developer builds into an open model.

No one has explained how open distribution of such models squares with the Security Council's counterterrorism sanctions regime, or with US law on material support to foreign terrorist organisations.

Governments usually struggle to focus on low-probability, high-impact risks. AI has produced the opposite pathology: lavish attention on a speculative catastrophe, almost none on harms already under way.

My organisation, Tech Against Terrorism, has launched a benchmark to test how AI models respond to terrorist requests. We found that all abliterated open-weight models we tested obediently helped with building a bomb.

This is now a non-proliferation problem. A modest start would be for governments to back independent guardrail benchmarking of closed and open-weight models alike, and to curb the spread of abliterated versions, beginning by asking the platforms that host them how this squares with existing counterterrorism laws.

Adam Hadley
Executive Director, Tech Against Terrorism, London N1, UK

Clairvoyance or déjà vu?

French brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt must have been tremendously clairvoyant when they devised the eponymous literary prize in the late 19th century as "France's answer to the Booker Prize" (Report, September 26).

The first Booker was awarded in 1969. So perhaps it's a case of déjà vu?

Henk Swarttouw
Domstem, Sweden

The case for tax reform

Martin Wolf argues — not for the first time — that the overall UK tax burden is not currently high, at least by European standards ("A message for the chancellor: the time is ripe for tax reform", Opinion, September 28).

I am not sure that this would be true if the steadily growing burden of student loan repayments were counted as a tax. Legally they are not quite a graduate tax. Yet their behavioural effect must generally be much like an extra income tax.

The only exception may be when (or indeed if) a full repayment finally comes very close. Then with each extra payment it may perhaps start to feel that it promises an early benefit to the payer.

Wolf has acknowledged in the past that incentives do matter in tax systems. He now endorses the Mirrlees Review of 2011, chaired by the Nobel laureate Sir James Mirrlees, in saying: "do not look at a single tax on its own but relative to the rest [of the tax system]".

That does not, I think, quite say it all about how fiscal behaviour effects operate. The overall impact of any part of the tax system is of course an aggregate of more primary causative effects, in how all of those individuals subject to it variously react.

I think most people with a current or potential involvement in the UK economy would take a view of those particular taxes likely to affect them most; and of course among all other factors within the whole UK economic and social environment, not just relative to other taxes.

Following a variety of UK personal tax changes targeted at relatively wealthy people in the past few years, I think the evidence is that further tax impositions on the highest earners could now assume quite critical importance.

That is especially (though not exclusively) true for those who were not born here, and others who do not now have all of their roots here, but could nevertheless view the UK as one of quite a number of alternative countries where their ambitions might best be pursued.

Nor would I share Wolf's confidence in VAT now offering the most effective way to solve large UK fiscal problems. In some commercial sectors, notably building trades and other services direct to final consumers, a VAT rate of much over 20 per cent, on top of all the income and profit taxes, would make cheating an overwhelmingly attractive option.

Andy Thompson
Worcester Park, Surrey, UK

Here's a favourite read from my childhood

Thank you to Nilanjana Roy ("Children's books never grow old", Opinion, Life & Arts, FT Weekend, September 26) for urging us to re-read childhood favourites.

Children's books that are sadly now out of print, by wonderful writers such as Malcolm Saville, Lorna Hill and Elinor Brent-Dyer seemed absolutely magical to me in the 1960s.

At age 70 plus, I still have a battered copy of *The Bookshop on the Quay* by the too little known children's author Patricia Lynch.

Set in Dublin in the 1950s, it is the atmospheric story of a book-mad family surrounded by books for sale, who take in a young Cork orphan in search of his long-lost uncle.

I enjoin your readers to seek it out and read it to their children.

Anna Kirby
Mallow, County Cork, Ireland

Opinion

Why a booming economy is not helping Trump



MARKETS

Ruchir Sharma

An American president's party normally loses ground in midterm elections but this year is unusual. Economic growth accelerated sharply to near 4 per cent in the third quarter, yet Donald Trump's approval rating is plummeting, particularly on the economy. His party is haemorrhaging support. Should it lose both houses of Congress next month, which betting markets see as a live possibility, it would be the first such defeat in economic conditions this favourable since the 1950s.

How could this happen? For many Americans, this feels like the wrong kind of boom — marred by a rising cost of living and the fact that growth is driven mainly by the wealthiest consumers and by heavy investment in AI, which the electorate has come to hate and fear more intensely than any previous tech breakthrough.

Frustration with the US economy predates both AI and Donald Trump's second term. Most Americans have been increasingly dissatisfied about the state of the nation for decades, but the share who say the country is heading in the right direction collapsed over the past year from around 40 per cent to 20 per cent. The big source of dismay: affordability. The share of voters who cite cost of living as the most important issue has risen sixfold in recent years to a record high, over 25 per cent.

And it is clear which prices are causing the most grievance: housing and energy, with the Iran war restricting oil supplies and AI raising demand for electricity. In the last year, petrol prices are up more than 40 per cent, and overall consumer prices have been rising at well over 3 per cent. With mortgage rates now topping 7 per cent, US housing is less affordable than at any point in the past two decades.

There is a widespread perception that power-hungry data centres are pushing up utility bills. Nine in ten Americans do not want one in their town, and most of these projects face local opposition. It's hard, however, for Republican congressional candidates to address these concerns when their president says slowing data centre construction would leave the US "backwards and poor".

Unsurprisingly, AI is the first widely hated product of the digital age. In earlier decades, a majority of Americans saw computers and the internet as big pluses for society. Now most say they are "more concerned than excited" about AI. Anxiety is rising most sharply among people in their twenties, who are increasingly worried about a jobless future. By asking voters to accept higher prices as the cost of his war in Iran, and AI as the cost of staying ahead of China, Trump is fighting against the national mood.

> The sense of America as a land of haves and have-nots has an AI twist

The consistent message from the White House and many Congressional Republicans is: learn to love AI, we need it to compete with China. It's an odd lecture coming from a party that won the White House and Congress by bashing globalist elites.

Broad GDP growth can fail to capture what people feel. Popular discontent reflects more granular details, like the fact that wage growth, adjusted for inflation, has turned negative in recent quarters. One key exception is workers with AI skills, who command wages up to 120 per cent higher than their peers.

So the sense of America as a land of haves and have-nots has an AI twist. Investment is growing around 25 per cent a year in AI-related industries, but by less than 1 per cent in other industries. Construction is contracting on average but growing at a double-digit pace for data centre projects.

This tide of money is lifting other businesses only if they find an AI angle — think of the Japanese toilet maker that saw its stock price jump after it started producing ceramics for computer chips. Now, on days when the stock market goes up, nearly half of the stocks go down — an unprecedented phenomenon.

Most voters have reasons to feel left out of the blessed AI circle. The wealthiest own the most stocks, and the mostly AI-driven gains are rising this year, creating a reverse Robin Hood effect. The 0.1 per cent are gaining more than the 1 per cent, who gain more than the 10 per cent, and so on down the income ladder. Similarly, mortgage delinquency rates are rising on a sliding scale, fastest in the least wealthy neighbourhoods.

Since the second world war, a booming economy has tended to cap midterm losses for the president's party. Historically, when growth has accelerated towards 4 per cent before an election, the incumbent rarely lost control of either house of Congress and lost control of both just once, in 1954. Should the Republicans get swept aside this year, Trump — who rebuilt the GOP as a vessel of anti-incumbent anger — will have turned his party into a target.

The writer is chair of Rockefeller International. His latest book is 'What Went Wrong with Capitalism'

The US is looking more like Italy



BUSINESS

Rana Foroohar

There's an interesting parlour game being played in New York these days: which dodgy economic habits has America picked up from elsewhere? Is it Malaysia's endemic political patronage? Is it Nigeria's tolerance of cash bribes as business as usual? Or is it Brazil's inequality, where the ultra-rich enjoy a life of luxury alongside those living in squalor?

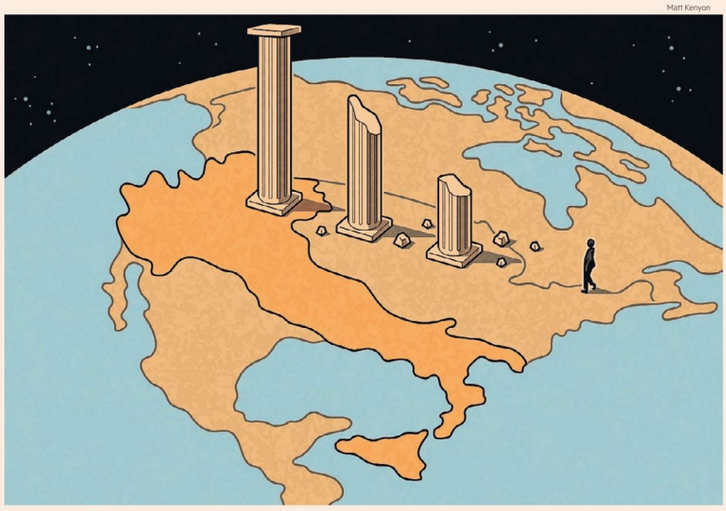
America today has aspects of these and other emerging markets (though that term feels like a misnomer these days, when so many developing nations are besting their rich-country peers in terms of economic performance and governance). But I would make a different comparison. I think that America is starting to look more like Italy, another western nation with a turbulent history.

This is the case for three reasons. While overt corruption may not be as dire in either the US or Italy as in many other frontier markets, both are actively turning away from policing it. Second, populism in politics is showing up in both countries in a similar way. Finally, and most importantly, the labour market in America is starting to look more like Italy's in one crucial respect: older people are holding on to good jobs, and the young have trouble finding decent ones.

Let's start with the political economy. Transparency International's most recent Corruption Perceptions Index gave the US a score of 64 out of 100 in terms of corruption, its lowest to date. Italy was slightly lower, with a score of 53, but the report specifically called out both countries for watering down efforts to fight corruption. Italy's resistance to criminalising the abuse of power among public officials, for example, and the Trump administration's weakening of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act belong in the same basket of behaviour.

No surprise then that democracy is weakening in both places. A 2026 report by V-Dem, an academic project that measures democracy, recently identified both Italy and the US as two of the western countries that have had the most democratic backsliding in recent years. Likewise, Freedom House found that the two countries had relatively large swings towards a more autocratic political economy compared with other nations still labelled "free".

The US is no longer an exceptional nation in any positive sense. I sense my fellow Americans starting to think about corruption as endemic, something ordinary people can't do much about. This reminds me of the shoulder-shrugging "what can you do?" attitude towards bad political behaviour or black-market economies that you find elsewhere. According to a recent Gallup poll, the percentage of Americans who say corruption in government is widespread has risen from 60 per cent in 2006 to 89 per cent today.



Matt Kenyon

Economic cynicism is growing too, especially among young people. One of the most striking things about the US economy today is how the labour market is beginning to mirror the two-tiered, age-divided system that has dogged European nations like Italy, forcing younger people to live longer with their parents or leave the country for more upward mobility.

The last US jobs report, out in early September, found that unemployment was 7.1 per cent for ages 20-24, as compared to 3.6 per cent for those 25-54 and 3 per cent for those over 55. Youth unemployment in Italy is much higher — a whopping 20 per cent. But the ratios are similar, with unemployment among younger people roughly double that of middle-aged workers.

> The labour market is beginning to mirror the two-tiered system that has dogged European nations

Some of this two-tiered labour market problem revolves around age, but some of it is about who your parents are. If you are an insider, you have opportunity. If you are an outsider, by race or class, you have less. As academics like Raj Chetty have shown, America is looking much more like Old Europe these days in terms of mobility: where and to whom you are born has an outsized impact on how much or whether you prosper.

These trends may be amplified by AI, which paradoxically seems to be favouring not young digital natives but rather older workers who have the sectoral experience necessary to leverage the technology and do not face the same risk of disruption as those seeking entry-level jobs. In a paper published in September, the Census Bureau estimated that graduates in the most AI-exposed areas would suffer a five-percentage-point decline in the likelihood of initial employment and 13 per cent lower earnings than those going into less-exposed sectors.

While there's reason to think the technology could benefit younger people in the future, as they move faster into the new jobs and sectors that AI will create, the short-term result is likely to be more disaffected young people.

The result of that would in turn be more of the populism already so evident in the US, Italy and many other European countries. That could in turn slow growth, which would further disadvantage the youngest and the poorest, fuelling the political divides between boomers and younger voters, centrists and extremists.

Italy has, of course, seen this cycle play out many times in its long history, and is right now enjoying a brighter moment, with stronger export and employment numbers. America is only beginning to understand what happens when an empire collapses under its own dysfunctional political economy.

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EU countries shoot themselves in the foot when they veto sanctions



EUROPE

Martin Sandbu

It is not a pretty picture: the country that has been most insistent that EU member states develop "strategic autonomy" from global powers recently forced the bloc to submit to pressure from a middling Central Asian authoritarian petrostate.

Last month, France held up the six-monthly renewal of sanctions on individuals and companies linked to Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime. The EU's foreign policy rules require unanimity for decisions on sanctions. Paris, however, threatened to allow all the sanctions to lapse unless the billionaire Alisher Usmanov was removed from the list. This, it seems, was a condition set by Azerbaijan for the release of French citizens imprisoned there. Luxembourg then followed with a demand to take another oligarch off the hook.

This is not the first betrayal of European solidarity over sanctions. Greece this year held up a previous sanctions renewal to allow a shipping magnate to continue the very lucrative business of shipping Russian gas to non-EU markets. Hungary has long used its veto power for its own benefit.

But for France to behave in this way is a watershed. It is one of the founders of the EU and its second-largest member state. And President Emmanuel Macron's call for strategic autonomy, at first dismissed as a French *idée fixe*, had more or less become conventional wisdom in the bloc. Now, however, it looks as though it was just talk.

In the end France — or rather, Azerbaijan — got its way. Baku promptly released one French prisoner after EU governments struck a compromise in which the remaining sanctions were extended for three years rather than just six months. That, at least, means a repeat will not happen any time soon. But what matters more is how much of the EU's geopolitical influence, such as it was, has been lost in the process.

Paris has in effect put the position of EU capitals on sanctions up for sale to third countries. Quite aside from undermining the "common" in the EU's common security and defence policy, this further encourages rogue states to hold European countries to ransom, for example by jailing their citizens.

The even bigger loss is the potential for a more strategic sanctions policy, which now seems further from being realised than ever. To give credit where it's due: the EU has managed to assemble an impressive 21 sanctions packages against Russia. These have hurt the Russian economy and shrunk the resources available to sustain its war effort. But the EU should aim higher than the reactive punishment it has meted out, partially and too weakly enforced.

> Paris has in effect put the position of bloc countries on bans up for sale to third countries

A truly strategic sanctions policy deliberately links sanctions decisions to demands made of others. That requires the ability to credibly threaten specific sanctions (or the tightening of existing ones) before other states act to harm EU values or interests, and to promise loosening on strict conditions. Such an ability is elusive while 27 veto-wielding member states all pursue their own narrow goals — but it would earn Europe a seat at the table when Ukraine's future is determined and give it greater influence on Israel's conduct in the Middle East. On top of boosting the EU's strategic relevance, that would also serve its economic interests.

The path to achieving this is well known: it is to shift sanctions and possibly other aspects of foreign policy to qualified majority voting (QMV), as provided for in the EU treaties. The last push to do so was a "friends of QMV" group of member states formed a few years ago. Ironically enough, France joined the group, although it is doubtful its heart was ever in it.

Unfortunately, the current prospects for such a move, which itself requires unanimity, are poor. However, now that the existing procedure is being undermined, the need for it is greater than ever.

Some member states fear that their vital interests would be damaged by majority rulemaking. But in a world suddenly more filled with adversaries and enemies, going it alone is to accept being divided and ruled by others — even for the biggest countries, as the French experience shows.

EU countries should remember that it is precisely when majority rulemaking has stopped them from undercutting each other commercially — in trade, competition and the single market — that they have flourished collectively.

Majority voting on sanctions would not by itself improve policy. Brussels' pusillanimity in robustly using the EU's anti-coercion instrument, or even conventional trade policy, against the US or China shows that. But it is a necessary condition for progress. Macron could redeem himself by rallying behind a shift now.

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Burnham could learn a thing or two from Thatcher

Caroline Slocock

Andy Burnham has said he wants to bring about the biggest change in how the UK is governed since Margaret Thatcher, reversing her legacy and healing the north-south divide. But he could still learn from her about how to overturn the status quo, even though it's her changes he wants to reverse now.

It's tough inheriting a rodeo ride of a job: the seventh prime minister in 10 years must deal with a faltering economy and multiple international crises. Thatcher's inheritance was equally challenging, from Heath's three-day week to Callaghan's IMF crisis and Winter of Discontent, with the economy in seemingly terminal decline. By the time she left office 11 years later, Britain had changed beyond recognition; she also played no small part in ending the cold war and initiating the European single market that helped secure Britain's future economic growth.

So how did she master what seemed like an impossible job? I worked for her in Number 10 as her private secretary in her last 18 months and observed her closely, warts and all. Her secret was clarity of vision and purpose, with a determination to get things done. She was across the detail when she needed to be, but her eye was fixed on delivering fundamental change.

It's so easy to lose your way when you're prime minister: the vast number of decisions to take, the people to meet, the unexpected events that throw everything out. Bad enough then but more recent incumbents have fallen prey to micromanaging tendencies. Tony Blair started this centralising trend, hugely expanding the political wing of Number 10; Theresa May and Boris Johnson moved even more power there as they tried to deliver Brexit. It may feel like gaining more control and speeding things up, but the rest of government actually slows down, waiting for decisions. Keir Starmer's Number 10 was more than three times bigger than in Thatcher's day, and it's still growing, but few would say it's more effective.

> Centralising power may feel like speeding things up but government slows down, waiting for decisions

Add in the 24/7 news cycle and you end up with prime ministers like Starmer who initially promised "country first, party second" then slipped into daily announcements to try to maintain political momentum. As Rishi Sunak wrote after leaving: "You get into this habit — you do an announcement for the evening news, post some things on social media and video, and your team briefs the press. Repeat."

So many recent prime ministers prefer campaigning to governing, with Boris Johnson first in class. Although Thatcher won three terms through political skill, it was getting things done which she most enjoyed.

Here's my advice to Burnham if he wants to deliver deep change, drawing on Thatcher's strengths: delegate, be clear about your purpose, direction and values and empower your cabinet and the whole of government to deliver for you, knocking heads together and joining them up when they don't. Devolution is a great goal, but you don't need to do it all yourself through Number 10 North. Instead, invest time internationally solving problems that could otherwise undermine Britain completely.

But Thatcher lacked a skill essential to Burnham's success: the ability to inspire and mobilise others outside government, including businesses and civil society, to deliver common goals. On so many issues, government needs others to help it create changes that would reduce public sector costs and promote growth and wellbeing. Burnham demonstrated this skill in Manchester and has promised collaborative, preventive government based on that experience.

Burnham would do well to emulate Thatcher's clarity of purpose domestically and leadership internationally, but he must also bring the UK together in ways she never did if he is to re-energise the country and escape the cycle of bad government that has dogged it for years.

The writer is a former senior civil servant. Her latest book is 'Bad Government (And How to Make It Better)'

Opinion

Western civilization won't be the same after Trump

This is the thinking behind the U.S. president's puzzling foreign policy.

Leonard A. Schuette
John Guida

We are not done trying to make sense of the jolts and lurches of Trump 2.0. Take foreign policy: President Trump and a group of intellectuals of the "New Right" have transformed how America acts in the world.

But is there a grand strategy behind this convulsion? Leonard A. Schuette, a fellow in the Europe Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, thinks that there is, or that at least one in the works.

Schuette calls this strategy "civilizationism." In a recent essay in Foreign Affairs, he explained that this theory would structure the world into spheres of influence defined by civilizations, with hegemons (the United States, China) dominating their own spaces and pursuing peaceful coexistence rather than aspiring to global leadership.

With Trump's recent meeting with China's leader, Xi Jinping, Schuette explored "civilizationism" and its implications at home and abroad in a written conversation with John Guida, an editor in Times Opinion. It has been edited for length and clarity.

JOHN GUIDA: What were the pre-Trump 2.0 traditional foreign policy groups, and how do they contrast with "civilizationism"?

LEONARD A. SCHUETTE: The debate on U.S. foreign policy has long been shaped by three schools of thought. Primacy, which prescribed a global (military) leadership role for the U.S. Liberal internationalism, which argues the U.S. should build and preserve a system of cooperation. And restraint, which argues that the U.S. is overstretched and should reduce its military footprint across the Indo-Pacific, Europe and the Middle East.

Civilizationism rejects the universal ambitions of both primacy and liberal internationalism. It also differs from restraint by advocating military dominance over the Western Hemisphere.

GUIDA: How do you define civilizationism?

SCHUETTE: It is a worldview according to which the system should be run by a number of great powers — the U.S., China, Russia, India, perhaps Turkey — that have some claim to representing an ancient civilization and that should thus dominate their respective civilizational space. In other words, civilizationism offers an ideological justification for a multipolar order.

Civilizationalism is in many ways a historical regression to a simpler, much less interdependent world.

GUIDA: Is it fair to say that, at least among the traditional schools, there was some overlap between the two main U.S. political parties in their adoption?

SCHUETTE: Yes, despite the domestic polarization, there has long been a broad consensus across both parties on the fundamental tenets of U.S. foreign policy. Both saw U.S. global leadership as necessary as the U.S. had both a responsibility and deep interest in maintaining the international order it had built after 1945.

GUIDA: Whereas a school focused on civilizations seems like a striking departure. How do the New Right intellectuals define Western civilization?

SCHUETTE: For the New Right, and unlike for generations of mainstream politicians, Western identity is not creedal. It is not based on political ideas that might have originated in the geographic West but were, in principle, universal. Think constitutional democracy, individual human rights, pluralism, etc.

Instead, this Western civilization is based on inherited characteristics like ancestry, religion, language and territoriality — the West is a place. By the same logic, there are essential, enduring and near-impossible to overcome differences between civilizations, which, as the political scientist Samuel Huntington put it, are the "product of centuries."

GUIDA: Do you think the ideas of this grand strategy are in parallel to, or spring from, similar notions in the U.S. domestic space? The administration's strict immigration policies, for instance, or its attempt to curtail birthright citizenship? In your essay, you made a striking statement that the New Right thinkers see "liberalism not as the foundation but as the cancer of Western civilization."

SCHUETTE: It is impossible to understand a civilizational grand strategy without understanding the domestic ideology of the New Right. They are inextricably linked.

The New Right, for all its proponents' differences, reject the traditional, fusionist conservatism (free markets, small state, hawkish foreign policy) and the creedal understanding of American identity. They see it in collective, ethnoreligious terms. Americans are white, Christian and can trace their lineage back to Europe. (Vice President JD Vance speaks of American "heritage.")

And U.S. foreign policy should serve to strengthen that illiberal domestic vision and protect what they understand as Western civilization. Concretely, that means three things. First, controlling the Western Hemisphere (the civilizational space) to limit immigration from allegedly alien cultures and prevent the inflow of drugs that undermines the desired societal stability. Second, fighting liberalism not just in the U.S. but also in Europe, the cradle of Western civilization, which according to Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau is committing "civilizational suicide." So interfering in Europe is akin to intracivilizational politics. Third, respecting other civilizations' spheres of influence so long as they don't meddle in your own.

GUIDA: Who are some of the key proponents of civilizationism?

SCHUETTE: Civilizationism is a project of the New Right, a group of intellectuals that have fueled Trumpism and reject fusionist conservatism (a mix of traditionalists and libertarians). They, and their ideas, have existed for a long time on the fringes of U.S. politics. But with the advent of Trump, they have drawn unprecedentedly close to power.

They are institutionalizing their influence in the conservative intellectual ecosystem. There are once peripheral institutions like the Claremont Institute that have become central to the right-wing movement. By one counting, at least 70 alumni of the Claremont fellowship programs serve or have served in the second Trump administration. Then there are what once were establishment institutions, like the Heritage Foundation, that have transformed themselves. And new ones have sprung up, such as the Center for Renewing America.

It is not just intellectuals, though. Vice President Vance is closely associated with the New Right. So are Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri and Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida.

GUIDA: In your essay, you mention two factors that might tilt the scale for the New Right in future intra-Republican Party battles for supremacy.

SCHUETTE: The first is demographic. The New Right is more popular with younger Republicans than the establishment, as it feeds off frustration with the generation held responsible for the forever wars and the economic dislocations following the financial crisis. Polling suggests that younger Republicans are more supportive of calling back the U.S. role in the Middle East, for example. Second, and interrelated, is the war in Iran. The New Right has opposed the war, and any entanglement in the Middle East, from the start. There is reporting that Vance was the most reticent among cabinet members. The longer the strategically catastrophic and costly campaign lasts, the more the New Right should benefit.

GUIDA: You also note that there is one powerful Republican who is not systematic (as far as one can be with something still in progress) about civilizationism: President Trump. How have some of his foreign policy decisions diverged from it?

SCHUETTE: The Trump administration's relationship to civilizationism is ambiguous. Civilizationist language appears in key strategy documents like the National Security Strategy and in keynote speeches by senior members of the administration. And civilizationist ideas seem to have had an influence on Trump's policy on the Western Hemisphere and Europe.

But ultimately, Trump is not an ideologue. He does not have a consistent worldview and has gutted the foreign-policy apparatus to such an extent that consistent foreign-policy making seems to have become nearly impossible.

The biggest difference between the prescriptions of civilizationism and Trump's foreign policy is on the Middle East. Both the Iran war and the cultivation of the special relationship with Israel run counter to withdrawing from the region to focus on the Western civilizational space. Importantly, for the New Right, Israel ought not been seen as part of it.

GUIDA: And China?

SCHUETTE: It is hard to say what the administration's policy is. It seems to oscillate between economic warfare and signaling a much more accommodating policy than that of Joe Biden and Trump 1.0. A civilizationist approach to China would start by recognizing China as a civilizational peer with a legitimate claim to dominating its neighborhood, including over Taiwan. I don't think this is where the administration is, but many observers worry that this is where they could end up.

GUIDA: Is it fair to say that a civilizationist approach may be most clearly seen in the administration's posture toward Europe? It seems to be as divisive there as its domestic equivalent has been in the U.S.

SCHUETTE: Yes, toward Europe and the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, civilizationism seems to shape the administration's Europe policy. As the National Security Strategy declares, the administration's endorsement of "patriotic European parties" and call for "cultivating resistance" to the political direction of Europe comes straight out of the civilizationist playbook. But so far, nonrhetorical efforts have been limited. JD Vance has met with leaders of the far-right Alternative for Germany party and campaigned in Hungary for Viktor Orban, the former premier. And the State Department has started a fund to financially support civil society institutions that share its worldview.

As you would expect, sitting governments and mainstream parties have strongly opposed both this language and the interference in their domestic politics.

GUIDA: Has this attention from the Trump administration been wholeheartedly embraced?

SCHUETTE: Actually, the far right, the supposed civilizational allies, have been on the fence about the MAGA support. They are certainly brothers in spirit, sharing the opposition to liberalism and creedal understandings of identity. But the far right also cares about national sovereignty. The administration's threats against Greenland, interventions in Latin America and the Middle East, and tariffs that have also hit their constituencies have created a backlash across the continent.

Many in the U.S. New Right might also underestimate the deep-seated anti-Americanism in the European far right. The U.S. has traditionally been seen as the ultimate universalizing force that poses a threat to European sovereignty and culture. This was reinforced by its neoliberal economic policy and U.S. troop presence in Europe.

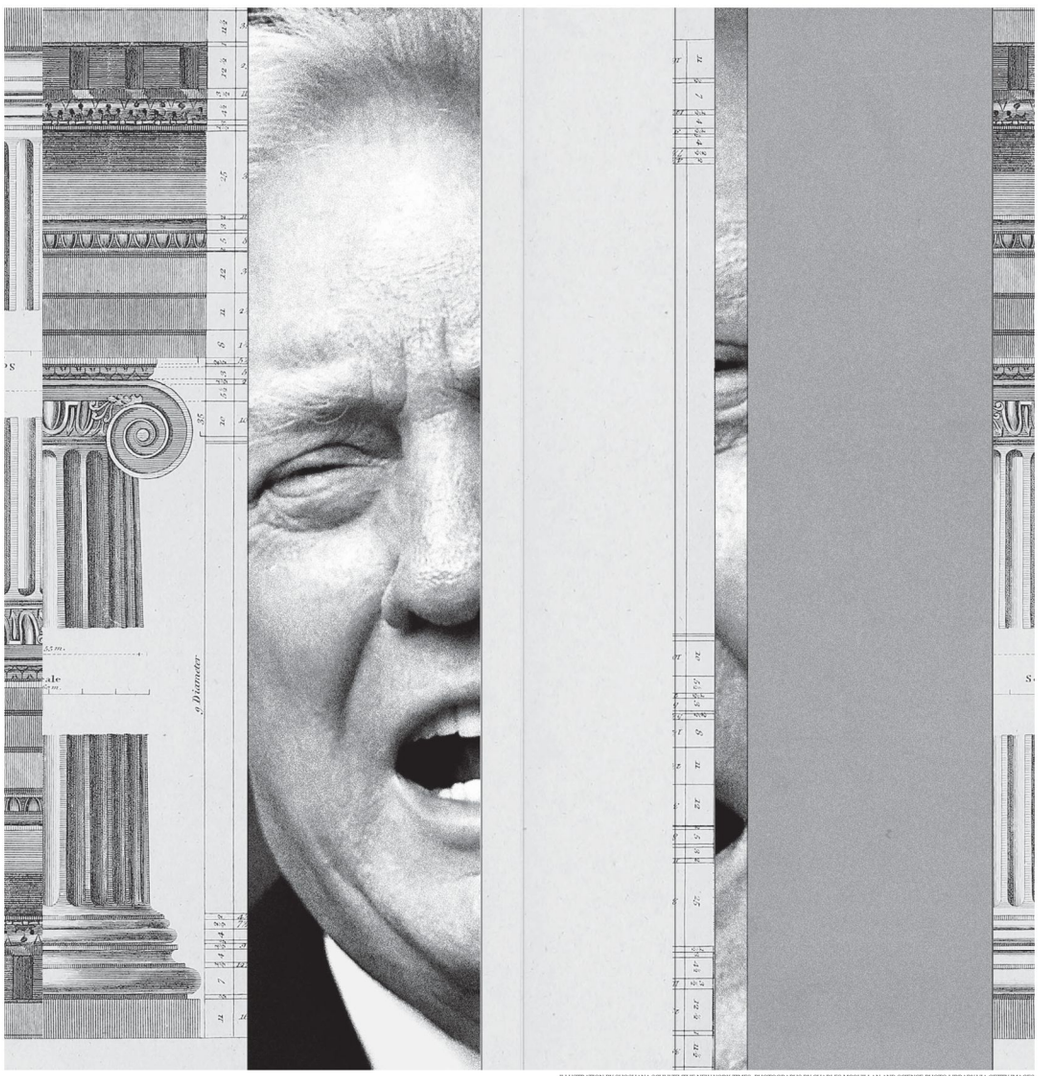


ILLUSTRATION BY SHOSHANA SCHULTZ/THE NEW YORK TIMES; PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLES MOQUILLAN AND SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY VIA GETTY IMAGES

So there are serious question marks over whether the civilizational agenda would resonate even with otherwise aligned forces in Europe.

GUIDA: Civilizationism seems to pit some of the universalizing aspects of the 21st century — global financial architecture, for example, or the development of artificial intelligence — against what could be seen as 19th-century concepts like the West (as in the recent book "The West: The History of an Idea" by Georgios Varouxakis) or a revived stress on nationalism. Do you have any sense of how these tensions could be worked out? Could they be?

SCHUETTE: Civilizationalism is in many ways a historical regression to a simpler, much less interdependent world. The New Right has explicitly talked about breaking the clock of progress and repealing the 20th century.

Perhaps even more than other ideal type strategies, civilizationism would have to confront the reality in which it plays out. The world is considerably too connected for it to work that the great powers just focus on their backyard.

This isn't the only tension inherent in the strategy. It is impossible to neatly delineate the boundaries of civilizations. Would a Russian civilization include the Baltics? Where do you draw the line between the Chinese and Indian civilizations? A strategy designed to prevent great power wars could thus become a recipe for one. And, in addition, why would middle powers without a claim to a civilizational space, such as Japan, accept the hegemony of, say, China?

But we are certainly witnessing the next chapter in the long history of contestations over the meaning of the West.

GUIDA: You mentioned Samuel Huntington earlier. How does Carl Schmitt, the German political theorist and jurist who joined the Nazi Party after Hitler became chancellor, fit into this theory?

SCHUETTE: There are two fundamental views of what a world of civilizations looks like. Huntington famously predicted that they would clash. But the New Right's view is much closer to the works of Schmitt, who is widely read by the New Right. He argued that a world organized along spatial blocs ("Grossraum," or great space) dominated by regional hegemons would actually be peaceful because it removed a central source of great-power conflict, namely the security dilemma caused by the threat of intervention. Schmitt's optimism that this could work resonates with that of the New Right.

GUIDA: Other than the 19th century broadly, do you have a sense that the New Right thinkers have in mind a historical precedent for this type of global arrangement?

SCHUETTE: Civilizationism is still a work in progress, not a complete theory yet. The New Right tends to focus on the domestic agenda, which, as Laura Field's book, "Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right," details, is more systematic.

GUIDA: Do you think that a theory like this will rely on a charismatic leader — a Trump — to become a sustainable part of the foreign policy Washington establishment? Is JD Vance such a figure? Someone else?

SCHUETTE: For civilizationism to become the policy of the administration, it needs a political figurehead. JD Vance could certainly be that person, given that he is steeped in New Right thinking. But either way, the New Right's ideological project is here to last. Their ideas are institutionalized and have a strong following among the young. Whatever happens in the 2028 elections, this kind of thinking will continue to shape U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

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It's a mistake to let A.I. companies police themselves

Lina M. Khan

Anthropic's chief executive, Dario Amodei, has transfixed Washington with apocalyptic warnings that his products could end humanity. To prevent such an outcome, he has proposed letting the artificial intelligence companies police themselves. A key government role? To issue an antitrust exemption allowing the companies to coordinate on slowing down model development and try to persuade China to adopt a similar approach. And last Tuesday, President Trump sat flanked by top A.I. executives after a private lunch at the White House and promised, "tremendous self-regulation."

A.I. may differ from products developed during the internet boom, but some parallels are emerging. Starting around 2018, Facebook, now rebranded as Meta, began a series of self-governance initiatives that purported to introduce some oversight of its behavior. In practice, these measures seemed more intended to forestall government scrutiny. Almost a decade on, jury trials have revealed that instead of policing itself to curb destructive practices, Meta was concealing evidence that its products seriously harmed kids and teens.

There are plenty of U.S. laws on the books to check the tech giants. Use them.

Implicit in the idea of A.I. self-regulation is that America is incapable of managing risk through our democratic government. But historically we have done just that, successfully building and regulating powerful new technologies, from railroads to nuclear energy. We can bring A.I. companies in line with the public interest and deter dangerous behavior.

First, policymakers should look to laws already on the books, not to the online manifestoes and blog posts written by tech chief executives, for guidance. Much of the commentary from the executives suggests they currently operate in a legal vacuum, as if A.I. has wiped clean the regulatory map. In fact, their business practices — including how they develop and deploy their technologies — are already subject to longstanding laws.

Product liability laws apply when goods are defective or dangerous, while tort law establishes basic duties for companies to not act negligently or recklessly. Consumer protection laws prohibiting unfair or deceptive practices can also kick in when businesses injure others by failing to take adequate precautions.

A host of lawsuits in this vein have already been filed against A.I. companies, with several judges already affirming the viability of these cases at the initial stage. State attorneys general can also act. Even at a time when federal enforcers have ignored all manner of corporate lawbreaking, the states can obtain injunctions and substantial penalties to halt harmful conduct and deter bad behavior, as Florida is now trying to do.

Individual executives at A.I. companies can also be held personally liable for unlawful activity, and we already have criminal laws that address more egregious forms of corporate lawbreaking. Given the automated hack of Hugging Face and a series of similar breaches, enforcers at both the state and federal levels should immediately hold A.I. executives accountable for the dangerous and illegal actions of their systems.

Congress will need to legislate. America has a long history of regulating companies and products that are both transformative and risky, including nationally chartered banks, potentially dangerous pharmaceuticals and lethal nuclear assets. Drawing on this tool kit, lawmakers should consider mandatory testing of advanced A.I. systems; breaking up the A.I. giants to prevent conflicts of interest that can arise when a dominant company controls a critical technology, its inputs and its distribution; and truly independent supervision to monitor risk.

Even where A.I. presents new risks, we have a rich history of what works and what doesn't that we can mine for lessons on how to design new, effective regulations. Efforts to bolster deterrence of risky or dangerous behavior — such as Senator Bernie Sanders's and Representative Greg Casar's proposal to introduce a "corporate death penalty" and heighten criminal liability for executives — are especially apt in today's environment of rampant corporate lawlessness.

Lastly, tackling the challenge of A.I. will require confronting America's broader crisis of governance.

Congress struggles to deliver — a legacy of the Republican takeover of Congress in 1995, when the newly appointed House speaker, Newt Gingrich, slashed committee staffing needed for rigorous policymaking and defunded internal expertise. The flood of money in politics greenlit by the Roberts Supreme Court has also distorted the legislative body, where even popular, bipartisan initiatives now fail to pass, or often fail to even get a vote.

Over this same period, America's court system has become increasingly libertarian on economic issues, with judges regularly vetoing policies that would promote economic fairness and protect Americans from corporate abuse while going easy on corporate lawbreaking. Mr. Trump's executive branch has devolved into naked corruption and stopped enforcing laws against wealthy interests.

Against this backdrop, outsourcing regulation to the A.I. companies may prove tempting. But it would be a clear mistake. U.S. democracy cannot surrender the trajectory of these powerful technologies to a handful of private actors. Americans must ensure they ultimately serve public ends. Congress should move diligently to investigate these companies and legislate, and state attorneys general should enforce the laws on the books.

Emerging technologies have always created both opportunity and peril as society and business adjust to rapid change. The public is now awake to the reality of A.I.'s potentially transformational nature. But the most dangerous reaction would be for Washington to panic and hand the steering wheel to the very same companies and executives whose breakneck pace of development and financial conflicts led us here in the first place.

LINA M. KHAN *was chair of the Federal Trade Commission from 2021 to 2025.*



LIANA FINCK

A scientific case for catching up less often

Adam Grant
Contributing Writer



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOOEUN BAE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

My mom has always been my biggest cheerleader. During the pandemic, I didn't see her for many months, and I missed her. When she was able to travel, she braved a long cross-country trip to spend quality time with me and my family. It didn't go as planned. I was impatient when she needed help with her phone. We couldn't agree on what to eat for dinner. She accidentally broke a vase. She'd often quoted her beloved grandmother: "Visitors are like fish — after three days, they stink." By the end of the visit, she joked that she'd proved it.

Amid a widespread loneliness crisis, many people believe that more contact is the key to connection. Teens commit to daily Snap streaks with their friends. Colleagues try to get closer through regular happy hours. Former roommates meet up for brunch every Sunday. And parents clamor for nightly calls with their adult kids.

Being in constant communication can be nice, but it can also create a lot of pressure — on ourselves and others — and a lot of opportunities to be offended when lapses occur.

Research reveals that the frequency of interaction does not determine the quality of a relationship. As one viral social media post put it, "true friendship is allowing a certain level of ghosting to go unmentioned." In fact, time apart can actually bring us closer together.

After leaving for college, kids often get along better with their parents and their siblings. Once parents aren't hovering and nagging and siblings aren't borrowing clothes without asking, they fight less and have more meaningful discussions. It's true at work too: From software to sales, the most productive, creative and resourceful teams don't interact in steady streams. They alternate between periods of low communication and surges of high communication.

Absence really can make the heart grow fonder. Distance enables us to reconcile, rejuvenate and reinvent. After winning three N.B.A. championships with the Lakers, Phil Jackson left, describing Kobe Bryant as uncoachable. When Mr. Jackson returned a year later, they were able to mend fences, put their egos aside, transform the team's offense and win two more titles, even without Shaquille O'Neal. Or take the band Fall Out Boy: After struggling with burnout, the members went their separate ways. When they regrouped four years later, it was with refreshed energy and a renewed vision for shifting their sound from punk to pop with a hip-hop slant. They ended up eclipsing their prior success, producing three straight chart-topping albums and their most streamed single ever. "The break cleared my palate so I could plug in to the new form," the drummer explained. The lead vocalist reflected, "It's almost like the whole hiatus was to help the band."

According to the data, most people can spend up to 75 percent of their time alone without feeling lonely. Some relationships require more recurring conversation than others. If you talk to your significant other only once a month, you're on the path to having an insignificant other. And if you catch up with high school or college friends only every five or 10 years at reunions, your relationships might become frozen in the past. To prevent our ties from fraying, we need new rituals for making intermittent interaction more meaningful.

Prioritize the contact that really makes a difference.

Continuing a Snap streak doesn't bolster bonds, but there's another kind of digital communication that can. It's called pebbling, named after a ritual that some penguins use to court potential mates. They collect and present smooth, shiny stones that are appealing and suitable for building a nest together. The digital equivalent of pebbling is exchanging memes, links or reels. It's not about spamming each other with random junk from the internet, but rather sending little things that remind you of each other, or that might be of special interest. The content may not be weighty, but the act is significant — each pebble is a bid for connection. It signals "I'm thinking of you."

Research shows that pebbling helps us solidify and sustain relationships, especially with people we don't know well. What makes it meaningful is that it's personal. It's moving to send a video they'll love; it's bonding to share one you both love. And either one can be a prelude to actual conversations.

When I reconnected with a college pal after a decade of distance, I was stunned that she remembered my favorite movie. It conveyed that I mattered to her. That kind of little memory flex can go a long way. So can a brief message of care.

Remarkably, there's evidence that after patients with mental health challenges are discharged from hospitals, getting short, periodic notes from staff is enough to cut their suicide risk by as much as half — and that holds true whether the patients are in California, Iran or Australia. Those relationships aren't friendships, but the lesson is the same: Small, sporadic touch points can make a big difference. One patient wrote, "You will never know what your little notes mean to me. I always think someone cares about what happens to me, even if my family did kick me out. I am really grateful."

Small gestures can nurture ties. But the best way to strengthen them is to make new memories together. Psychologists find that when people take a trip to a haunted house, the more fear they face, the closer they become, if they process it together afterward. That turns the experience into a unique moment they've shared. The same goes for singing, dancing, family video games and martial arts rituals: These shared activities aren't a substitute for getting to know someone deeply, but sweating and cheering are social lubricants. The more we feel together, the faster we bond together.

Too busy for karaoke? Try admin night, where friends hang out together while powering through their most tedious tasks. Steve Martin, Martin Short and Tom Hanks have their own version of transforming personal discomfort into shared fun: colonoscopy parties, at which they watch comedy and play poker while prepping for the procedure. I've heard of friend groups that stay in touch across continents by holding a New Year's Eve reunion party. An annual trip together can do more to maintain closeness than a quarterly dinner.

Reaching out to someone you're not in regular contact with can be daunting. In a series of studies, people were as reluctant to contact old friends as they were to write to strangers. After hundreds of people drafted texts and emails to reconnect, less than a third ended up sending them. They wanted to, but worried that since their friendships had fizzled, their overtures would be unwelcome. They were wrong: In 90 percent of cases, people found reconnecting to be fun. And if people were randomly assigned to reconnect by phone or video call, their ties got stronger than if they emailed or texted — and the interaction wasn't any more awkward. The care hormone oxytocin is more likely to be released when we hear people's voices than when we read their messages.

Sustaining relationships seems harder than it really is. When we accept that strong attachments can exist without regular interaction, we can take the pressure off, and stop fretting about whether too long has passed. After all, even chimps and bonobos appear to recognize friends they haven't seen in years.

My mom and I don't talk every day, but we've started a tradition of calling while we play online Scrabble together, and I look forward to every game. A vibe is not about the frequency of communication; it's about the depth of connection.

ADAM GRANT *is an organizational psychologist at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of "Vibe: The Secrets of Strong Connections in a Lonely World," from which this article is adapted.*

China has never felt this angry to me

GAO, ***FROM PAGE 1***

down in a hunt for evidence that connections, fraud or favoritism paved their way.

In late July, a 29-year-old podcaster named Zhuge Yiyang, a Ph.D. candidate at Boston College, went viral after she interviewed the director Christopher Nolan about his movie "The Odyssey." Ms. Zhuge had been admired by many of her online followers as proof that hard work and merit lead to success, and she was widely praised for the intellectual depth of her questions in the interview.

Soon, however, the online stripping started, leading to accusations that she had plagiarized material in her podcasts and writing. Ms. Zhuge has disputed some of the accusations, but canceled public appearances and described herself as emotionally exhausted.

Often, the scrutiny seems less about exposing wrongdoing than about a reflexive resentment of perceived elites who have become avatars of an economy in which many people see their own prospects narrowing. Other recent targets have ranged from a Chinese actress to prominent doctors and a Harvard graduate who last year became the first Chinese woman to speak at a commencement ceremony at the university. The young woman called for global unity in her speech but was soon accused of using family privilege and connections to further her academic career.

Fraud, nepotism and plagiarism are hardly new in China, nor is the tendency for people to take aim at perceived inequities online. What feels new is how automatic and ferocious the hunt for them has become as sensitivity rises over who gets ahead — and how — at a time of pervasive economic anxiety.

Bitterness is intensifying between men and women, too. In online forums, men complain that more of the pressure from the worsening economic prospects falls on them. They rail against feminists, and some have even called for a men's rights awakening.

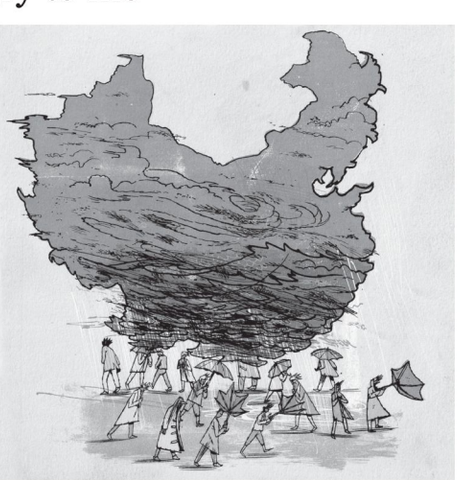
Male frustration spilled into the streets in August when groups of young men, apparently protesting what they saw as the effeminizing of youth culture, reportedly gathered in the city of Chongqing outside a talent agency that handled boy bands. After police officers detained one of the men, the protesters marched down a major road, demanding his release and chasing, shoving and kicking female fans waiting outside the agency. Some took photos of the women, which were digitally altered as pornographic images and disseminated online.

Studies suggest that many Chinese men, particularly those with fewer resources, face mounting difficulty fulfilling traditional expectations to marry and become stable breadwinners. A man is often expected to have an apartment and a car before he can secure a wife. For many, that's becoming nearly impossible.

What's disturbing about China today is that success itself is cause for suspicion and hostility.

In some parts of the country, a groom's family may also be expected to pay a "bride price," a payment to the bride's family as part of the marriage agreement. A survey of young male migrant workers, which was published in February, put the average price at around 130,000 yuan ($19,000) — about six times the respondents' average annual savings.

Marriage prospects are worsened by the government's former one-child policy, which, combined with a traditional preference for male heirs, led many families to abort female fetuses, skewing China's gender balance. The policy was ended a decade ago, but single men of marriageable age outnumbered unwed women by as much as two to one in some parts of the country, according to the most recent detailed census in 2020. Last year, China still had nearly 29 million more men than women.



MATT ROTA

I grew up in a China whose ascent was powered not just by factories, investment and growing incomes, but by the sense that all boats were rising. Even if some rose faster, people could see those who had made it and imagine joining their ranks. They could look forward to building families and bringing up children whose lives would be better than their own.

What's disturbing about China today is not simply that those expectations are fading, but that success itself is cause for suspicion and outright hostility: If I am falling behind, someone else must be getting ahead at my expense; if I can't meet the expectations society places on men, a woman must be to blame.

The Chinese state has enormous power to steer the economy and shape public life. What it cannot simply command back into existence is goodwill between its citizens.

Economic downturns end. A fraying social fabric may prove harder to mend.

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ACPM 19.34 **Printed in** Athens, Beijing, Beringen, Dubai, Frankfurt, Gallargues, Hong Kong, Islamabad, Karachi, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur, Lahore, London, Madrid, Milan, Nagoya, Osaka, Rome, Seoul, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Tokyo.
The New York Times Company 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405, NYTCo.com; The New York Times International Edition (ISSN: 2474-7149) is published six days per week. A.G. SULZBERGER, Publisher ©2026 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Commission Paritaire No. 0528 C83099.
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Regional Offices: U.K. 1 Bartholomew Close, 3rd Floor, London, EC1A 7BL; **Hong Kong** 1201 K.Wah Centre, 191 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong; **France** 2, rue Favart, 75002 Paris, France. Printed in France by Midi Print ZAC du Pôle Actif. 18 Allée Piot 30660 Gallargues le Montueux.

OPINION

The End of College as We Know It



INSIDE VIEW
By Andy Kessler

What's the matter with universities? Syracuse missed its 2026 enrollment target and may run a $30 million deficit. Minnesota is cutting its budget by $225 million over two years. Tulsa is slashing tuition by more than half. Colleges enroll 4.2% fewer undergraduates than last year. Cornell, Yale, Vanderbilt and Washington University in St. Louis put out plans—not radical enough, if you ask me—to reimagine the university. Wossamotta U?

Colleges are known for left-leaning professors, speech suppression, bizarre courses—Occidental College taught "The Unbearable Whiteness of Barbie"—and easy grading more than critical thinking, judgment and problem solving. It's easy to blame artificial intelligence, but problems run deeper:

• *Aptitude*. In *Griggs v. Duke Power* (1971), the Supreme Court effectively banned corporations from giving intelligence tests, so companies rely on colleges to do their sorting via aptitude tests like the SAT. That led to branding and credentialism, but that game is over. A Cornell report noted employers' "jarring" skepticism of college graduates because they lack job skills such as "the ability to handle uncertainty and solve problems that do not have clear answers." A Forbes survey found almost half of corporate executives are either less likely to hire Ivy League graduates than they were five years ago or would never hire them.

• *Admissions.* "Holistic reviews" that ignore aptitude and grades put a thumb on the scale and harm college brands. In combination with athletic scholarships and easy majors, they bring in underqualified students who are churned out as subpar employees.

• *Accounting*. In 1945, Vannevar Bush suggested the U.S. government fund "basic research in the colleges, universities and research institutes," which became a big business. But universities got greedy and abused the system by overcharging the government for overhead.

That business model is now suspect. The Trump administration instituted a 15% cap on "indirect cost rates." A 2025 study found that at more than 350 institutions funded by the National Institutes of Health, the average negotiated indirect cost rate was 58% and the effective actual overhead rate averaged 42%. The Trump administration's 15% cap was struck down in most cases and the administration has backed off for now, but we've seen research funds cut off. Watch for "let's hit up alumni for more" as research overhead may no longer be an overstuffed cow to pay for campus excesses.

That includes professor salaries. Many eyebrows lifted in 2024 when Claudine Gay was fired as Harvard president and went back to being a professor, at a $900,000 salary. The average full professor salary at Harvard in 2026 is $293,619, up 6.4% from last year. I'd bet many of them hate capitalism but are happy to enjoy its fruits.

• *Affordability*. Student loans lead to constant tuition hikes. Same for high professor salaries and administrative bloat. Sixteen colleges and universities cost more than $100,000 a year in tuition and expenses. Where's the value? Students could buy a decent GPU rack and start their own AI company for less.

AI is wreaking havoc in universities, but higher ed's woes long predate ChatGPT.

• *Artificial Intelligence*. Professors and students seem to be going through the motions of learning, so there's a huge structural problem. Do ChatGPT-written essays get graded by Claude? Why bother?

Three years ago, OpenAI's GPT-4 scored 1,410 on the SAT, maybe enough to get into Michigan. Since then, AI has passed bar exams and medical licensing exams, which says more about these outdated tests than the inadequacy of humans, perhaps a sign of an antiquated education system. Even worse is a 2025 Harvard study, "AI tutoring outperforms in-class active learning." Are teachers and professors becoming obsolete?

Universities can take advantage of AI rather than ban it. The sage-on-a-stage format is over. Learning is experiential. As corporate America rejects college branding, graduates would benefit from more hands-on experience. Universities may be uniquely positioned to implement what I call "virtual apprenticeships," real job experience while still at school.

I suggest all students spend their entire junior year on team projects. Assignments might include building nuclear autonomous buses or robots that cook. Cross-discipline self-organizing teams will form. You'll need engineers and coders, but also prelaw and political-science majors to clear the regulatory path, philosophers and marketing majors to write press releases, designers, nutritionists, etc.

Self-paced AI-tutored instruction can help students learn what they need as problems arise. A smart entrepreneur might even create a student transfer portal to recruit talented students from other universities.

According to Gallup, in 2013, 70% of Americans said college was very important. Today it's only 31%. If universities don't change, more than a few will implode, while others will wither away over decades. AI and alternative forms of learning are already rising. Something radical is needed to stop the decay of our once great universities. Who will step up?

Write to kessler@wsj.com.

Trump's Dubious Venezuela Strategy



AMERICAS
By Mary Anastasia O'Grady

A sold-out international oil and gas conference in Caracas, Venezuela, last week drew dramatic headlines in the financial press. Representatives from Big Oil, along with many smaller companies, mixed with their peers and government officials and grumbled about the country's broken-down electrical grid. Journalists seemed amused by a shortage of golf equipment for executives who wanted to hit the links at the local country club.

It's been nine months since President Trump used the U.S. military to arrest dictator Nicolás Maduro inside Venezuela, take him to New York, and promote his deputy, Delcy Rodríguez, to top despot. Venezuelans thought they were going to get elections. Instead U.S. sanctions on oil sales have been lifted and dollars are again flowing to the criminal regime. Popular opposition leader María Corina Machado desperately wants to return, but Washington won't allow it.

The energy confab was a Trump administration idea. It's betting that by talking up the Venezuelan petroleum industry even while a dictatorship is still signing the contracts, it can get capital flowing into the country. The rebuilding of democratic institutions is supposed to follow.

Trump critics say that's an error in sequencing. They believe that before investors sink real money into long-term commitments in Venezuela, in amounts that matter, they will want to be dealing with a legitimately elected government operating under a rules-based system.

History is on the side of the skeptics. At a minimum, caution is in order when dealing with the *chavistas*, who over the past quarter-century have repeatedly "dialogued" with democrats, as they're doing now, only to refuse to relinquish power.

The energy summit harked back to a time in the once-prosperous South American nation when oil was the engine of growth. But elsewhere in the capital and the rest of the country, things remain dire. Triple-digit inflation and persistent power outages make life miserable for most Venezuelans. Ms. Rodríguez still holds an estimated 324 political prisoners, and more than two dozen others are under restricted freedom. Venezuelans at home and abroad are souring on the Trump administration.

Team Trump says it's still pushing for political reform through negotiations between Ms. Rodríguez's brother Jorge, head of the National Assembly, and the opposition. The two sides have been meeting on and off for two months and are rumored to be near an agreement on an independent supreme court. After that they're supposed to form an independent electoral council. If all goes well, some insiders say the country could hold elections by mid-2027.

Venezuelans who want to recover their country are holding onto this hope. But doubts creep in when the Trump administration attaches no importance to restoring good governance and instead makes a boom in oil production, driven by secret agreements, its priority. By continuing in this direction it's likely it will get neither.

He is pushing oil production over good governance and may end up with neither.

Attending the conference was a low-cost way for large companies to generate goodwill with the White House. Even companies with little interest in Venezuela had reason to show up to stay on Mr. Trump's good side. Marginal players probably wanted to rub shoulders with Oil Ministry bigwigs who have discretionary power over rights to explore and exploit oil blocks. Sweetheart deals in exchange for who knows what are the way things work in Venezuela.

Venezuelans are complaining bitterly about the recent regime decision to grant proprietary rights over 17 oil fields to North American Blue Energy Partners, whose majority owner is palace insider Alejandro Betancourt. Yet rather than object to the no-bid contract, the Trump administration further eroded confidence by appropriating its own minority stake in the company.

In a country gutted by corruption, this is troubling. As oil analysts M. Juan Szabo and Luis Pacheco wrote on their Notes From the Oil Patch blog last week, it's worth pondering what's going on "when a company as limited in scale" as Mr. Betancourt's "announces the purchase of 50 drilling rigs and a significant number of steam generators for a sum exceeding $1 billion—without having yet made the contract or its technical and financial plan public."

Mr. Trump's Venezuelan oil-gusher narrative is, for now, mostly rhetoric. Even contracts and memorandums of understanding, Messrs. Szabo and Pacheco write, "signed with solid companies such as TotalEnergies and Continental Resources, as well as the many contracts signed with companies lacking any real operating, technical, or financial track record, will take time to translate into investment plans, and even longer to contribute to incremental production." This means that "for the rest of 2026 and much of 2027, these agreements will likely remain in the stage of evaluating fields and weighing options before reaching a final investment decision, conducting baseline audits, carrying out detailed reservoir studies, and resolving logistical and talent bottlenecks."

Better outcomes might be had. But not without a return to democracy.

Write to O'Grady@wsj.com.

Where Did the Independent Leaders Go?

By Joseph Epstein

Am I alone in finding the current political landscape bleak? Everywhere I turn, I find ambiguity, ambivalence and antipathy. What are we to think of artificial intelligence? Will it be the death of us or a greater boon than the internet? Apart from Benjamin Netanyahu and Volodymyr Zelensky, there are no political leaders I find admirable. By contrast, there are many outright villains on the scene, among them Vladimir Putin, the various levels of Iranian leadership, and the wilder of the Democratic Socialists of America and their compatriots.

As for members of Congress, only John Fetterman stands out as independent. The rest are lined up irretrievably on their side of the aisle, emerging merely to babble the party line. Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana is notable for his comic similes, but not much else. I stopped listening to Bernie Sanders years ago. When he does speak on television I shut out his words and follow his endlessly moving hands. I shall be glad to see Dick Durbin, one of my senators, retire after more than 40 years in office. I won't miss his countless platitudes delivered in a voice of the deepest solemnity conveying moral superiority.

Aristotle's 'happy medium' is absent from our politics.

No, if originality of thought is what you seek, it won't be found in Congress, where sorry shibboleths are the order of the day. I should be glad to see all of them retire and succeeded, doubtless, by fresh cliché-mongers.

How did this come about? Some would blame Donald Trump, whose ready recourse to invective has doubtless intensified our sad political situation. Though as H.L. Mencken, who died in 1956 when Mr. Trump was 9, prophesied, "on some great and glorious day, the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron."

Never high on politicians, Mencken also wrote that "if a politician found he had cannibals among his constituents he would promise them missionaries for dinner." And this: "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary." Would climate change and AI be among these hobgoblins today? How about the rise of the socialists in the Democratic Party? Has politics degraded to little more than keeping Americans agitated? So it often seems.

Aristotle wrote that "he is happy who lives in accordance with complete virtue . . . throughout a complete life." That virtuous life for Aristotle was marked by finding the mean, or happy medium, when confronted with rivaling claims.

The happy medium is what is missing from our political life. "My way or the highway" might suffice as the current slogan for both political parties. A cold place, the highway, providing little comfort, either physical or spiritual. But that is where many Americans seem to find ourselves now.

Mr. Epstein is author, most recently, of "Never Say You've Had a Lucky Life."

BOOKSHELF | By Feyi Fawehinmi

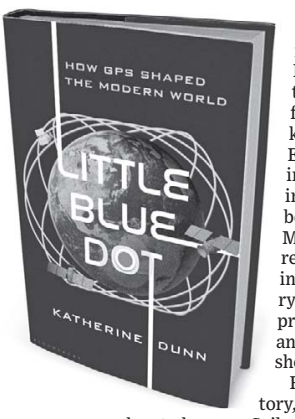
Maps and Satellites

Little Blue Dot

By Katherine Dunn
Bloomsbury, 384 pages, $29.99

Earlier this year a French naval officer went for a 4-mile run and, like millions of other runners around the world, uploaded his progress to Strava, the fitness app that plots workouts on a map. His route showed loops suspended over open water in the eastern Mediterranean.

Using satellite images taken an hour later, journalists at the newspaper Le Monde soon identified the officer's location, as well as the location of many of his fellow sailors. It turns out the seaman had been running laps on a warship in the Charles de Gaulle's carrier group. The carrier's position had been among France's better-kept secrets. The embarrassment in Paris was considerable.



This story is, in miniature, the one Katherine Dunn tells in "Little Blue Dot": How a system, originally designed for the U.S. military to know precisely where on Earth things are, escaped into civilian life, became invisible and has lately been called back to war. Ms. Dunn, a business reporter and editor based in London, is a gifted storyteller. Her introduction promises "a wild, weird and fantastical ride"—and she delivers.

For most of human history, knowing where you were was an educated guess. Sailors practiced dead reckoning: Start from a known point, multiply speed by elapsed time, and then hope for the best. Latitude could be read from the stars, but longitude required something that nailed down time more precisely.

The longstanding problem of calculating one's location appears to have been solved by the Global Positioning System. In fact, GPS also overcomes the challenge through time: A receiver uses the travel times of signals from several satellites, whose positions are known, to calculate its own position. The map in your pocket rests on atomic clocks in the sky.

It all began with a Soviet provocation. In October 1957 Sputnik crossed the American firmament, beeping as it went. Two scientists at Johns Hopkins tuned in. From the rise and fall of the signal's pitch as the satellite passed overhead, the scientists could reconstruct the entire orbit from a listening post. Then came the elegant inversion: If a point on Earth could locate a satellite in the sky, then a satellite in the sky could locate a point on Earth.

The Vietnam War provided the humiliation that converted that insight into a weapons program. For years the American military failed to destroy a single bridge at Thanh Hóa—not for lack of bombs, but for lack of precision. Bradford Parkinson, the Air Force colonel who became GPS's chief architect, spelled out the remedy on a sign at the entrance to the GPS Program Office: The mission was "to drop five bombs in the same hole."

Even so, GPS spent its first decade as an orphan: Few in the military understood the system or cared for it; the real fight among the service branches, Ms. Dunn writes, was "the battle not to get stuck with the bill." The turning point came in 1983 when a Soviet fighter shot down Korean Air Lines Flight 007 after the passenger jet mistakenly flew into Soviet airspace. President Ronald Reagan promised the still-unfinished system to the world's civilians.

The Global Positioning System, designed by the U.S. military, became a mundane part of civilian life. It has lately been called back to war.

Commerce did the rest. By 1985 Silicon Valley had shrunk the receiver to the size of a typewriter. One young firm, angling for publicity, lent a unit to the writer William F. Buckley Jr., who was a "fanatical amateur sailor." Buckley carried the device across the Pacific and reported back in the New York Times Magazine: "Navigation used to be deadly serious stuff," he reflected, but this device "will change everything."

Courtesy of "the greatest gift that the American taxpayer has ever given the world," as one navigation executive put it, GPS is, these days, invisible infrastructure. The same signal that tells a dating app which lonely hearts are within a mile of each other also runs the clocks that keep cellular networks and financial exchanges in step. Yet it remains, first and foremost, a military tool. In 1991, when the Pentagon repositioned its satellites over the Middle East for the Gulf War, GPS coverage over America shrank. Highway maintenance, railroad scheduling and earthquake detection were among the civilian activities affected. As Ms. Dunn writes, that episode was among the first occasions—but certainly won't be the last—during which civilians discovered with shock what GPS "was actually for."

Ms. Dunn's underlying theme is that humans spent centuries groping in the dark for their position, built a system that ended that groping, and then forgot the dark was ever there. Her later chapters can read like a dossier proving a point already made. Yet her warning extends beyond navigation: Can time itself be weaponized? An attacker cannot alter its passage but could make clocks disagree. Modern life turns out to be, among other things, a vast congregation of machines taking one another's word for what time it is.

How such an attack would cascade through civilian networks remains uncertain. But alternatives exist: Precise time can travel by fiber-optic cable and be kept by land-based atomic clocks. And paper maps—the last resort—still work.

The whole journey—from military technology to civilian infrastructure and now global vulnerability—is neatly mirrored in the military's own training curriculum. In 2006 the U.S. Naval Academy, having deemed GPS dependable, stopped teaching midshipmen celestial navigation—the discipline of fixing a ship's position based on timed sightings of the sun and the stars. In 2015, with jamming and cyber-attacks no longer hypothetical, the Navy put the subject back on the syllabus.

Mr. Fawehinmi works in financial services in London and is the co-author of "Formation: The Making of Nigeria From Jihad to Amalgamation."

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Another Election, Another Mediscare

Democrats create a phony scare whenever a government subsidy ends, and the Trump Administration's recent elimination of a fillip for Medicare Part D plans is no different. Still, it's worth exposing how Democrats are trying to exploit problems they created in the Part D program.

With open enrollment for Medicare kicking off soon, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has published Part D premium details for the coming year. Surprise—premiums are rising far less than Democrats warned this summer when the Trump team cancelled a Biden Administration subsidy.

Part D prescription premiums are coming in lower than Democrats predicted.

Average premiums for stand-alone part D prescription drug plans will rise by less than $1 a month to $36. Most low-income beneficiaries receive subsidies that fully cover their premiums. Ninety-three percent of other beneficiaries will have access to at least one plan that costs less than $6 a month.

Average prescription drug premiums for Medicare Advantage plans—which enroll about half of beneficiaries—are expected to fall by 38% to $7 a month. Drug premiums in Medicare Advantage are typically lower than for stand-alone Part D plans because insurers who administer the former can subsidize their drug plans with savings from, say, reducing hospitalizations.

In any event, few seniors will experience an appreciable increase in drug premiums next year. One reason is that new generics and biosimilars, and competition among drug makers more broadly, are putting downward pressure on prices. Prescription drug prices have fallen 2.9% over the last year, according to the Labor Department's consumer price index.

This is bad news for Democrats who claimed that Part D premiums would soar. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer averred that the Trump team "doubled prescription drug costs for millions of seniors." Punxsutawney Phil has a better prediction record than Mr. Schumer.

As we wrote at the time, the Biden team established a special "demonstration program" to subsidize Part D plans to keep premiums from spiking before the 2024 election as a result of the Inflation Reduction Act's (IRA) expensive benefit enhancements. These included eliminating the coverage "donut" hole and a $2,100 annual cap on out-of-pocket costs.

The Biden crowd panicked when insurer bids for providing basic Part D benefits surged to $179.45 a month for the 2025 plan year, from $34.71 in 2023. While the IRA provided subsidies for insurers to keep down premiums through 2029, Democrats didn't anticipate the extent to which drug utilization would increase.

Ergo, the Biden Administration funneled more money to Part D plans to keep premiums from rising. Some insurers then gamed the system to extract more subsidies, which undermined competition in the market. Eliminating the subsidy will reduce this market distortion.

* * *

The broader problem is that the IRA's Part D redesign and price controls have created many other distortions, which Democrats propose fixing by—wait for it—creating a public Part D option. Democrats want a government prescription plan.

Medicare Part D is a rare entitlement that costs less than projected because of intense competition by private insurers and drug makers. Yet the IRA ballooned the entitlement's costs and drove some insurers out of the market. The Congressional Budget Office this year revised up its cost projection for Part D by some $700 billion through 2035 largely due to the IRA.

The number of Part D plans has shrunk by 60% over the past five years. Former Biden CMS official Kristi Martin, a key architect of the IRA's Part D changes and price controls, recently warned in the journal Health Affairs that the Part D market is "headed to a death spiral." Why?

Separate IRA subsidies for Part D plans end after 2029, which "raises significant cause for concern around unsustainable premium increases and continued market exits in the near-term," she wrote. Did Democrats knowingly enact a ticking time bomb? Perhaps, though our guess is they phased out the subsidies in 2029 to reduce the cost of their entitlement expansion on paper to game CBO scoring.

To prevent future premium spikes, Ms. Martin proposes a "federally-facilitated" Part D plan with government "negotiating power" to force lower prices on drug makers. This would be another means by which the government could impose price controls and seize control over Medicare's provision of prescription drugs.

Private plans would struggle to compete with the public option, and more would leave the market. Seniors who like their prescription drug plan shouldn't expect to keep it if Democrats take control of Washington.

Letitia James and the Cornell 7

What is New York Gov. Kathy Hochul thinking? Her decision to appoint state Attorney General Letitia James as the special prosecutor in the case of seven Cornell male students alleged to have known of or engaged in the rape of a female undergraduate couldn't be a worse decision for the cause of transparent justice.

Hochul's special prosecutor seems to have prejudged the case.

As Justin Dillon writes nearby, Ms. James appears to have prejudged the evidence before she has seen it. "What this young woman has been forced to endure is horrific and unacceptable," Ms. James wrote on Facebook before she was appointed by Ms. Hochul. "To her, and to all survivors: you're not alone. We stand with you."

That should be disqualifying on its face. A prosecutor is supposed to examine the evidence and make a judgment about whether a jury would find the accused guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Ms. Hochul says she lost confidence in the local district attorney who declined to bring charges, but how can the public have confidence that Ms. James isn't prejudiced against the male students?

The ugly facts of the Cornell 7 case are in dispute, and we don't profess to know who is right. The students clearly engaged in awful behavior, and Cornell has punished them after its investigation. But the issue for a prosecutor is whether this rises to the level of a criminal offense.

In choosing Ms. James, a progressive who has abused her power for political purposes in the past, the Governor looks to be bending to the social-media mob that wants the students charged. The victim, the Cornell 7 and the cause of justice deserve better.

The United Academic Workers

For a lesson in why labor unions have declined in America, take a look at the reelection challenge to United Auto Workers president Shawn Fain. While championing left-wing political causes, Mr. Fain has squandered worker dues.

A leadership election reveals the change at the United Auto Workers.

The UAW is holding an election for executive offices with a Monday deadline for submitting member ballots. Mr. Fain won election in 2023 by fewer than 500 votes on a promise of reform, but his tenure has been marred by allegations of misconduct and financial mismanagement.

A corruption scandal last decade, before Mr. Fain took office, culminated in convictions of 11 UAW officials and a federal court appointment of an independent monitor. In June the monitor, Neil Barofsky, alleged that Mr. Fain retaliated against union vice president Rich Boyer for refusing to take improper actions that would financially benefit Mr. Fain's fiancée.

Another monitor report found that the union had mismanaged investments in its strike fund. Mr. Barofsky accused Mr. Fain of scapegoating and retaliating against the secretary-treasurer for the apparent financial lapses.

Mr. Fain denied wrongdoing and accused the monitor of waging a vendetta against him for his anti-Israel activism. Mr. Barofsky has a "political grudge against me because the UAW took an anti-war stance about what was happening in Gaza," Mr. Fain says. At least he cops to his anti-Israel activism.

"We cannot bomb our way to peace," Mr. Fain declared at a press conference with Congressional Democrats in 2023, as he demanded Israel agree to a Gaza cease-fire. Mr. Fain also backed anti-Israel protesters on college campuses, many of whom are UAW members.

While the UAW has struggled to unionize auto plants in the U.S. South, it has had success organizing on college campuses. These include the University of California, California State University, Columbia, Harvard, New York University, the University of Southern California and Penn State.

The UAW claims to represent more than 120,000 workers in higher education, largely graduate students. Incredibly, the UAW has more members at the University of California than it does at General Motors. Last year it organized 24,500 workers at universities. Yet despite those gains, UAW membership overall has shrunk by about 23,000 since 2016.

A major reason is the UAW's strikes in 2019 and 2023 that pressured U.S. auto makers into expensive wage and benefit increases, which contributed to job losses. Some colleges are also now cutting admissions and graduate-student employment owing to higher costs from collective-bargaining agreements.

Yet while union workers lose their jobs, the UAW is expanding its administrative ranks. In 2014 the UAW raised dues to pad its strike fund, though much of the money has gone to adding overhead. Mr. Boyer, who is challenging Mr. Fain for president, pledges to "cut overspending," reduce union dues, and "end the hiring of non-UAW members at excess salaries."

He says the union has added 23 "administrative assistants" and 12 "public relations specialists" since 2020, many of whom make two to three times as much as auto workers. The election is a test of whether the UAW exists to help workers, or the interests of union bosses and the priorities of the university left.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Accession Could Strengthen Maritime Security

John Bolton's op-ed "America Has Gone Wobbly on Freedom of the Seas" (Sept. 29) is accurate in its core message that freedom of the seas is "fundamental to America's national security." But in critical ways his op-ed undermines the freedom of navigation he champions.

The current U.S. position on the Strait of Hormuz seems to have corrected from earlier "wobbles" and supports full freedom of navigation through Hormuz. But Mr. Bolton's attack on the Law of the Sea Convention undermines navigational freedom through straits as fought for and won by the U.S.

The fight for freedom of navigation through straits lasted more than a decade in Convention negotiations. The U.S. was the key player in these negotiations, making navigational freedom essential for acceptance.

The U.S. prevailed, and its positions were embodied in the Convention. Part III provides unequivocally for "freedom of navigation and overflight" through straits, including for military ships and aircraft. Proposals for controls and tolls by "straits states" such as Iran were rejected.

Mr. Bolton writes that "Ronald Reagan wisely rejected U.S. accession to the Law of the Sea Treaty." The real story is Reagan made clear that the U.S. would not be a party until his conditions for deep seabed mining were met. And these Reagan conditions were subsequently met.

Were President Trump to ask Senate leadership to move the Convention, it is likely it would be approved. American accession would be a huge win for navigational freedom and would emphasize to our North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies that ending Iranian and Houthi efforts to control Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb isn't a peculiarly American interest but is a shared concern for freedom of navigation.

JOHN NORTON MOORE
Keswick, Va.

Mr. Moore was a U.S. Ambassador for the Law of the Sea Convention.

Think of Artificial Intelligence Like a Weapon

Regarding Gabriel Rauterberg and Sarath Sanga's "Shareholders Should Pay for AI Dangers" (Oct. 1): The line "customers demand the capabilities that make the product so dangerous" immediately brought to mind weapons. When a weapon is used in a way that harms another person, the manufacturer isn't held liable, the user of the weapon is. In the case of AI, the person who is directing the AI agent to take harmful action should be held accountable. AI companies should be held accountable only under specific exceptions.

Access to AI should be restricted based on the capabilities available to the user. Access to weapons varies based on capability, a pocket knife can be purchased by anyone anywhere, firearms are restricted from certain groups, and missiles are only available to militaries and are meticulously accounted for. Not all AI is created equal.

SCOTT NOLEN
Tobyhanna, Pa.

Messrs. Rauterberg and Sanga contend that if we invest in AI companies, we have no product liability in the event of bankruptcy. What about losing our entire investment?

Extending shareholder liability beyond loss of investment is unjust because ordinary shareholders outside the company can't identify or correct flaws in the services rendered. With unlimited liability for events beyond shareholder control, who would then own shares in American AI companies?

Relying on the proposed government export schemes involving complex, rapidly changing technology only subjects Americans to the foolishness and whims of politicians. The market can do better. Users of foreign AI services may have no reliable recourse for harm done unless the foreign services provide it.

RICH BATEY
Aliso Viejo, Calif.

Americans Have Better Things to Think About

Bob Greene's op-ed "The Most Important People in an Election" (Sept. 28) quotes former Senator Bob Dole in a Chicago coffee shop, saying, "If you could figure out what the people in here are thinking right now, I bet not a one of them is thinking about politics." I believe Congress, together with the executive branch, is the most wasteful, dysfunctional and incompetent organization on earth.

Look at the way Republicans and Democrats treat each other. They call each other names, accuse each other of the nastiest things, try to undermine and embarrass each other at every turn.

Americans have more important things to think about—family, work, friends, community. They have better things to do than waste time thinking about an organization where the majority of politicians seem like they're there to enrich themselves at the expense of the taxpayer and keep the country divided.

Maybe term limits would help change the environment. I don't know. I'm too busy focusing on what's important and in my control.

PETER J. SCHMOLE
Los Angeles

Mr. Greene brought back a vivid memory of a Bob Dole presidential campaign event that I attended in Worcester, Mass., in 1996. Although I had no particular leaning toward candidate Dole, my company had tickets, and I agreed to come along.

We sat at a round table about a third of the way back in a room with roughly 300 others. During his remarks, Sen. Dole locked eyes with me. For a few seconds, he was talking directly, personally, exclusively to me.

I don't remember what he said, but I vividly recall how he made me feel: worthy of his attention, valued, listened to. I member feeling that he was a person I could trust. What a gift.

BARRY E. LUNDQUIST
Washington, N.H.

Nevada Basks in Solar Power

The article "Nevada Is Making Surprising Gains in Solar Energy" (U.S. News, Sept. 28) confirms what the data have shown for years: We have to use an economic case to spur adoption of solar energy. Nevada draws roughly a third of its power from the sun, and Gov. Joe Lombardo's pitch was about jobs, reliability and cost, which is a winning argument nationwide. Utility-scale projects like Nevada's Mosey Solar Project and the Purple Sage Energy Center bring a number of construction jobs and lease payments to rural communities that need both.

If solar is going to scale nationally at the pace our grid requires, the industry needs to make it easy to say yes with consistent messaging around savings, jobs and grid reliability. Nevada didn't adopt solar because of politics. It adopted solar because the economics were too good to ignore, and the state's leadership responded.

ALEXIS ABRAMSON
Dean, Columbia Climate School
New York

Justice Thomas's Good Turn

Regarding Jason Riley's "Clarence Thomas, Stalwart for the Constitution" (Upward Mobility, Sept. 30): A number of years ago, Justice Thomas accepted an invitation to speak before an economic club in Indiana. For security reasons, Justice Thomas accessed the dais through a service hallway.

At the conclusion of his remarks, he left through the same hallway, but he took the time to stop and speak with each service worker and to inquire about his or her family. I will never forget that kind gesture and frequently relate the experience to others who may have a mistaken impression of Justice Thomas.

CHARLES LILES
Indianapolis

Letters intended for publication should be emailed to wsj.ltrs@wsj.com. Please include your city, state and telephone number. All letters are subject to editing, and unpublished letters cannot be acknowledged.

Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"This was not my idea of family game night."

OPINION

Nikole Hannah-Jones vs. Randi Weingarten

By Joel Klein

Nikole Hannah-Jones's much-discussed New York Times article about the New York City public schools' decadelong failures to educate her daughter drew a telling response from the head of the national union that represents the city's teachers. "I was so saddened," Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, commented on the Bluesky social-media site. "Public schools must be places parents want to send their kids; where educators want to teach & where kids thrive. That is our North Star. We must learn what went wrong & address it so all students have what they deserve."

But Ms. Hannah-Jones's article makes clear "what went wrong." Her daughter, Najya, and her classmates "were languishing in classrooms with educators who did not take their academic potential seriously and largely refused to teach." And the failure to educate "poor Black children" isn't limited to Najya's school or even to the Hannah-Joneses' city: "There was nothing exceptional about what I witnessed at P.S. 307. I had observed and reported on similar educational malfeasance in Detroit, in Durham, in St. Louis, in Tuscaloosa, in Birmingham." Ms. Hannah-Jones writes.

'We must learn what went wrong,' says the head of the teachers union. She needs to look in the mirror.

If Ms. Weingarten wants to "learn what went wrong," she should start by looking in the mirror. Her union is the primary reason New York's public schools fail to educate so many children, especially poor black children.

Ms. Hannah-Jones chronicles a wide range of unprofessional practices at Najya's school. Teachers refused to check homework or administer mandatory assessments. They were contemptuous of their students, thinking they had no ability to learn. They made up grades. They stopped calling on Najya in class, making her "so frustrated that, waving her hand furiously, she began to blurt out the answers." They repeatedly ignored Ms. Hannah-Jones's efforts to find out how her daughter was doing. Some were absent for long periods. Kids were left without substitute teachers and allowed to run wild and assault one another.



DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES

A pro-charter-school protest in Brooklyn, N.Y.

A debacle of this scope can't be explained away by a lack of money or overwhelmed teachers—the usual excuses rolled out to defend failing schools by shifting blame to "the system." Najya's school is extremely well-resourced, spending more than $50,000 per pupil each year, and it has a low student-teacher ratio. More important, the transgressions Ms. Hannah-Jones documents had nothing to do with resources. They were intentionally harmful acts by uncaring teachers, who disrespected their students and refused to do the most basic and undemanding parts of their jobs. They didn't even try.

This kind of persistent, comprehensive and unchecked behavior can persist only in the absence of accountability. These teachers knew there would be no consequences because their jobs are protected by policies and practices artfully designed by their union.

Teachers unions are built around two nonnegotiable principles: that teachers must be tenured for life and that their compensation can't be based on performance. Taken together, they inflict enormous harm on schools like Najya's. When teachers are paid the same regardless of ability, the good ones almost always go to high-performing schools serving motivated students. Those who "cannot get hired at a 'better' school," as Ms. Hannah-Jones puts it, end up in schools like Najya's. These schools, having started with less talented and conscientious teachers, are then stuck with them despite the intolerable practices Ms. Hannah-Jones repeatedly observed in Najya's school.

Although fully aware of these harms, the unions remain implacable. Ms. Weingarten's predecessor Albert Shanker, the most revered and powerful teachers-union leader in history, eventually came to appreciate the problem but couldn't get his own union to change course. In a 1993 speech before the Pew Forum, he said: "The key is that unless there is accountability, we will never get the right system. As long as there are no consequences if kids or adults don't perform, as long as the discussion is not about education and student outcomes, then we're playing a game as to who has the power."

No union leader since Shanker's death in 1997 has adopted his position. They have kept playing the power game, a game they can't lose and the kids can't win.

Despite her devastating critique, Ms. Hannah-Jones remains focused on the problem and not the solution. She ignores the question of teacher accountability and fails to mention charter schools, an option showing real promise for the children she champions. For her, there are only two kinds of schools in New York—rich white ones and poor black ones—a description that inexplicably omits the almost 300 nonunionized charter schools in the city that educate 150,000 predominantly black and Latino children from low-income families.

Almost every one of these charter schools significantly outperforms Najya's school. Some, like the 59 Success Charter Schools, match and even do better than the city's highest-performing public schools. That's because these charter schools hold themselves and their teachers accountable for the performance of their students. Despite these good results—or rather because of them—the teachers unions, supported by lawmakers fearful of their power, have put a limit on the number of charter schools allowed in the city.

Ms. Hannah-Jones has performed a public service by sharing the heartbreaking story of her daughter's education and exhorting the rest of us to confront one of our nation's greatest failings—the abysmal education being provided to the large majority of poor black children. But she leaves it to readers to identify the root cause: the teachers unions.

The unions have no answer to her exposé. On the one hand, they can't defend the behaviors she documents without showing themselves to be cynical and uncaring. On the other hand, having created and enforced the rules that enabled those behaviors, they can't condemn them either. Worse yet, given Ms. Hannah-Jones's acknowledgment that these behaviors are commonplace and widespread, any condemnation by the union would create significant risk for its members.

That's why Ms. Weingarten is playing dumb and other union leaders are silent. As they always do, the unions will ignore the problem, let time diminish the memory and force of Ms. Hannah-Jones's article, and continue to play their power games to the detriment of poor black children in America. Shame on the rest of us if we allow that to happen.

Mr. Klein was New York City's schools chancellor, 2002-11.

Hurray for Higher Mortgage Rates



LIFE SCIENCE
By Allysia Finley

The average 30-year mortgage rate last week popped up to 7.28%, the highest in three years and more than double the average for 2020-21. The press tells us this bodes ill. Rising mortgage rates will make homes less affordable and could hurt the economy.

Just the opposite. Today's higher mortgage rates herald a return to normalcy and make homes more affordable over time. They are a sign of a healthy and strengthening economy.

The real risk isn't that the housing market will collapse because fewer people can afford homes, but that housing regulators relax underwriting standards to help borrowers take out bigger mortgages than they can afford. This is what the Biden team did when mortgage rates rose in 2022, which merely fueled higher prices and taxpayer risks.

The press presents the current 30-year mortgage rate as a historical aberration. It isn't. Millennials may not recall a time when rates were as high. For most of their adult lives, rates ranged between 2.5% and 5%. But that was the aberration.

The 30-year mortgage rate averaged 8% between 1971 and 2019 and hovered between 7% and 9% during most of the 1990s, when the economy grew 3.4% annually on average. Economic growth has generally been stronger during periods of higher mortgage rates.

One reason is that the 30-year mortgage rate tracks the 10-year Treasury rate. When the economy or inflation heats up, Treasury yields rise. Mortgage rates follow. In recent months, the economy and inflation have accelerated, pushing up mortgage rates.

After the 2008-09 financial panic and again during the pandemic, the Federal Reserve bought trillions of dollars in mortgage-backed securities along with Treasurys. This had the effect of suppressing mortgage rates. But as the Fed tightened, it reduced its portfolio of mortgage-backed securities, causing rates to drift up.

Banks have become more reluctant buyers of mortgage-backed securities, which has also pushed up rates. Reduced bank buying of mortgage-backed securities is a salutary development. During the pandemic, when the government sent trillions of dollars slushing through the economy, bank deposits ballooned. Banks invested a large share of their deposits in mortgage-backed securities because these were considered safe and relatively liquid assets. Plus, demand for business loans was weak. As interest rates rose, banks found themselves sitting on depreciating assets.

They're a sign of a healthy economy and a portent of lower home prices.

Silicon Valley Bank's large portfolio of mortgage-backed securities plunged in value, contributing to its ultimate failure in March 2023. Banks now demand a higher yield premium on mortgage-backed securities to compensate for the risk that rates will rise and their value will decline. This, too, has had the effect of pushing up mortgage rates.

Because of the strengthening economy, business loan demand has increased and banks now have many more productive ways to invest deposits. Bank loans to businesses have surged over the past year and now surpass their holdings of mortgage-backed securities. This is good, although competition for credit also boosts mortgage rates.

The silver lining for home buyers is that higher mortgage rates suppress demand, especially by investors. Higher interest rates combined with elevated home prices, plus slow growth in rents, make housing a less attractive investment.

The National Association of Realtors reports that 15% of sales in August were for a "non-primary residence," down from 21% a year ago. Investment properties and second homes made up only 4% of new mortgages guaranteed by Fannie Mae in the second quarter, compared with about 8% from 2019 to 2023.

Note that the decline preceded this summer's law restricting institutional investors from buying single-family homes. The Trump team deserves credit, however, for curbing government mortgage-relief programs that repeatedly waived payments for delinquent borrowers. Foreclosures rose as a result, by 47% over the past year for mortgages backed by the Federal Housing Administration.

This isn't a cause for panic. Foreclosures, suppressed by the Biden team, have merely returned to pre-pandemic levels. This has freed up more homes for buyers and returned demand and supply to a healthier equilibrium. "The ample supply of homes for sale on the market is giving homebuyers better opportunities to negotiate," the NAR reports.

The result: slower home-price appreciation. Wages are now growing at about twice as fast as home prices. If this trend continues, Americans will be able to save more for down payments and buying a home will become more affordable.

One danger is that the Trump team will panic over rising mortgage rates and reduce already lax underwriting requirements to help borrowers. An average FHA buyer today has a 691 credit score and 45% debt-to-income ratio yet makes only a 2% down-payment, according to the American Enterprise Institute's Ed Pinto and Tobias Peter.

Easing requirements further would only goose demand and drive up prices, while increasing the risk of future defaults and losses for taxpayers who stand behind most mortgages. Better to embrace the reversion to normal mortgage rates and focus on lifting worker wages.

Cornell, Letitia James and the New York Ethics Code

By Justin Dillon

Stephen Covey famously advised that one should always "begin with the end in mind." New York's attorney general seems to have taken that a bit too literally.

On Thursday Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that she was appointing Letitia James as a special prosecutor to investigate the alleged 2024 gang rape at Cornell University. In her statement announcing the appointment, Ms. Hochul said that she had "lost faith in the Tompkins County DA's ability to fairly oversee" the case and that "the young woman at the center of this case deserves to know that every fact will be examined and justice pursued."

The signal she is sending couldn't be clearer and goes well beyond the usual efforts of a politician to please her constituents: There is only one acceptable outcome here, and I expect Attorney General James to find it.

Ms. James doubtless understands the assignment, having run for office in 2018 on a platform in which she proudly proclaimed she would go after Donald Trump and then eagerly proceeded to do so. Public statements she has already made about the case raise serious questions about whether state ethics rules permit her to participate in the case at all.

On Sept. 28, three days before Ms. Hochul announced the appointment, Ms. James posted the following statement on both X and Facebook: "What this young woman has been forced to endure is horrific and unacceptable. I'm holding her in my heart and in my prayers. To her, and to all survivors: you're not alone. We stand with you."

As an initial matter, we don't actually know what "this young woman has been forced to endure." The point of the investigation would be to find that out. The New York Times obtained documents from the university's investigation, which present a complicated picture: Jane Doe, as her lawsuit identifies her, initially texted one of the now-accused men that "non [sic] of the sexual stuff was illegal" and that she enjoyed being with him and one of his fraternity brothers. She accused them of rape only after being disinvited from the fraternity's Halloween party.

Nor—to put it mildly—do prosecutors publicly proclaim that they hold accusers in their "heart" and "prayers." And consider Ms. James's declaration that she is on the side of "survivors." Whether the accuser is a "survivor" is the very question that an investigation is meant to answer. To start by characterizing her that way is to turn the burden of proof on its head. Ms. James's job is to determine whether there is probable cause to believe that someone may have committed a crime, and whether she can persuade a jury of his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. It isn't to "stand with" either side.

Rule 3.6(a) of the New York Rules of Professional Conduct prohibits a lawyer from making an "extrajudicial statement that the lawyer knows or reasonably should know will be disseminated by means of public communication and will have a substantial likelihood of materially prejudicing an adjudicative proceeding in the matter." Rule 3.6(b) lists examples of such statements, including "any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of a defendant or suspect in a criminal matter that could result in incarceration."

Prejudicial statements by New York's attorney general should disqualify her from the investigation.

Almost two decades ago, violations of this ethics provision played a role in the disbarment of Mike Nifong, district attorney of Durham County, N.C., who proclaimed the guilt of accused students in the Duke lacrosse case before undertaking any investigation of the facts. That case was taken over by the state attorney general, who dropped the charges. Years later the accuser publicly apologized for fabricating the charges.

Ms. James is a savvy operator and knows she is playing with house money. Her public statements about Mr. Trump didn't lead to either her disqualification from his case or any consequences from the New York State Bar, and she expects this time is unlikely to be different. That may be why, when asked about her tweet at a Friday press conference, Ms. James did not take the opportunity to walk back or "clarify" her comments. Instead, she responded with regal disregard: "I will not comment on a Facebook post."

So we are left with a Javert problem: Like the blinded-by-righteousness police inspector who mercilessly pursues Jean Valjean in "Les Misérables," Ms. James will begin her own pursuit of seven young men who have already been punished by Cornell (some severely) and who have reasonably believed for almost two years that they could take the local prosecutor's declination at face value. We can only hope that somehow this case will come to a just end.

Mr. Dillon, a former federal prosecutor, is a partner at Dillon PLLC, where he represents students and professors in campus misconduct cases.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
PUBLISHED SINCE 1889 BY DOW JONES & COMPANY

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Founded June 10, 1847

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EDITORIALS

Endorsements in Illinois Congressional Districts 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10



Clockwise from top left: U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley, U.S. Rep. Sean Casten, state Rep. La Shawn Ford, U.S. Rep. Brad Schneider, Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss and former U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean. **CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY BRIAN CASSELLA, JOHN J. KIM, EILEEN T. MESLAR AND E. JASON WAMBSGANS**

Today, the Tribune editorial board continues its endorsements for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The 5th District, a Democratic stronghold, is a contest between the 67-year-old Democrat Mike Quigley, an incumbent of some 17 years standing and also now a candidate for mayor of Chicago, and 72-year-old Republican Tommy Hanson, a small business owner in the realm of commercial real estate.

This board first endorsed Quigley in his initial 2009 special primary election to succeed none other than Rahm Emanuel, lauding Quigley's prior record as both fiscally competent and a voice of reason on the Cook County Board. We've endorsed him several times since then, and recently have been having a lot of lively conversations with him in regard to the mayoral race, wherein he seems fully engaged.

More to come there, obviously. We specifically asked Quigley Friday about the double-dipping conflict and he said it was a fair question, but argued that far-apart filing deadlines "make the situation tough" and that there are "a lot of governors and senators also running for president," which is true. "I am asking for people's votes for Congress," he said. (He will also be asking for Chicagoans' vote in the mayoral race.)

We did not endorse Hanson in the Republican primary. Indeed, we did not endorse any candidate in that race since we judged none of them credible, although Hanson, for the record, was the best of the group.

Since then, Hanson has told us that "tariffs are a good thing," a notion with which we do not agree. He also said he would be "asking every member to sign a pledge to reduce the deficit, pay down debt and save existing programs and affirm committing to the pledge, or they resign," which strikes us as tortured logic. He also supports abolishing the federal income tax, which is impractical, at least as far as our eyes can see. We did appreciate Hanson's comments on creating a business-friendly environment, reining in government fraud and abuse, and his interest in sustainability.

It seems to us that given his length and quality of service, Quigley is entitled to hedge his mayoral bets with his current job and appropriately time his exit to best serve the district.

The 6th Congressional District, which includes southern Cook County and eastern DuPage County, as well as part of the Far Southwest Side of Chicago, is a contest between the 54-year-old incumbent Sean Casten, whom we endorsed in the Democratic primary earlier this year and in the 2024 general election, and Niki Conforti, 63, whom we endorsed in the Republican primary in February.

Conforti, an energy consultant and demonstrable expert in that field, is a very solid choice for Republican readers.

She told us that "the single biggest issue facing residents and businesses in the 6th District is affordability, with the high cost of living driven primarily by skyrocketing energy and healthcare expenses." By way of a solution, she said she would "push for legislation that cuts burdensome regulations in the energy sector and limits the renewable energy component to increase grid resilience and lower utility bills." Additionally, she asserted she would "leverage (her) professional background in healthcare to enforce medical billing transparency, which will foster free-market competition and drive down prices for patients, while also incentivizing the return of manufacturing jobs to the 6th District to stimulate our local economy."

That all sounds good to us, but we judge Conforti squishy on matters of free trade, which is important to us. More importantly, Casten is one of our favorite Democrats in Congress, not least because he marries the needs of his district with an intellectual curiosity of unusual distinction.

He is a business-friendly Democrat on the moderate wing of the party, but also aware of the less prosaic parts of his job. "Our challenge is to provide hope," he told us. "To let people see how our government works and trust that their officials are working for them."

We also were taken with Casten's answer to our question about immigration enforcement: "I have always been fond of Ronald Reagan's description of America as a "tall proud city... teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace — a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors, and the doors were open to anyone with the will and heart to get here."

That dodges the hardest aspects of our question, for sure, but we think it's the right philosophical framework and very much something in which Republicans used to believe.

The 7th District, a deep blue spot long represented by Danny K. Davis, who announced last year that he would not seek reelection after nearly 30 years in office, was another fascinating primary battle featuring a Democratic slate packed with talent.

The winner in the Democratic primary was state Rep. La Shawn Ford, 54, who has represented the 8th District on Chicago's West Side since 2007 and (crucially) was endorsed by Davis. Ford was by no means our first choice, however; indeed, we found him mostly disengaged in our endorsement meeting even as others articulated their passion to serve this district in Congress, including Dr. Thomas Fisher, our choice for the Democratic Party nod, and such honorable and hard-working candidates as Richard Boykin and Jazmin J. Robinson.

But Ford does not face credible opposition in retired farmer, pilot and Republican hard-liner Chad Koppie, 88, a perennial candidate who has said he does not believe Joe Biden was duly elected president, which is disqualifying for us.

We enjoyed our endorsement meeting for the 8th, mainly a northwest suburban district now with Democratic leanings, featuring two candidates we endorsed in the primaries, Democrat Melissa Bean and Republican Jennifer Davis.

Bean, 64, survived a bruising primary battle with a lot of attacks from her left and for her perceived support for Israel in its battle against Hamas. This time around, Bean told us that "this is a very urgent moment for this country with a lot of things we never thought we would see," a reference to Donald Trump's rejection of longstanding American norms. "I've been hearing a lot of anxiety and concerns," she went on "about the lack of checks and balances, but also about how young people are feeling very hopeless." She said that addressing that lack of hope would be an important task and she argued that the new Congress will need to set about passing laws so as to "codify" what used to be accepted norms. We agree that this will be a better use of lawmakers' time than an endless series of investigations.

Davis, an energetic and smart businesswoman in the tech industry, is one of the better political outsiders running for elected office in the state, and if Democrats had gone with a far-left choice instead of Bean we would have had no trouble endorsing this Republican moderate and mother of 10. The 55-year-old had many interesting things to say about the need for AI controls, and she comes with greater tech expertise than most candidates. She also said the difference between her and Bean is that she is someone "who has signed the front of people's paychecks and not just the back."

Fair enough. But we've endorsed Bean, who represented the 8th for three terms beginning in 2005 until she was defeated by Republican Joe Walsh in the 2010 election, several times before.

We admire her pragmatism, her principles and her guts.

We have enjoyed our several encounters with the ambitious Daniel Biss, currently the 49-year-old mayor of Evanston and a formidable intellectual with growing political maturity. Biss, who was gunning for votes from the party's left flank in the Democratic primary, was not our choice in the heavily contested contest (we endorsed state Rep. Laura Fine), so we were glad he came to make his case to us again.

We were more impressed this time around as Biss, who has served in Springfield and also run unsuccessfully for governor, has pivoted back toward the center — hardly unusual in a general election. "I believe to my core that American government is stuck," he told us, describing the current Congress as "the least productive in American history" and outlining what could reasonably be termed a centrist growth agenda with a progressive flavor, which is political real estate he's occupied while in office. "I'm going to be focused on getting things unstuck," he said, "so we can focus on the deep issues facing the American people." Biss told us he did not identify as a Democratic socialist and that there were many things in the DSA platform with which he disagreed.

He also said "he had taken on big projects, sometimes to my political detriment," an apparent reference to the new Northwestern University football stadium, a local decision of his that we supported. He also spoke eloquently on his big-tent vision for the Democratic Party, arguing that a massive country that has settled on a two-party system needs to embrace healthy disagreement within the ranks of those parties. He also told us he respects the need for federal agents enforcing immigration laws, even though he has called for ICE, as currently configured, to go. "We need to start again from scratch," he said.

Biss does not have strong Republican opposition. His opponent, John Elleson, the 64-year-old pastor of Lakewood Chapel in Arlington Heights, won our endorsement in the Republican primary, by virtue of his apparent sincerity and decency. He displayed that in our endorsement meeting, striking a moderate tone and saying he would bring "the forgotten people to the forefront" if he were elected to Congress. He also saw the historic pictures of Chicago workers on the walls of our boardroom and noted that the city was built by hard-toiling, blue-collar Chicagoans and should "stay that way."

"I'm not a big government person," he said, "and I'm not interested in this socialism thing. I think the more people can keep in their pocket, the more you can incentivize them."

Fair enough; we agree with Elleson that government spending is out of control. But even for those with Republican leanings, the political neophyte would not be the right choice against Biss, whose drive and skills will better serve this district and, we hope, get things unstuck in the next Congress.

The 10th District is mostly made up of the northern Chicago suburbs and has been represented by incumbent Rep. Brad Schneider, 65, since 2017. Like many moderate Democrats who have affirmed Israel's right to exist and defend itself, Schneider had to withstand a primary challenge from his left but managed to do so with relative ease.

"Affordability is the most pressing issue in the 10th District because it reaches into every part of daily life," he told us. He noted that "families talk about the cost of groceries, housing, utilities, childcare, and health care. Small business owners face many of those same pressures, along with uncertainty that makes it harder to set prices, hire workers, and plan for the future."

We agree with Schneider that many of Trump's policies have made things harder for families and small businesses. "We cannot claim to be lowering costs while imposing unpredictable tariffs that make materials and everyday goods more expensive," he told us. "As a member of the Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee, I have worked to reclaim Congress's authority over trade and challenge tariffs that hurt families and businesses without advancing a clear national interest."

We have endorsed Schneider several times before and think he has effectively represented this district.

The Republican candidate is 92-year-old Carl Lambrecht, who has not mounted much of a campaign nor been responsive to us. Lambrecht did not face an opponent in the primary. In the general, the best choice for voters in the 10th could not be clearer.

ON THIS DAY 76 YEARS AGO PENSIONS, PRICES AND PRODUCTION

Sound advice on the vexing pension problem was offered by Sumner H. Slichter, the Harvard economist, in an address to the American Meat Institute in Chicago. Prof. Slichter pointed out that in the production race with Russia it is folly to pension workers at 65 when they want to stay on their jobs and are capable of doing so.

Industry might be encouraged to keep less productive older men at work by a system of government subsidies, the economist said. He argued that such subsidies would be no more expensive than pensions and would raise the national production by several billion dollars' worth of goods annually.

The mania for compulsory pensions at 65 has been promoted chiefly by labor union bosses and the New Deal politicians. The labor bosses want pension plans which will force their members to stay obedient; ...

Pensions cannot be provided by waving a wand or making a bookkeeping entry. They must be paid by the people who are producing goods and services. The more workers who are forced into idleness, the less goods will be available. When goods are scarce, prices rise and the purchasing power of pensions declines.

Sen. Taft properly has made the point that if a steel worker is entitled to get $100 a month pension at 65, so is a waiter, or any other worker. ...

The liberalized law and the numerous union sponsored pension plans will put more and more workers into idleness, whether or not they are capable of earning their living. ...

Compulsory retirement on a pension is much like paying men for leaf raking or doing other useless jobs invented by the WPA. If there was an excuse for it in the days of the depression, there is none now, when there is a shortage of labor and a desperate need for a high rate of production for military purposes.

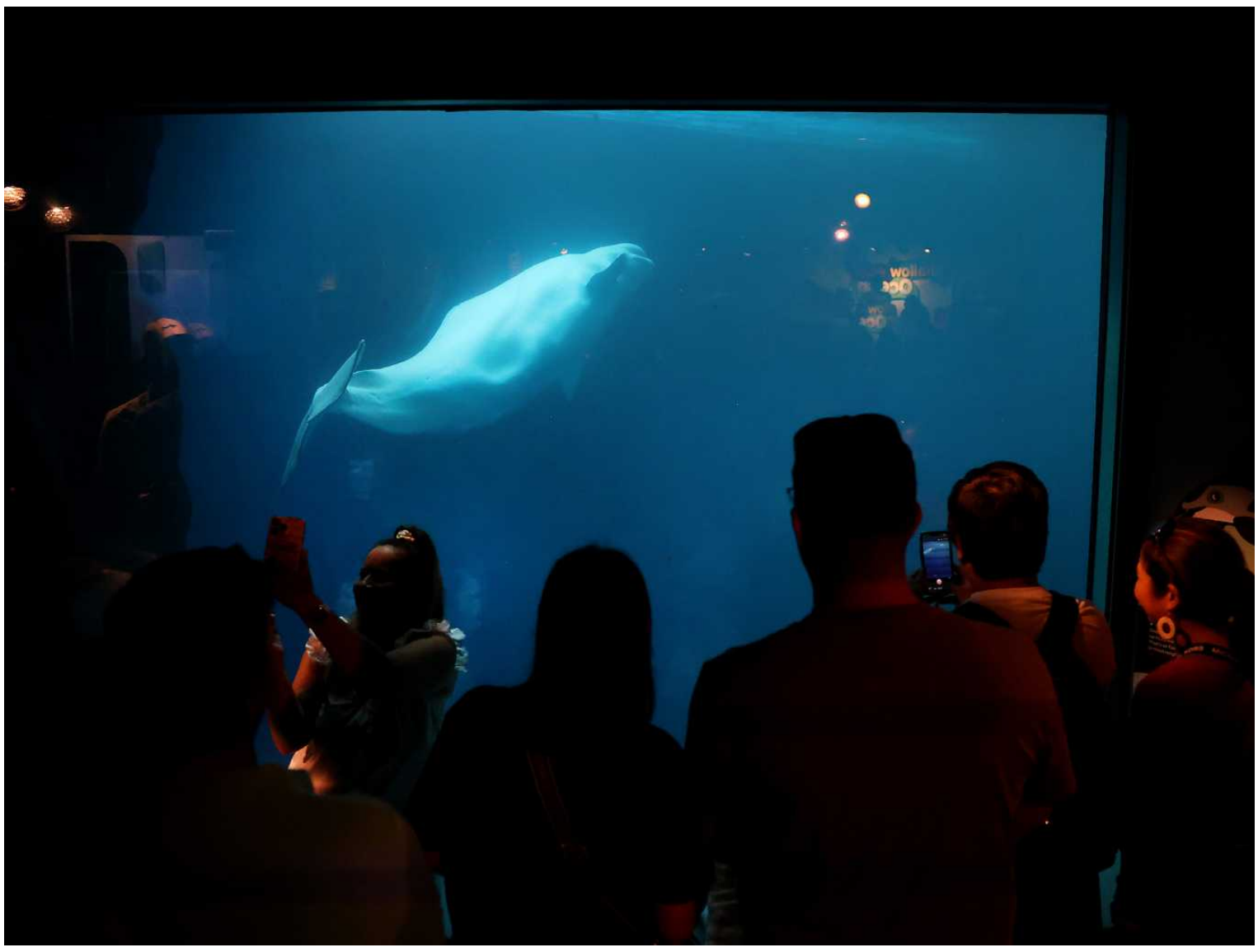
Industrial and union labor leaders, as well as members of congress, should reëxamine their thinking in this field. If the production of goods and services is not kept up by making the best possible use of the labor force, the $200 a month pensions which the CIO is now demanding by 1960 will not buy subsistence for anybody.

Tribune editorial board, Oct. 5, 1950

OPINION

The time for keeping beluga whales captive for our entertainment has passed

By Bob Kustra and Jenny Kustra-Quinn
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE



People watch as a beluga whale passes by at Shedd Aquarium in Chicago on July 9. **CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

The tragic deaths of four beluga whales at Shedd Aquarium, three of which were transferred as rescues from Canada's Marineland and one that was a longtime resident, call attention to the injustice and suffering these intelligent, social animals face when taken from their natural homes and confined to small aquarium spaces.

Beluga whales deserve better, and the time for imprisoning them for our entertainment or "education" has passed.

The Shedd's history with belugas goes back to 1991, when the aquarium built its Oceanarium and introduced whales, as well as dolphins, captured from the wild.

The capture of belugas involves motorboats circling them in shallow waters where they hunt and throwing large nets over them.

This is done to the dismay of experts and activists who have fought mightily to stop the efforts, arguing that imprisoning these marine mammals is not about animal welfare, education or advancement of science but rather a means of increasing paying visitors to grow a budget, staff and profits.

For the Shedd, the plan worked — at first. The public couldn't wait to get a look at these unusual whales, and attendance almost instantly doubled.

This encouraged the Shedd to expand its beluga pod. In 1992, the aquarium announced its intention to capture four more whales, winning a court battle in which animal rights groups tried in vain to prevent the Shedd from adding to this carnival attraction. The four whales were taken from the northern Canadian waters of Hudson Bay and dumped into their small tank. Two weeks later, two of them died within minutes of each other after being given an anti-parasite drug.

Since those early days, the Shedd continued to expand and profit from its beluga and dolphin displays.

Zoos and aquariums often rely on the excuse that they are saving species from extinction. Although that might be true in some cases, it does not apply to belugas worldwide.

They are considered endangered in Alaska's Cook Inlet, but in general, their existence is far from threatened across the Arctic. The Red List of Endangered Species compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the most comprehensive source on global extinction, lists belugas as being of "least concern" and claims there are "likely more than 200,000."

There is no legitimate reason for us to deprive belugas of the right to "flourish." That's the word University of Chicago professor Martha C. Nussbaum used in her book, "Justice for Animals: A Collective Responsibility." Board members and staff at the Shedd should read Nussbaum's proposal for giving the creatures of the earth and water a chance to flourish, enjoy good health, use their senses and imagination, play and have pleasure, and have relationships with each other and other species.

That is only possible in the vast open ocean, where belugas, called the "Canaries of the Sea," can live out their long lives, typically 60 years, in their complex social pods. Compare captive belugas forced to swim in circles in confined spaces to wild belugas that have annual open-water migratory travels of thousands of miles.

In hunting for food such as Arctic cod, they can dive up to 3,000 feet. The Shedd tank is around 30 feet deep, and the whales do not hunt but are fed just as we feed death row prisoners.

That analogy is not much of an exaggeration given the tragedies at the Shedd and other aquariums, including the many captive-born infants that have died. Even the Georgia Aquarium, the largest in the U.S. and a global leader in the world of aquariums, has lost at least six belugas since it opened its waters to these white whales.

It is also worth noting that a 2019 Canadian law prohibits breeding whales for nonresearch purposes, but there are no federal protections here. The U.S. aquariums that have accepted the Canadian belugas have not agreed to abandon breeding operations.

That's why the transfers are not heroic or humane, according to Lori Marino, a neuroscientist specializing in animal behavior and founder of The Whale Sanctuary Project.

She claims that transferring belugas from one captive environment to another so they can possibly be bred is not a heroic or humane act to be celebrated. In fact, the collapse of Canada's Marineland should be a turning point that ends the cycle of breeding and captivity.

There is no doubt marine mammals are challenged today by climate change, pollution and contaminants; overfishing by humans; and noise disturbance from ships.

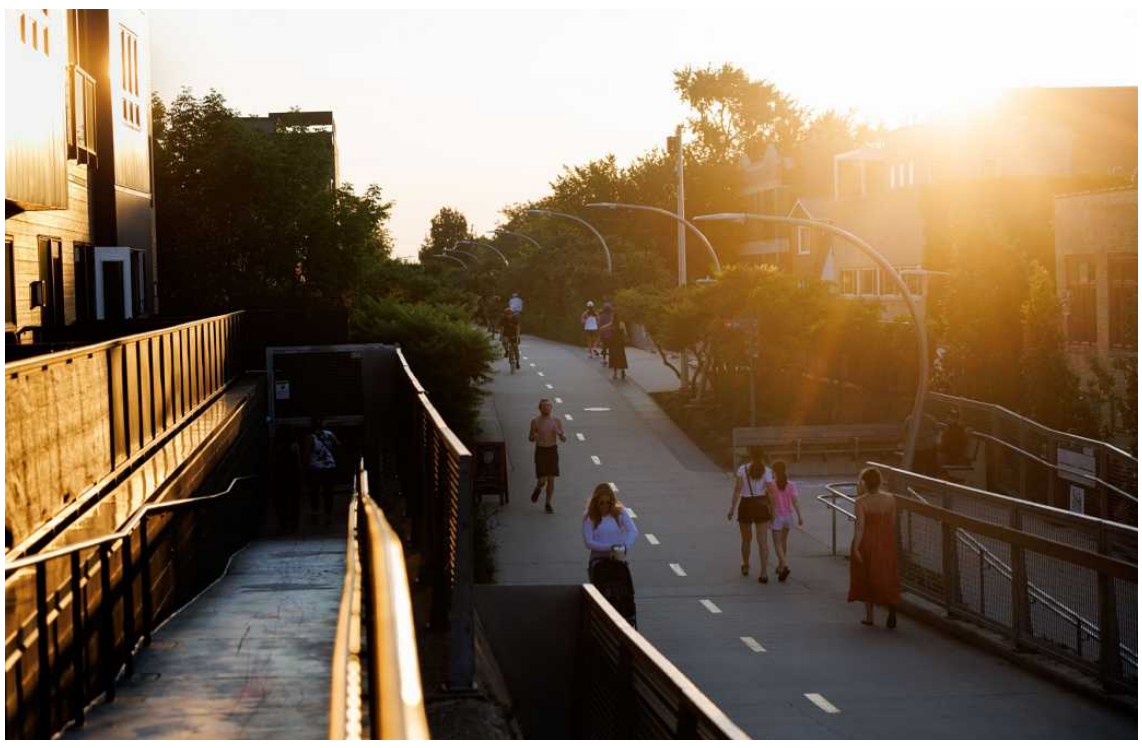
If the Shedd wants to save whales and dolphins, it should join international efforts to bring attention to their plight and enlist Illinois' congressional delegation to build legislative and political support for stronger efforts to protect these animals.

In the meantime, the Shedd should not accept any more belugas and should commit to ending its breeding efforts. It should also phase out its acquisition and breeding of dolphins, working toward the goal of giving all marine mammals the freedom to flourish in their native waters.

Bob Kustra was an Illinois lieutenant governor, state legislator and president of Boise State University; he now hosts "Reader's Corner" on Boise State Public Radio. Jenny Kustra-Quinn, his daughter, is a writer and editor based in the Chicago area and president of Kustra-Quinn Communications, a public relations and communications consulting firm.

How Chicago can tackle its pensions, other fiscal challenges

By Mary Wagoner
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE



People run and cycle on The 606 trail Aug. 14, 2025, in Chicago. **ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Chicago is a city that knows how to make a comeback. It rebuilt after fire, reinvented its waterfront and turned a once-abandoned rail corridor into one of the most celebrated modern urban parks in the country. So, when our city is struggling financially like it is right now, we know we have what it takes to roll up our sleeves, do the hard work and get things moving in the right direction.

The Civic Committee recently released its new strategic plan for the region, and at its core is a fundamental belief that growth for all is paramount to Chicago's success as a city. Chicago must grow its economy, attract businesses and residents, and create broad opportunity that lifts the whole region and kickstarts a virtuous cycle of growth. A cornerstone of growth for all in Chicago is ensuring fiscal stability at the city level.

The city has a long way to go on this front. Chicago faces structural budget deficits driven by rising personnel costs as well as pension and debt obligations, which now consume 37 cents of every non-grant budget dollar. Last year's budget gap was roughly $1.2 billion; this year's is projected to be nearly $885 million. The city traditionally has addressed these challenges with short-term (and less painful) fixes such as using tax increment financing surpluses to plug budget gaps or borrowing to cover ordinary operating expenses. Unfortunately, patching the gaps year after year with one-time maneuvers does not make the problem smaller — it makes it more expensive.

The city cannot continue to limp from budget to budget without addressing the root causes of its fiscal issues. It must address those challenges head-on to put the city on a more sustainable fiscal trajectory.

In that spirit, the Civic Committee convened a group of business leaders and subject matter experts over the past year and a half to study the root causes of the city's fiscal issues and develop recommendations for addressing them. We recently released those recommendations in the in-depth report "Chicago's Fiscal Future: A Roadmap to Reform." We looked at a myriad of issues, but broadly, they clustered around three themes: pensions, process and governance, and expenditure reductions.

Chicago's pension problems are well known: The city has $36.6 billion in unfunded pension obligations, and they are collectively only 28% funded, a situation that is among the worst in the country. Chicago's police officers and firefighters put themselves on the line for this city, and they deserve a secure and dignified retirement. But the way to honor that commitment is to keep the system solvent, not to add obligations the city has no ability to fund. Yet only a year ago, legislators did exactly that, increasing pension benefits for police and firefighters. Our recommendations include not increasing benefits except where required for legal compliance; implementing a voluntary retiree buyout program that could reduce required contributions over the next three decades by more than $700 million; and consolidating the city's four pension funds into one fund similar to what the state did a few years ago, which could save between $680 million and $3.5 billion over the next three decades.

Under process and governance, four issues stand out. On debt management, adopt a more conservative debt target, structure borrowing to leading practices and reserve debt for capital and infrastructure investments only. The City Council's recent vote to increase the number of votes required to issue debt from a simple majority to a three-fifths vote is a great example of improving debt management. On the City Council's role in the budget process, move up the budget deadline, require the budget office to share data and give the City Council a properly resourced budget office.

On police settlements and judgments, reform risk management and change how the city budgets and pays for these costs. On TIF districts, implement comprehensive policies around creation, implementation and evaluation of TIF; explore creative solutions to fund economic development in the future; and improve transparency and governance around the declaration of TIF surpluses.

Finally, there is expenditure reduction. Historically, annual budget debates focus almost entirely on revenues and tax hikes while spending receives far less scrutiny.

As a result, expenditures tend to increase largely unchecked — for example, personnel costs increased 42% from 2019 to 2026 despite the number of employees declining. Consulting firm EY highlighted personnel costs as an area of potential expense reduction in its 2025 report, which identified up to $1.4 billion in actionable operational efficiencies, yet nearly all its ideas were shelved. The city must do the hard work of right-sizing its workforce, modernizing back-office operations and implementing the cost savings already on the table.

Before the city asks anyone to contribute more, it must demonstrate it has addressed what is actually broken. That sequencing is deliberate. Too often, revenue increases have served as a way to get through another budget year without fixing what drives the problem.

If the city addresses the root causes of its fiscal issues, it will provide substantial benefit. Every dollar freed from the weight of past obligations is a dollar available for parks, transit, public safety, and the kind of investment that makes businesses want to stay and people want to put down roots — the very conditions that turn fiscal discipline into growth for all.

Chicago has overcome big fiscal hurdles before and can do it again now if our leaders are willing to make the hard choices necessary to do so.

Mary Wagoner is the vice president of state and local finance for the Civic Committee.

OPINION

Trump's 'truth' betrayed by White House chatbot



Clarence Page



Joe Gebbia, co-founder of Airbnb and head of the National Design Studio, speaks during the America.gov launch event on Sept. 29 in Washington. **KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY**

Since President Donald Trump displays a ferocious disdain for any suggestion he could be wrong about anything, I hope he will not try to consult the artificial intelligence fact-checker he has unleashed against himself.

Last week, the White House unveiled America.gov, a search tool it declared to be no less than "the unified digital front door to the Federal Government."

This gizmo, a White House news release said, will usher in a "fundamentally different relationship between the people and the Federal Government, defined by simplicity, speed, accuracy, security and respect for the individual."

Type "America.gov" in a web browser and you're ushered to a simply designed chatbot that offers to help you find government information and interact with administrative agencies.

Speaking to the press, Trump adjudged it to be "damn good."

After test-driving the chatbot, reporters were inclined to agree, finding it did a pretty good job at debunking Trump's oft-repeated falsehoods on topics such as election fraud, tariffs, inflation, illegal immigration, climate change and, perhaps most painfully for Trump's ego, who won the 2020 election.

A New York Times report, for example, found the chatbot contradicted Trump's contention that foreign companies bear the cost of import tariffs. It is, in fact, America.gov confirmed, American consumers who do so.

The chatbot also contradicted Trump's claims about U.S. election fraud. Our elections are generally safe, it said, and fraud prosecutions are exceedingly rare. It also punctured Trump's exaggerations of illegal border crossings during President Joe Biden's administration and his doubletalk on the current rate of consumer inflation.

Americans who regularly buy groceries or fill their gas tanks don't need a chatbot to debunk many of Trump's claims. But other issues are more complicated, requiring reference to nonpartisan and unbiased authorities, such as the Congressional Budget Office. It's nice to know that America.gov cited the CBO when the Times reporter asked about Trump's signature One Big Beautiful Bill Act, confirming that the law will add trillions to the deficit and "cause more than 10 million people to lose their health insurance."

It even agreed that the law "on average made the poorest people in America even poorer and the richest people in America even richer."

Considering how pointedly the chatbot underscores talking points the Democrats have been trying to make all along, searchers have been bemused to find the chatbot says it avoids answering questions it deems political.

But it supports some of Trump's proclamations when it can cite an official government source to do so.

For example, the chatbot calls what most of us have known as the Gulf of Mexico the "Gulf of America (formerly the Gulf of Mexico)."

The website's answers are based on published government sources, the site says, and its FAQ page invites users to "review those sources yourself."

One wonders how long such candor will last on the America.gov page, although Trump's ability to enchant his followers has depended more on the bright lights of television cameras and the algorithms of social media than on the well-sourced reports in the print media.

Still, the Democrats cannot hide their relief at seeing Trump's new chatbot as a providential generator of talking points.

"Finally, a straight answer from someone in the Trump administration," wrote Sen. Adam Schiff, a California Democrat, along with a screenshot of America.gov saying that Trump lost the 2020 election.

You may recall how Schiff has routinely asked Trump's judicial nominees at confirmation hearings to affirm the 2020 election results. Some of the nominees meekly declined to give a straight answer, apparently out of fear of incurring Trump's wrath over any admission that Biden's election was legitimate.

If you're a Republican who wants to remain employed in Trump's Washington, you need to show absolute loyalty to the president, even if that means denying the plain truth.

Can facts compete with the MAGA wall of denialism? We'll find out in the coming midterm elections and the presidential contest that follows.

Email Clarence Page at cptimee@gmail.com.

Voice of the people

Long-term costs of data centers

Elk Grove Village Mayor Craig B. Johnson's recent defense of data centers presents a fundamentally flawed economic development narrative ("When judging data center incentives, don't ignore the revenue," Sept. 30). While he touts short-term revenue, his ledger ignores the long-term, structural costs these facilities impose on local communities.

First, using job creation to justify data center subsidies is a sleight of hand. While $1.2 billion in construction permits is impressive, they're short-term bumps in revenue. This masks the reality that data centers are essentially ghost towns once operational. They consume prime industrial real estate but employ only a small number of permanent staff members, meaning taxpayers are often subsidizing millions of dollars per permanent job. Furthermore, major tech companies rely on specialized, traveling construction crews. The economic multiplier effect largely leaves town when the concrete dries.

Second, the mayor's claim that Class 6B incentives don't harm homeowners ignores the basic math of Illinois property taxes. When a data center's assessed value is artificially slashed, the local tax levy doesn't shrink. The burden simply shifts onto everyone else, driving up residential tax bills for 12 to 24 years.

This is compounded when tax increment financing districts are used, such as the one Elk Grove Village created for the Vulcan Construction Materials site in 2022. While the mayor suggests schools stand to benefit, it should be noted TIFs divert new tax revenue to pay for project costs for up to 23 years, meaning schools and municipal services wait decades for the promised windfall. Worse, once operational, these operators frequently deploy aggressive legal teams to appeal their property assessments year after year, forcing municipalities to spend taxpayer dollars defending their own revenue.



The EdgeConneX CHI03 data center is a 167,000-square-foot facility constructed as part of a Chicago-area campus. **STACEY WESCOTT/ CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Finally, while data centers don't add students to classrooms, they place enormous, invisible strains on our infrastructure. Their construction increases wear and tear on local roads from construction vehicles. Once completed, they are massive consumers of municipal water for cooling and place unprecedented demands on the electrical grid. These upgrades are eventually paid for by everyday ratepayers.

Subsidizing heavily automated server farms that hollow out industrial parks, generate negligible employment and strain our grid is not the "pro-growth" policy our region needs.

— Donald Guisinger, Strong Towns Oak Forest

Will data centers pay fair share?

Elk Grove Village Mayor Craig B. Johnson in his op-ed completely ignores the higher cost of water and electricity that his constituents will face subsidizing these monstrosities. Will he demand that data centers pay their fair share for the high volume of water and electricity they use? Or is it too late?

— Ken Perez, Wood Dale

Department of Justice's credibility

I am hopeful that with the recent focus on the "Broadway Six," in particular due to the reporting of Tribune reporter Jason Meisner, the public will begin to understand that when prosecutors go unchecked, victims face extreme consequences for which they have very little redress.

In recent years, the credibility of the U.S. Department of Justice has fallen to all-time depths as it has been weaponized against those with whom it disagrees, both political and nonpolitical, taking up positions not supported by the facts or even the law.

This is on full display in Chicago. U.S. District Judge April Perry is being asked to consider disciplinary action against the U.S. attorney's office for alleged misconduct in the grand jury investigation and prosecution of the "Broadview Six."

No justice system can function effectively if there are components within it that disregard the rules and mechanisms of checks and balance. The public relies upon this system to keep prosecutors in line, to punish misconduct and to send a message that misconduct cannot be tolerated.

Misconduct is anathema to justice.

— Michael Segal, U.S. National Title Services, Chicago

Celebrate parking meter deal? No.

Regarding Chicago's parking meter deal, what a demonstration of ineptness and buffoonery — this is the 2026 edition of the 2008 disaster.

As a Chicago resident and motorist, I have one simple question: Will it cost me less to park?

Nothing I've read about this deal — a transfer fee, percentages of a future sale and net income, a "city wallet" program and 25- to 50-cent-per-hour surcharges for non-Chicagoans — suggests that it will benefit the great majority of drivers in Chicago.

And as for the City Council's self-congratulation over the deal: same-o, same-o.

A final question: Where's Mayor Brandon Johnson?

— John Mjoseth, Chicago

I support the arts in the city

Thank you for the editorial regarding suburbanite parking in Chicago ("Chicago may charge suburbanites more to park. How neighborly," Oct. 1).

I am a suburbanite who supports the Joffrey Ballet, the Chicago Architectural Center and the Art Institute with subscriptions to their events. I do attempt to take public transportation when I can, but that is not always feasible, since as the editorial mentions, timing for public transportation is sparse on the weekends.

For example, a friend and I have Joffrey season tickets for its Sunday matinees, but trying to coordinate Metra and "L" train times with that is difficult. Although driving into town is stressful, we brave it by going down early to enjoy a great lunch at Italian Village before the show. And yes, we look for cheap parking because we're already supporting businesses and cultural events.

Also, because we are both in our 70s, we cannot park too far from the venue just to find an extremely cheap parking lot; we would then need a taxi to get to the Lyric Opera House.

In short, considering our generous monetary contributions to the city of Chicago, asking us to pay more for parking really takes the cake!

— Dianne Casuto, Lake Forest

Naperville's welcoming vibe

Thank you for saying "Naperville has a very nice downtown" in the editorial "Chicago may charge suburbanites more to park. How neighborly." I have long believed that part of the reason for Naperville's success is welcoming all with free parking in garages and ground-level lots and on the street.

Overnight parking also is available for those who would rather not drive themselves home at the end of the evening.

— Roch Shipley, Naperville

Merits of 'traditional wives'

It's too bad that we're now back to defending being a traditional wife now, given the stupid label "tradwife" ("The views of tradwife influencers are evolving. It's a complicated victory," Oct. 1). Children raised by a loving mother are usually better off than their parents taking on the risks of bad daycare and latchkey children. Much-needed volunteer work is done by traditional wives.

Yes, it's good for a traditional wife to have a backup financial plan, but please don't denigrate traditional wives. They don't deserve it and work just as hard as women working outside the home.

— Alice Marcus Solovy, Highland Park

Note to readers

With Halloween coming, we'd like you to share your most memorable experience related to the holiday, either as a child or as an adult. A costume that you've never forgotten? A trip to a haunted house that scared you silly? Neighbors who went above and beyond to make things fun for the kids? Send a letter, of no more than 400 words, by Friday, Oct. 23 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Be sure to include your full name and your city/town.

For online-exclusive letters, go to www.chicagotribune.com/letters. Email your letter submissions, 400 words or less, to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name, address and phone number.

COMMENT&FEATURES

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Founded in 1932 by GERSHON AGRON

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Shirking responsibility

As is customary in Israel, the elation and pride felt last week over the miraculous rescue of the hijacked flydubai plane and the courage displayed by a group of ordinary, but extraordinary, Israelis who saved the 174 mostly Israeli passengers has morphed into a blame game of accusations and evasions.

However much we should be grateful for the heroic actions of the Indian pilot, Capt. Smit Machchhar, and the Israeli passengers – Tzvika Manes, Yaniv Hayun, Dr. Shota Musayev, Asaf Rajuan, and Tzvika's wife, Tali Manes, who was the first to raise the alarm on board after hearing a suspicious commotion coming from the flight deck – it's now incumbent on the relevant authorities to examine how the events were allowed to materialize in the first place and draw conclusions and develop a system that will prevent such potential tragedies from occurring in the future.

It was no secret that flights to and from the UAE present security risks. In fact, since the onset of Iranian attacks against Israel earlier this year, the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) and Israeli security forces had barred El Al, Arkia, and Israir from flying to the UAE, pending an agreement between the nations to resolve security-related issues.

The ban had stemmed from concerns about baggage screening, not the risk posed by pilots employed by foreign airlines, N12 news site reported.

That appears to be the crux of the matter. Was any official Israeli body in charge of vetting the pilots who were flying into Israel?

Israeli regulations reportedly say pilots from states without diplomatic relations with Israel are prohibited from landing in the country. But there didn't seem to be any mechanism in place – not by the Transportation Ministry, not by the Shin Bet, and not by the Mossad – to screen those pilots.

According to reports, pilots from unfriendly or hostile states – including Iran, Syria, and Iraq – have repeatedly landed planes in Israel in recent years. Those pilots have dual citizenship, with a second passport presumably issued by a nonbelligerent state, N12 reported.

A law stating that lists of flight crews would be sent to Israeli security agencies passed in 2023. On Saturday night, the Israel Tax Authority, tasked with reviewing incoming flights' manifests, confirmed it had received the list of passengers and crew for flydubai flight 1073 before takeoff – a standard procedure for all flights under that legislation. The Mossad also had access to that list.

Transportation Minister Miri Regev said her ministry is not responsible for implementing security checks on incoming foreign pilots. The Shin Bet is responsible for security on Israeli carriers, and the Mossad is responsible for security on foreign carriers, she told KAN News on Saturday night.

"Those who are supposed to identify the crew are security officials," she said. "We are not security officials. Those who are supposed to say what the threat level is, and whether you can travel to a given destination, are security officials."

Tamir Uri, a senior official in the Transportation Ministry's Security and Cyber Division, told Walla: "We have 120 airlines flying here. We are not the Shin Bet, and we don't have people abroad."

With nobody accepting responsibility, the body ultimately in charge, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, has vowed to fix the cracks in the process.

"Every pilot that is going to be flying into Israel, we are going to know the pilots' identities, know who they are, and do some type of security check," Prime Minister's Office spokesman Doron Spielman told Reuters last week.

Those might be welcome words, but how is it that such a system has not been in place and functioning already?

We've written on these pages that just as Israelis had to take action due to government agency failure on October 7, 2023, they had to spring into action in the sky above Saudi Arabia to stop a preventable tragedy from occurring. That's not the way things should work.

As the euphoria over the midair rescue and achievements dissipates, it's vital not only to conduct a proper investigation into the security gaps that enabled the hijacking, but also for all of the relevant authorities to stop shirking responsibility and work together to quash the likelihood that such a horrific event is ever able to get off the ground again.

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Do only B'Yachad care about us?

• By SHERWIN POMERANTZ



B'YACHAD PARTY chairman Naftali Bennett meets with families impacted by Hamas's October 7 massacre at the Families' Sukkah at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv last week. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

In preparation for the upcoming Israeli elections scheduled for October 27, I thought it would be worthwhile to ask the prime ministerial candidates whose chances at least put them in competition for the position what they see as the major problems facing Israel today and how they plan to address them.

One would think, of course, that providing this information to the electorate would be a given in any democratic society. However, in the polarized world in which we now live, politics seems to have been dumbed down to personal rather than ideological battles.

In an attempt to change the discourse, a colleague and I prepared an extensive questionnaire addressing three major subject areas: (a) how candidates structured their party lists and their associated campaigns; (b) what they perceive as the key challenges facing Israel; (c) their approaches to foreign policy issues, including reversing the effects of our having become a pariah state in the opinion of most of the world.

About six weeks ago, I sent the document in Hebrew to all the identified candidates except the current prime minister.

Sadly, but not unexpectedly, I received only one response, and that was from the Bennett/Lapid camp.

From the others, despite almost daily dispatches of my blogs and op-eds to all of them, nary a peep. Thankfully, I have thick skin and can handle rejection, although I'm not sure why they didn't even offer the courtesy of a note saying they weren't interested in responding.

Nevertheless, on September 29, I had an extended conversation with fellow Chicagoan Jeremy Saltan, an American-born Israeli political analyst, strategist, and former Knesset faction secretary, who is part of the B'Yachad party's Knesset slate in the upcoming election. He was good enough to spend time with me by phone to discuss many of the points in the questionnaire.

As the reader can see the party's entire platform at https://be-yahad.org.il/en/home-en, there is no need for me to repeat all of it here, but it can be summarized as follows:

Governance and institutional reform

Electoral reform: Imposing an eight-year term limit for the office of the prime minister.

Constitution: Promoting a long-awaited constitution that will be rooted in two sections: (1) the Declaration of Independence as its preamble; and (2) a Basic Law: Legislation section clearly defining the process for the passing of, and judicial review of, Basic Laws, as well as the powers allocated to the three branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial.

Educational reform: Recognition that the education system is broken and needs restructuring for the 21st century and beyond.

Starting salaries for teachers need to be raised, principals need to be given more autonomy, and the core curriculum (i.e., math, science, and English) needs to be taught in every school, including those in the haredi and Arab communities.

Further, expanding state-haredi (*Mamlachti Haredi*) schools that teach core subjects while allowing haredim to maintain their identity and way of life.

Sixty percent of the curriculum in all schools, including *Mamlachti Haredi* ones, will be composed of the common core subjects; 40% will be at the discretion of individual communities. Schools that don't meet these requirements will not receive state funding.

State inquiry: Establish a state commission of inquiry into the October 7 attack, to be launched on the new government's first day.

National resilience: Fostering national unity, reducing political polarization, and restoring public trust in state institutions.

Civic duty and social policy

Universal conscription ("equality of burden"): Ensuring that all segments of society, including the ultra-Orthodox community, share the military, civic, and national service burden of the state.

For all sectors, receiving state benefits will depend on completing military or national service. The vision, when it comes to enlistment, education, and the workforce, is for all parts of society to be part of one shared Israeli story.

Cost of living: Prioritizing economic measures to lower both housing prices and the day-to-day cost of living, including slashing bureaucracy and import barriers, dismantling monopolies, and making it easier to build apartments and rent them long-term.

Security and foreign policy

An active security doctrine: Maintaining a firm, assertive security policy on all fronts, alongside deepening alliances with moderate elements in the region.

Conscripting the 20,000 soldiers that the IDF says it is short of today.

Declaring Qatar, with its present modus operandi, as an enemy state.

Zionist and democratic identity: Preserving Israel as a Jewish, democratic, and liberal state in the spirit of our founders.

Repairing Israel's reputation: A full-court press to reestablish Israel's diplomatic credibility worldwide, with special attention to strengthening ties with members of both political parties in the US, based on Naftali Bennett's continued personal relationships with American politicians even after he ended his earlier term as prime minister.

For those specifically interested in the party's slate, its list of candidates for the Knesset and associated biographies can be found here: https://be-yahad.org.il/en/team

Every voter can decide whether this is a platform with which he or she can identify. This is not an endorsement of any candidate but rather an effort to help all of us, the voting public, understand what issues the party in question sees as important.

But what of the others who did not respond? Do they not care enough to provide at least the basic data that every thinking voter should have access to?

Or is it that the English-speaking population here is perceived as unimportant? If that is an issue, it is easy to refute.

There are as many as 300,000 English-speaking voters in the electorate. If they were to vote as a bloc, they would command seven Knesset seats.

While we don't vote as a bloc, an abnormally high percentage of us do vote, so our influence is magnified beyond our absolute numbers.

It would certainly seem that we, along with the entire electorate, are owed a full exposition of the platform of every party that would like our vote.

October 27 will be a critical election, as it will decide what direction the country will take after a decade in which we experienced a mass health casualty event, three years of a seven-front war that continues, a year of seemingly nonstop demonstrations against judicial reform, which many saw as the end of democracy, and the emigration of 270,000 citizens (almost 3% of the population) in the last three years.

Any party that wants our votes needs to show that, at a minimum, it acknowledges the challenges it will face if elected and is prepared to meet them in the most productive way possible.

Those candidates who choose not to share their intentions simply do not deserve our votes.

The writer, a 42-year resident of Jerusalem, is a former national president of the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel, a past chairman of the board of the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, and a board member of the Israel-America Chamber of Commerce.

Warnings and a 'conseptzia'

• By YISRAEL MEDAD



A DEMONSTRATOR in a costume representing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sets up a public protest installation in Tel Aviv on Saturday, as Israelis demand a state commission of inquiry into the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led massacres in Israel. (Ronen Zvulun/Reuters)

If we presumed this election period for the 26th Knesset would be dominated by the memory of October 7, 2023's debacle, and that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would be pilloried by the slogan: "You were in charge, you are responsible," that's not quite the current case.

A new spin has emerged seeking to frame Netanyahu's "responsibility" more narrowly. The new *conseptzia* (Hebrew for a "fixed notion") in public discourse is that there definitely were warnings of the Hamas invasion.

However, they weren't negligently missed and overlooked by the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency), IDF intelligence units, the Mossad, or any other section and/or officer in charge, as we have read in various reports.

Those warnings, the new motif is, were passed on to Netanyahu, and stayed with him. He did not reveal them. He did not pass them on.

The current memes on social media read: "You knew and hid it." And what did Netanyahu know? The left-wing version of the conspiracy theory framework surrounding the events of October 7 has erupted.

According to an exposé in *Haaretz*, based on a forthcoming book by Shlomi Eldar and Ruthie Yuval, Emirati President Mohamed bin Zayed called Netanyahu about a week and a half before October 7 to warn that Hamas was planning a major operation against Israel. Netanyahu, however, remained unperturbed.

A purported second warning was then revealed. *The Atlantic* reported that Egypt's intelligence chief Abbas Kamel arrived in Israel 11 days before October 7. He also warned that the armed group in Gaza was preparing a major attack. Kamel, it emerged, sought to pressure Israel to award Hamas further economic concessions.

The revelations are literally flooding the social discourse platforms and the media.

Unfortunately for the anti-Bibists, logic dictates that if Netanyahu was responsible for the October 7 debacle, he also must be responsible for the ultimate results of Israel's quite successful post-October 7 operations.

Even if this were true, can it be that the heads of the various services bear no responsibility for the lead-up to October 7? The order not to approach the fence? The decision not to wake Netanyahu when there were genuine warnings?

Of course, there were warnings. The female field scouts' reports were dismissed out of hand, as well as warnings of a different type – one that the anti-Bibists would prefer to be forgotten.

And in 2023, amid the judicial reforms controversy, were central figures opposed to Netanyahu impressing upon Hamas, or warning Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, that Israel was crumbling from within?

WHILE THIS is very relevant to Israel's internal political struggles, the real conseptzia that should be considered is that ever since the Oslo Accords, Israel's security establishment has been in conflict with the country's elected political leadership. That leadership has mainly been critical of, and disbelieving in, the wisdom of those agreements.

The conflict brought them, as Efraim Karsh wrote in an article for the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies – "How the 30-year peace delusion led to the October 7 Hamas massacres" – to adopt a conception that the century-old Arab conflict with Zionism and Israel paved the way for Hamas's invasion.

Karash wrote: "The failure to prevent Hamas's slaughter... is a direct result of [those who] decided to do nothing despite acute warning signals, and failed to alert the Gaza division commander and the political echelon to the imminent attack."

He asserts that there was an underlying mindset to this blunder that can be traced to what the "Oslo peace delusion" brought upon the thinking of the security establishment. He views Oslo as "a grand strategic deception" that aimed at the "emasculation of the IDF's military capabilities and combative/offensive ethos."

Former defense minister Yoav Gallant has now said that Israel was warned ahead of the October 7 massacre. He confirmed that the Shin Bet received a message that Hamas leader Sinwar would "shake the prisons." Israeli security officials interpreted the threat as Hamas's intention to take dramatic actions to compel Israel to release thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

But that message was thought not to focus on Gaza. Was that because the thinking was that Hamas was deterred?

A CONSEPTZIA overrides normative reason and critical analysis. Only a conseptzia could have thought that the July 6, 2023, warning from a veteran Israeli signals intelligence analyst, that Hamas was holding large-scale training exercises, to be dismissed by her superior as an "imaginary scenario."

Likewise, only a conseptzia could have convinced those specialists who provided situation analyses to Netanyahu, and to then-head of the National Security Council, Tzachi Hanegbi, that Hamas was in a state of deterrence.

Journalist Amit Segal, criticizing Eldar's and Yuval's claims, notes: "Tragically, Netanyahu and [Shin Bet head Ronen] Bar adopted the Yuval-Eldar approach: economic concessions are preferred in the hope that these would appease" Hamas, and that they would choose money over ideology.

More importantly, Segal writes further that "Netanyahu and his subordinates operated in line with the prevailing approach of the media, think tanks, academia, and the High Court of Justice – always offer a carrot, never a stick – or if a stick is unavoidable, make it as small as possible."

As we approach the October 27 elections, we cannot allow another conseptzia – the "he-was-warned" charge – to take hold.

The writer is a researcher, analyst, and commentator on political, cultural, and media issues.

Read Kurdistan's history to understand Iran's Kurds

• By MOHAMAD MOHAMADI



MOURNERS ATTEND a condolence ceremony for killed Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in the Kurdish town of Soran near the Iranian border, earlier this year. (Safin Hamid/AFP via Getty Images)

Ofra Bengio, a scholar of Middle Eastern history and politics, points to an important dimension of the historical relationship between Jews and Kurds in an article titled "Jews, Israel and the Kurds: Deciphering a Myth."

She writes that the long-standing relations between Jews and their Kurdish neighbors later laid the groundwork for relations between Jews, Israel, and the Kurds.

According to her, these ties were reinforced by a "sense of shared destiny of two small and persecuted peoples," whose surrounding countries had denied them the legitimacy of an independent state.

Beyond 'patriot' versus 'separatist' dichotomy

In Tina Ghazimorad's article in *The Jerusalem Post* about the Kurdish struggle, a one-sided image of the history and demands of Iran's Kurds is presented.

The dichotomy between "patriotic Kurds" and "separatist Kurds" overlooks the distinctions between Kurdish identity, the political demands of Kurds, and the specific programs of Kurdish parties.

In this narrative, the struggle of Kurdish parties against the Islamic Republic – which has constituted an important part of the political history of Iranian Kurdistan for nearly five decades – is viewed primarily through the lens of "separatism."

To demonstrate Kurdish patriotism, Ghazimorad refers to Taq-e Bostan and Bisotun, two historical monuments in Kermanshah province, and uses these ancient sites to draw conclusions about the present-day political situation. Among other things, she concludes that the Kurds of Ilam and Kermanshah are patriotic and supporters of Reza Pahlavi.

Yet even Bisotun and Taq-e Bostan, the very monuments cited as evidence of Kurdish "patriotism," cannot in fact substantiate such a conclusion. Bisotun, in addition to containing Darius's official account of consolidating his power and suppressing uprisings, also records his account of Gaumata the Magus and subsequent uprisings and resistance in the land of Media.

Even the violence committed in Kurdistan during the early years of the revolution by forces loyal to Khomeini is presented in Ghazimorad's narrative largely within the framework of "fighting separatists." In this account, the same forces that committed crimes in Kurdistan on Khomeini's orders are placed within the category of patriotic Kurds, Kurds who are today portrayed as loyal to Reza Pahlavi and with whom Israel is also advised to establish relations.

I come from Javanrud, a city in Kermanshah province near Taq-e Bostan. Since childhood, first because I had a Kurdish name, and later because I was forced to study in Persian from my very first day of school and experienced the university *gozinesh* selection process, I have directly lived through the Islamic Republic's systematic discrimination.

In my city, during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising, on November 21, 2022, protesters returning from the funeral of Erfan Kakaei, a teacher who was killed the previous day by the Islamic Republic's repressive forces, were targeted with DShK heavy machine guns and machine-gun fire.

The Islamic Republic justified this violence by claiming that it was fighting "separatism," the same accusation that has been used for decades to suppress Kurds.

From 'separatism' to 'cooperation with Mossad': The continuation of a security policy against Kurds

The accusation of "separatism" against Kurds is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Islamic Republic; it has a long history, whose roots can be traced back to the era of the first Pahlavi monarchy and the centralizing policies and nation-state-building process of that period.

The roots of this approach can be found in the security-oriented and centralizing policies of both the first and second Pahlavi governments – policies within which Kurdish political and identity-based demands were defined as threats to territorial integrity and the authority of the central government.

At that time, Kurdish political struggles and demands for rights were repeatedly confronted with the same label and answered with repression and violence.

The Islamic Republic not only failed to abandon this security framework but, in many cases, expanded it. Over the past five decades, membership in or association with Kurdish political parties, political activism, and even civil-society activities in Kurdistan have faced accusations such as "*moharebeh*" [enmity against God], "acting against national security," "membership in opposition groups," and "separatism."

In recent years, another accusation has been added to this framework: "cooperation with Israel and Mossad." In the new regional environment, and particularly with the intensification of the confrontation between the Islamic Republic and Israel, accusations of links with Israel and its intelligence service have also entered the Islamic Republic's security discourse.

The case of Mohammad Faramarzi, Vafa Azarbar, Mohsen Mazloum, and Pejman Fatehi clearly illustrates this trend.

These four men, members of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, were my friends and fellow party members. They were arrested in 2022, and for 18 months – until the day before their executions – their families and lawyers had no precise information about their fate or place of detention.

Amnesty International stated in February 2023 that the four had been subjected to enforced disappearance for months and were at risk of torture, other ill-treatment, and an unfair trial.

They were ultimately executed on January 29, 2024. The Islamic Republic had accused them of cooperating with the Mossad and of participating in a plan to carry out a sabotage operation in Isfahan.

The Islamic Republic has pursued the same pattern of confronting Kurdish parties outside Iran's borders as well, under the banner of fighting "separatists" and "Israeli agents."

On the day after the beginning of the recent war, attacks on the headquarters and camps of Kurdish parties in the Kurdistan Region entered an unprecedented phase. At the time of writing, according to intelligence data from the Kurdistan Regional Government, these attacks have been repeated more than a thousand times.

A significant portion of these attacks has targeted the headquarters of Kurdish parties, including the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, and during this same period, 13 members of my party have been killed as a result of these attacks.

The 1979 Revolution and the beginning of the confrontation with the Islamic Republic

The 1979 Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic marked a turning point in this process.

Kurdish political forces demanded recognition of the political and cultural rights of the people of Kurdistan within the new political structure.

On August 19, 1979, Ruhollah Khomeini issued an order for jihad against Kurdistan and ordered the deployment of military and law-enforcement forces to confront opponents.

Afterward, the modern, well-equipped army inherited from the Pahlavi government, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and other government-affiliated forces entered Kurdistan. Summary executions, brief trials, and the absence of due process, alongside large-scale military operations, created a painful experience in the political memory of Kurdistan.

Jina Amini and 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadi'

The state killing of Jina Amini in September 2022 introduced a new phase into this historical process.

Jina, a young Kurdish woman from Saqqez, died after being detained by the morality police in Tehran, and protests first spread across Kurdistan and then to many cities throughout Iran.

The slogan "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" also acquired particular significance in this process. The slogan has its roots in the traditions of Kurdish women's struggles, but during the 2022 protests it moved beyond its original context and was used in cities across Iran. As a result, a slogan of Kurdish origin became part of the shared discourse of nationwide protests.

Kurdish parties were among the important political actors and organizers of protests in Kurdistan during the Jina uprising, and the people of Kurdistan repeatedly responded to their calls for protests and strikes.

This pattern over the past five decades shows that Kurdish parties, despite changes in the forms and methods of their struggle, have maintained considerable capacity for social mobilization in Kurdistan.

A recent example was the Kurdistan-wide general strike of January 8, 2026, which followed a call by six parties belonging to the coalition of Kurdish political parties, in protest against the killing of protesters in Lorestan, Ilam, and Kermanshah, and in response to the repression and violence of the Islamic Republic.

Following this call, more than 50 cities in the provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, Lorestan, Kurdistan, and West Azerbaijan witnessed widespread strikes and closures.

The political struggles of Kurds in Iran have a history extending back more than a century, and the issue of Kurdish identity has been one of their enduring components.

Kurds regard themselves as a nation, a concept based on shared historical, cultural, and linguistic elements and a collective will.

Nevertheless, the political demands of different Kurdish currents have not been the same across historical periods.

If Israel seeks to understand Iranian society, particularly Iran's Kurds, such an understanding requires moving beyond limited and individual narratives.

Studying the decades-long history of Kurdish parties' activities, together with examining Kurdistan's social and political developments, can provide a more comprehensive picture of this society and its demands.

The 'Jews vs Israelis' lie

• By SHUKI FRIEDMAN

Of all the fault lines dividing Israeli society, none is more dangerous – or more misleading – than the supposed divide between "Jews" and "Israelis": the notion, aggressively promoted by some, that the Right represents the "Jews" who keep the flame alive, while anyone who is not on the Right is merely "Israeli" – estranged from Jewish tradition and in thrall to global "progressivism" and its values.

This is a distorted picture of Israeli society. Israeli identity itself embraces Jewish values and traditions; Jewish tradition and its values are foundational to Israeli-Zionist identity. The data, too, tell the opposite story. The overwhelming majority of Israelis are deeply Jewish – in identity, values, and practice.

The false narrative of "Jews" versus "Israelis" has antecedents at both ends of the political spectrum. Its intellectual roots reach back to the fringes of the Canaanite movement and later to the post-Zionist Left, both of which sought to sever Israeli statehood from its Jewish inheritance.

But the Right turned the idea into a popular political weapon. When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu whispered into Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri's ear that "the Left has forgotten what it means to be Jewish," he was articulating a strategy designed to brand the entire liberal public as "Israelis" hostile to Judaism and its expression in the Jewish state; to give the right-wing and haredi (ultra-Orthodox) bloc a monopoly on Judaism; and, above all, to bind it together as a cohesive "Jewish" bloc.

But anyone who looks squarely at reality can see this for the distortion it is. Data from recent years consistently tell a very different story. Jewish Israeli society is not split between "Jews" and "Israelis." Most of it falls within what might be called "Israeli Judaism" or the "traditionalist sphere."

In this broad middle – which encompasses most of Israeli society, including most of the political Center and part of the Left – the two identities do not compete; they reinforce each other, in self-understanding as well as in practice.

Consider the numbers. Roughly 80% of secular Israelis say it is very important to them that their children grow up as Jews. The share of Israelis who attend a Passover Seder, light Hanukkah candles, affix a mezuzah at home, and circumcise their sons consistently exceeds 90%. Even on Yom Kippur, three out of four Israeli Jews fast either fully or partially, and almost all car owners refrain from driving. Two-thirds of Israeli Jews (67%) keep kosher fully or in part, and 70% do not eat hametz on Passover.

Israelis in the Center and on the Left, along with substantial segments of the Right, oppose religious coercion. Most support civil marriage, limited public transportation on Shabbat, and a more equal sharing of civic burdens.

They object to the politicization of religion, in part because they refuse to surrender their Judaism to the Chief Rabbinate – an ossified political institution focused on the sectoral and economic interests of its insiders. But opposition to the rabbinate's monopoly is not opposition to Judaism.

The real debate in Israel is not between "Jews" who care deeply about tradition and "Israelis" who supposedly reject it and want to strip the state of its Jewish markers. The debate is over the Jewish character of the state.

Participants in that debate include people on the Left whose concern for the state's Jewish character – and for the character of Judaism within it – is no less profound than that of the Jews on the Right. The attempt to portray the liberal camp as having lost its Jewishness is a dangerous political lie. It is time to root it out of our public discourse.

Israel is a Jewish and democratic state. It is also deeply Zionist and Israeli. At their best, these identities coexist, complement one another, and draw strength from one another. There is, of course, tension among the different values that constitute Israeli identity. The debate over their place in the public sphere and the institutions of government is real and has accompanied the country since its founding.

But at the deepest level of identity, most Israelis are also Jewish. The Jewishness of those on the Left and in the political Center is no less real than that of right-wing Jews. This narrative may serve the political extremes and the campaigns of cynical politicians, but it threatens Israeli society with yet another fault line – one built on a lie.

The writer is director-general of JPPI, the Jewish People Policy Institute, and a senior lecturer in law at the Peres Academic Center.

LETTERS

Unbridled vigilantism

Edith Ognall ("Nothing pure about it," Letters, September 30, 2026) says that Elor Azaria was arrested "for protecting our soldiers." In fact, Azaria was convicted of manslaughter for killing a Palestinian lying on the ground 11 minutes after he had been shot and subdued. Azaria decided to execute a person who posed no threat. Azaria has repeatedly insisted he behaved correctly, while the IDF opposed pardoning him.

Ognall also argues that never again should settlers be referred to as terrorists. Terrorism is a tactic, not an ideology. The actions of this outlaw band of disaffected youth, some of whom do not even live in the territories, mirror the widely accepted definition of terrorism: "Threatening or using violence against civilian targets in order to achieve political ends." Like Azaria, they have arrogated to themselves the powers of judge, jury, and enforcer.

Ognall ignores the fact that this Jewish violence is aimed not just at Palestinians but at our own soldiers. This is unbridled vigilantism, a precursor to anarchy that will further tear apart an already deeply divided nation.

Worst of all, Israel's national security minister condones such violence. He has done precious little to counter these illegal and immoral actions that subvert the legitimate rights of Jews to live in the disputed territories. Further, he has allowed murders in Israeli-Arab society to go unchecked.

Ognall and Itamar Ben-Gvir seem to have concluded that Jews may act violently without fear of retribution, while Palestinians have no right to protection under the law.

EFRAIM COHEN
Zichron Ya'acov

Politicizing the near-tragedy

The context of your editorial "Who will fly the plane" (October 4, 2026) most certainly caught me by surprise. As expected, there has been, throughout the media, accusations that last week's near tragedy is being exploited by both sides in the upcoming elections in Israel. Likening the need to proactively "shake" the Israeli electorate into rescuing a country in what appears to be a free fall toward disaster with what went on in both the cabin and cockpit of that flydubai airline is indeed a novel way to make a point. I'm not sure, though, if the parallel, as you put it, is at all appropriate; expediency does not excuse insensitivity.

I'm not denying that the current electoral system in conjunction with the political leadership in Israel is in dire need of reform, and your summary of the see-sawing that's been going on over the seven or eight years would be in any other situation perfectly acceptable. Enduring the consequences of social turbulence due to political instability is one thing. Going up in the flames from a terrorist-initiated airline disaster is quite another. Your editorial board, to be blunt, blew it.

The Jerusalem Post still has another three weeks to try and steady the plane, so to speak. But apples should not be mixed with oranges, even when used as analogies or metaphors. An apology of sorts for the tactlessness of today's editorial would not be unwarranted.

AMI SHIMON BEN-BARUCH
Be'er Ya'acov

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The flydubai terror attack succeeded



• By BEN CASPIT

In a normal country, a minister receives a government portfolio and is expected to devote all their talent, energy, and capabilities to it.

The education minister focuses on education; the welfare minister on welfare; the transportation minister on transportation. The aim is to advance the ministry and its objectives, and to benefit the citizens of the country.

In the State of Israel, however, a minister receives a government portfolio and exploits it – along with its resources, the jobs it offers, and the levers of influence and control it provides – to advance their own interests.

This is why Miri Regev appointed a personal associate as director-general of the Transportation Ministry – someone whose career experience peaked with managing the "Likudiada" event.

This is no joke; it is a true story, and the individual in question – Moshe Ben Zaken – remains the director-general.

That is precisely what it looks like. The deeper one delves into the Dubai plane incident, the more evident the neglect and disarray become. The state comptroller wrote about this explicitly. Two years ago, State Comptroller Matanyahu Englman warned of the need to reexamine the security arrangements for foreign aircraft entering Israel, to clarify the division of responsibilities among the relevant bodies, and to adopt an "integrated approach."

Do you think anyone there actually adopted an integrated approach? In a well-run state – in a ministry where the director-general is a professional appointee and a transportation expert – a team would immediately be established to implement the comptroller's report.

Incidentally, the report contains classified sections that were not released. One wonders if they specifically address flights from Dubai following the Abraham Accords.

Be that as it may, Ben Zaken preferred to craft an "integrated approach" tailored to his minister's needs – needs that focused primarily on endless trips to obscure conferences in various overseas destinations.

Traffic jams? They'll clear up eventually. Road accident fatalities? The families will get insurance payouts. An aviation disaster? Let's hope for a miracle. It turns out that, in the end, this approach was right. After all, there *was* a miracle.

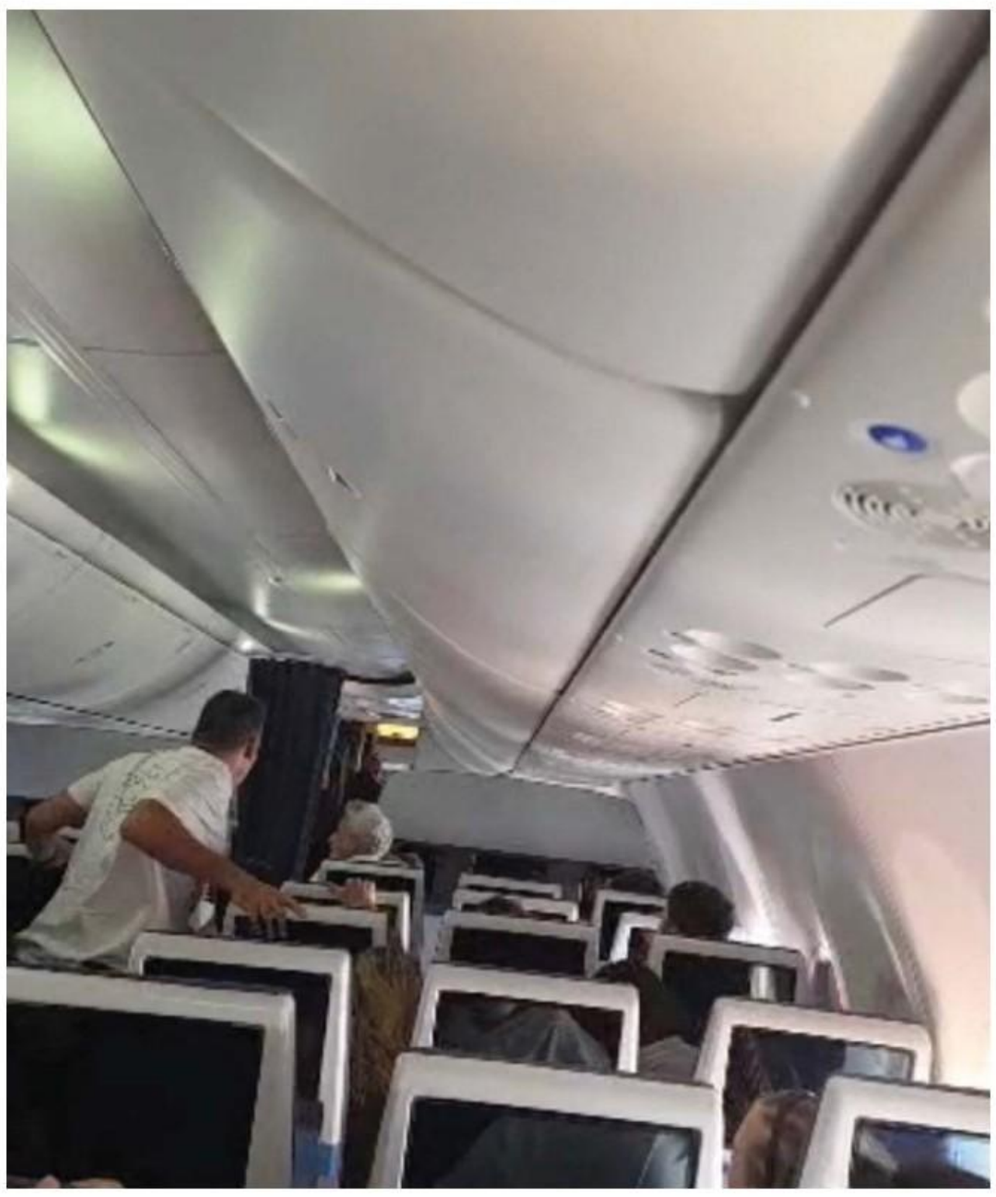
And now, we can state with certainty: a major failure occurred here – a massive one. A pilot – one whom Oman grounded for becoming radicalized and whom Morocco barred from flying due to his extremist Islamist views – found himself flying hundreds of Israelis to Israel.

And not for the first time. Someone in the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) needs to take a hard look at themselves. I know – they take risks regarding Gadi Eisenkot's security too – but when hundreds of passengers are involved, it's going too far.

People say Shin Bet Director David Zini is messianic. That might be true. Perhaps he even knew in advance that there would be Israeli passengers on the plane who refused to accept their fate, and that everything would end safely.

The Mossad has no way of knowing about every single jihadist who decides to kill Jews, provided that individual isn't linked to an organized group or acting on orders from somewhere. If that is indeed the case, the Mossad bears less responsibility here.

And yet, an Omani pilot – deemed "dangerous" by the Omanis themselves – should not be flying to Israel without that information coming to the attention of Israeli authorities. Especially since it turns out that dozens of Omani pilots have landed planes at Ben-Gurion Airport in recent years.



FLYDUBAI PASSENGERS react after realizing there is commotion in the cockpit, last week, in this screengrab taken from a handout video. (Reuters)

What about the political leadership? The transportation minister? The prime minister? Don't even mention them. We've learned our lesson. What do they have to do with it? They have no connection whatsoever. Shame on you for even entertaining the thought.

It was proven for all to see after October 7: the political leadership is responsible only for successes. After all, Benjamin Netanyahu sat with flydubai hero pilot Yaniv Hayoun and celebrated the miracle with him.

When something bad happens, they have nothing to do with it. So, our Miri can keep jet-setting around the world, hoping the incompetents in her office are ensuring no Omani pilot flies her.

Netanyahu can keep posing for photos with heroic survivors while ignoring the fact that they were forced to save themselves because he failed – for the hundredth time – to do his job. And finally: our security agencies, which failed miserably, ought to treat the attempted downing of the flydubai plane as a *successful* attack – an event that actually occurred, resulting in 174 fatalities (in a best-case scenario).

This is exactly what happened on November 28, 2002, in Mombasa, Kenya, when two Strela shoulder-fired missiles were launched at an Arkia plane packed with Israelis shortly after takeoff. The two missiles whizzed past the plane and missed; the pilots saw them.

Within Israel's security establishment, that incident was logged and classified as a successful attack – an event that actually took place, resulting in the deaths of 260 Israeli passengers and crew members (in a best-case scenario).

WHY SHOULD it be recorded as a successful attack? Because, from the attackers' perspective, it *was* a success. The Omani pilot managed to outwit every screening and security system in both the UAE and Israel, gaining the keys and the means to bring down the plane.

Zini needs to tell himself: I failed. Mossad chief Roman Gofman needs to tell himself: I failed. Miri Regev needs to tell herself – though, of course, she won't – that she failed. The same applies to the head of the ministry's security division and the head of MAMLAT – the Aviation Security Operations Center. I don't know what operations he has carried out recently, but I know for a fact that he failed to perform his actual job.

At the time, following the attack in Mombasa, that was the prevailing view: security officials determined through internal inquiries that the attack had succeeded and they had failed. The fact remains that two terrorists fired two shoulder-launched missiles at a plane full of Israelis.

You have to understand: wherever Israeli flights take off from, there are always Israeli security personnel responsible for perimeter security. "Our boys" are supposed to be at the "Mombasa station" just as they are supposed to be at the "Dubai station."

They operate alongside deep intelligence support, cooperation with local security forces, the vetting of anyone coming into contact with passenger security, and so on. They were there, and yet – it happened.

The Arkia plane was saved thanks to one small detail: the terrorists didn't know how to launch the Strela missiles. Such a missile homes in on engine heat. They needed to wait for the plane to pass overhead and then fire the missile in its wake; it would then lock onto the engines and detonate against the aircraft.

Instead, they fired from the side as the plane was taking off, and so the missiles didn't lock onto the engine; they merely flew past the plane and continued on.

Pilots Rafi Marik, Itzik Shani, and Uri Sapir could have waved hello from the cockpit at the missiles meant to shatter their aircraft, one of them told me this back then.

In Mombasa, the plot succeeded but failed due to luck. In Dubai, it succeeded but failed thanks to the heroism of five Israelis. Will anyone be held accountable? Of course not. Quite the opposite. Netanyahu has inserted himself into the event as if he were the plumber who saved everyone. He is celebrating it as if he had just declared, "The Temple Mount is in our hands."

The truth is the exact opposite: Netanyahu is the one responsible for the clog and the flood that nearly killed everyone. Hayoun – the plumber – along with Tali and Tzvika Menes and the others who simply took matters into their own hands, saved the day.

An amusing historical correction to wrap things up: Hayoun isn't just any plumber; he operates a vacuum truck (a massive vehicle used to clear large quantities of sewage). When we asked him on Saturday night on *Meet the Press* if he was just going back to work the next morning, he replied: "I'd like to, but I got into the truck yesterday and it wouldn't start." What an amazing guy.

Terror in the skies: A miracle or a story of resourcefulness?



THINK ABOUT IT
• By SUSAN HATTIS ROLEF

I do not believe in miracles. Alleged miracles are frequently the result of human intuition and resourcefulness, just like many catastrophes frequently result from human failures, misjudgments, and arrogance.

In my opinion, what happened last Wednesday in the case of flydubai flight FZ1073 from Dubai International Airport to Ben-Gurion Airport in Israel was an event of the former type, even though many reactions in Israel gave God full credit for it. My answer: "*Ish ish be'emunato yichyeh*" (Each person shall live within his faith).

The immediate culprit in this story was the Omani co-pilot on the flight, Hamam al-Hammami, who stabbed the plane's Indian captain, Smit Machchhar, who was its main hero. Hammami's intention was apparently to cause the plane, in which the majority of the 174 passengers were Israeli, to crash, possibly over Israeli territory.

Of course, beyond Hammami's personal responsibility, there is that of the Dubai authorities who allowed the Omani pilot to co-pilot the flight to Tel Aviv, even though he had a record of extreme Islamic expressions and activities and had been removed from Oman Air, and Royal Air Maroc training courses, for the same reason.

At the time of writing, it is not yet known whether any terrorist organization or country stood behind Hammami, or whether he acted as a lone fanatic.

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who seems eager to take credit for any successes associated with the event for reasons connected to the upcoming elections in Israel, announced on Friday in Hebrew that "whoever sent the pilot will pay a very heavy price."

On CNN and Fox News, Netanyahu insinuated (in English) that Iran might well be involved but did not indicate whether this is merely speculation based on self-interest or a reflection of reality based on Israeli intelligence information.

Another question to which there is no definitive answer at present is whether Israel's mutual flight agreements with the UAE in general and Dubai in particular contain reference to Israel's requirement that pilots flying the planes of foreign companies to Israel should hold the citizenship of a country that maintains diplomatic relations with it.

If such a stipulation does exist (and at least one Israeli source quoted in the media has claimed that it does not), then Israel is at fault for not checking whether it is upheld on all flights of UAE airlines that land in Israel.

AS MENTIONED at the outset, the main hero of this episode was the plane's Indian captain, Machchhar, without whom the plane and its passengers would not have come out intact or alive.

Despite his severe wounds and loss of blood, Machchhar managed to send two distress codes: Squawk 7700 (general emergency) and Squawk 7500 (unlawful interference/hijacking), and to verbally alert air traffic control about the ongoing physical attack against him inside the cockpit.



PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu meets Yaniv Hayoun, a passenger on the flydubai flight bound for Israel from the United Arab Emirates, which made an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia, last week. (GPO/Handout via Reuters)

Most importantly, he managed to open the locked door into the cockpit, which cannot be opened from the outside. Once the door was open, four Israeli passengers managed to enter, overcome the co-pilot, who not only kept stabbing the captain but also tried to destroy equipment in the cockpit, and provide first aid to the pilot.

In addition to the four Israelis, two off-duty flydubai pilots who were on the flight (according to reports, they were supposed to fly the plane back to Dubai after the disembarkation of the passengers at Ben-Gurion Airport) entered the cockpit.

One of the two (apparently a British national) took control of the plane, after one of the Israelis – a plumber by the name of Yaniv Hayoun – attempted to stop the plane diving down at great speed (there was no one in control of the plane at the time) by pulling up the aircraft's control yoke and thus managing to temporarily lift the plane from its dive.

Hayoun, who had never flown a plane in his life, had learned that pulling up the yoke was what had to be done in such a situation from a Canadian TV documentary series, *Mayday*, which deals with true cases of serious airplane accidents.

Hayoun's act saved the plane and its passengers from a certain immediate crash, but it might also have been responsible for the plane losing the blades of the rotor in its tail, which could have caused the plane to fall apart midair. That this did not happen was due to exceptional good luck, though again, some might count it as a miracle.

At any rate, not only was the plane saved, but the two off-duty pilots managed to fly the plane to safety and land at the airport of Tabuk in southwestern Saudi Arabia, close to the Saudi border with Jordan. If the two off-duty pilots had not been on the plane, the plane and its passengers would have been doomed.

Incidentally, the Israeli who saved Machchhar's life by stopping his profuse bleeding was a dentist of Georgian origin called Shota Musayev. The other three Israelis involved in detaining the co-pilot and saving the captain were Asaf Rajuan (the owner of an insurance brokerage), Zvika Manes (the CEO of Barak Capital), and his wife, Tali, who was the first to discover what was going on in the cockpit. The plane's stewards (all men) are reported to have been in total confusion, not knowing what to do.

MY CONCLUSIONS from this extraordinary story are, firstly, that with low-cost airlines (and flydubai is officially in that category) the chances of something going extremely wrong seem greater, especially because of manpower issues.

Secondly, since many Israelis have active and diverse military experience, accompanied by a propensity to improvise, one is safer being part of a random Israeli group of people than part of a random group of people of any other nationality, if one gets into a messy situation.

In my opinion, it has nothing to do with our allegedly being "God's chosen people" but rather with the very long history of the Jewish people in the Diaspora and its need to survive under difficult circumstances, and the Israeli ethos and self-confidence (at times an exaggerated and annoying self-confidence).

Though the catastrophe of October 7, 2023, threatened to severely damage this ethos and self-confidence, the flydubai incident has undoubtedly given both a boost.

Nevertheless, some irritation in Dubai concerning what they see as Israeli audacity regarding the role played by Israeli citizens in last Wednesday's incident suggests that a measure of *hatzne'ah lechet* (walking humbly) might be called for.

The writer has written journalistic and academic articles, as well as several books, on international relations, Zionism, Israeli politics, and parliamentarism. From 1994 to 2010, she worked at the Knesset Library and the Knesset Research and Information Center.