

Saving young lives

The steady decline in India’s infant mortality rate shouldn’t lead to complacency

LA**TEST FINDINGS FROM** the Sample Registration System show that, for the first time, India's birth and death rates have fallen to nearly half their levels from 50 years ago. This is a positive reflection of the foundations for healthcare, family planning, and social welfare laid in the decades since Independence. Most encouragingly, the infant mortality rate (IMR) has continued its steady decline, falling from 40 in 2013 to 25 in 2023—a reduction of 37.5%. IMR, defined as the number of infants dying before their first birthday per 1,000 live births, is one of the most critical measures of health standards. Between 2013 and 2023, the rural IMR fell from 44 to 28, while the urban IMR dropped from 27 to 18. Yet disparities persist: states such as Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh reported the highest IMR at 37, while Manipur was at the other end of the spectrum with just 3. While the findings bode well, they also show that the country still lags several of its neighbours, with China leading the region at 4.5.

As with all statistics, some caveats remain. The wide gap between the states with the highest and lowest IMRs—37 in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, compared with 3 in Manipur—shows that outcomes vary sharply across state lines. Rural-urban differences are also significant, underscoring that national figures are an average of highly uneven conditions. Importantly, when compared to our neighbours, some Indian states perform at par and even better—Kerala (5), Goa (6), Sikkim (6), and Manipur (3) are all within or below the range of Sri Lanka and China. However, improvements are still needed, particularly in implementation.

India's two flagship maternal and child health programmes—the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), a conditional cash transfer scheme, and the Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK), which provides free maternal and neonatal services—are funded through the National Health Mission. Estimates suggest that utilisation under JSY was about 87% in FY24, while JSSK has also expanded access to services and increased institutional deliveries (over 80%). A 2025 study in the *Cureus* journal notes that the persistence of wide regional disparities points to the need for improving quality of care to ensure equity. It further argues that given the scale of these programmes, a comprehensive restructuring may be required to plug leakages.

While smaller neighbouring nations such as Sri Lanka or Bhutan do not have the sharp variances like India does, lessons can be drawn from them, as well as China, which despite having the largest population, has the lowest IMR in the region. Sri Lanka has invested in free and universal public healthcare for decades, resulting in near-complete institutionalised births, and Bhutan actively utilises community participation despite being strapped for resources. The latter is something India can do. The *Cureus* study states that India's accredited social health activists “play a vital role in connecting with pregnant women within communities and can be further empowered to provide enhanced support and advice.” China's high score can be attributed to its stringent emphasis on hospital deliveries across regions (above 99%). The current figures should certainly bolster optimism, but they are also a reminder that policies and implementation must continue to improve if India is to bring down its IMR further. Only then can this critical aspect of health and social well-being fit seamlessly into the India@2047 vision.

● COOLING SOLUTIONS

SCIENTIFIC MODELLING, INNOVATIVE PLANNING, & FORWARD-LOOKING POLICY CAN HELP CITIES BEAT HEAT STRESS

Breaking a vicious cycle

ON **SEPTEMBER 2**, Bhubaneswar became the first Indian city to release an Integrated Heat and Cooling Action Plan (IHCAP) to comprehensively tackle two growing crises—rising heat stress and the explosion in air conditioning demand. Heat stress is not new to India. Over the past two decades, the country has experienced increasingly frequent and intense heatwaves that have claimed thousands of lives, reduced worker productivity, and strained health systems. But the crisis has changed. Cities are now caught in a vicious cycle of heat and cooling—higher temperatures and humidity drive up air-conditioning use, which worsens the urban heat island (UHI) effect and greenhouse gas emissions. This, in turn, makes cities even hotter—and more dependent on cooling.

It is precisely this cycle that Bhubaneswar's IHCAP seeks to break. It is India's first city-level plan that integrates urban planning, green buildings, sustainable cooling, and heat adaptation measures under one umbrella.

A city on the frontline of heat

Bhubaneswar has long been one of India's most heat-affected cities. Over the last four decades, average temperatures and humidity levels have risen steadily across the year. Even more worrying is the rise in night-time temperatures, which robs people of relief and increases health risks. Today, heat stress stretches from February to October. According to the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) “feels like” index, which uses temperature and humidity to measure heat stress, the city endured nearly 230 days of yellow or orange heat alerts in 2024.

Rapid urbanisation has further compounded heat stress. Between 2018 and 2024, Bhubaneswar's built-up area grew by 23%, while vegetation declined by nearly 10% and water bodies by a staggering 75%. The result is a far more

CHANDRA BHUSHAN

CEO, iFOREST

ACTION PLAN

Note: Bhubaneswar's IHCAP is developed by iFOREST in collaboration with the Singapore-ETH Centre, which is running the Cooling Singapore program.

pronounced UHI effect, with the city now 2 to 5°C hotter than surrounding rural areas.

The impacts are already evident. Outdoor workers—from construction crews to street vendors—lose 20-30% of productivity and wages to heat stress. Overall, the city lost 8.6% of its annual income due to heat stress. At the same time, AC ownership has more than doubled in just two years, rising from 6% of households in 2021 to 15% in 2023. Cooling now

accounts for one-third of the city's electricity use—and nearly two-thirds in the peak summer months.

Looking ahead, the situation could worsen dramatically. Under an intermediate climate warming scenario, a “normal hot day” in 2050 will feel like today's extreme heat days. The city, therefore, will have to rely on cooling to survive. Under a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario, therefore, electricity demand from cooling could rise 7.6 times by 2050 compared to current levels.

What the IHCAP offers

Against this backdrop, Bhubaneswar's IHCAP lays out a comprehensive five-pillar strategy:

- Cool the city:** Expand greenery, revive water bodies, promote cool roofs, and redesign streets to reduce UHI.
- Cool buildings:** Implement energy conservation building codes and promote climate-responsive designs to reduce heat absorption and enhance indoor comfort.
- Sustainable cooling for all:** Ensure access to affordable, efficient, and climate-friendly cooling solutions such as efficient fans and ACs, district cooling systems, and white roofs for low-income homes.
- Enhance heat resilience:** Strengthen electricity, water, and health systems; build cooling shelters and provide cool bus stops and public water kiosks.
- Adapt to heat:** Update heat alert thresholds to account for humidity and night-time temperatures, provide insurance to vulnerable workers, and expand awareness campaigns.

If implemented effectively, these

interventions could reduce surface temperatures by 0.5-9.4°C, depending on the type of measure, and cut the city's cooling-related electricity demand by 44-67% compared to the BAU scenario.

Beyond Bhubaneswar

The IHCAP connects two national policies that have so far worked in silos. The India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) of the environment ministry promotes sustainable cooling and the Heat Action Plan (HAP) of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) (focuses primarily on early warning and heat adaptation. By unifying them, the IHCAP offers a comprehensive framework to address heat stress that other cities can adopt.

Scaling this framework, however, will require significant policy reforms. The NDMA's HAP guidelines must be updated to include heat mitigation and sustainable cooling measures. City master plans and building codes will also need revision. For example, the Energy Conservation and Sustainable Building Code, 2024, for commercial and institutional buildings and the Eco-Niwās Samhita 2024 for residential buildings cover only a fraction of upcoming construction. In Bhubaneswar, just 25% of commercial and institutional buildings and a mere 1.5% of residential construction fall under these codes. Likewise, master plans do not consider UHI, heat mitigation strategies, or the need for heat-resilient infrastructure.

By mid-century, India will be home to 600-700 million urban residents, most of them in heat-stressed cities. Without integrated action, we risk a future where outdoor work becomes unsafe for millions, inequality deepens, and cities completely rely on cooling appliances to survive.

Bhubaneswar's IHCAP, however, shows that cities can avoid this dystopian future and break the vicious cycle of heat and cooling through scientific modeling, innovative planning, and forward-looking policy.

BMW, the anti-Tesla, is playing EV long game

IT'S EASY to be gloomy about European automakers facing intense competition from technologically sophisticated and lower cost rivals like BYD and Xiaomi. But at least one Western manufacturer is aiming to convince customers and investors it can compete with the best that China or Tesla offer—and I reckon BMW might have found a sweet spot. On Friday, the German automaker unveiled the electric iX3 sport utility vehicle. Car launches are generally overhyped and quickly forgotten, but this one matters: It showcases the advanced hardware and software that will underpin future BMW models, both battery-driven and gasoline-powered.

Dubbed Neue Klasse, in homage to the mid-range models that saved BMW from financial ruin in the 1960s, its new technological building blocks will enable greater battery driving range, faster charging, and a much better user experience. BMW says the iX3 can be driven as far as 805 km before plugging in; a 10-minute charge delivers a range of more than 370 km. Representing more than \$1.17 billion of investment and about five years in the making, BMW's big reset looks to have been well calibrated for an era when autos are evaluated more for their software chops than horsepower.

Auto journalists have been impressed by the responsive driving dynamics and futuristic cabin—instead of the usual instrument cluster, a panoramic display stretches across the entire windshield. BMW has also adopted a cleaner exterior design language: There's no sign of the oversized grilles that blighted some recent models.

It's rare for BMW to make such a big splash; the company prioritises long-term thinking while its executives try to avoid controversy or theatrics. Almost half of BMW's shares are controlled by the billionaire Quandt family, whose calmness and low-profile couldn't be more different than Elon Musk's grandstanding.

The Munich-based company was criticised a few years ago for refusing to join the stampede for EVs even as European rivals were vowing to go all-electric by the end of the decade. BMW's management insisted providing customers with a choice of electric, hybrid, gasoline or hydrogen-powered vehicles would be essential for years to come because the transition would happen gradually. BMW learned this lesson the hard way: It was an early leader in EVs, but demand for its quirky i3 hatchback, launched in 2013, proved disappointing.

Its factories were duly equipped to produce several powertrain variants on the same production line while its current EVs are styled to look similar to their combustion engine equivalents to avoid putting off customers. BMW's stubbornness has been proven right: While Mercedes-Benz Group, Porsche and Volvo Car have watered down their electrification ambitions amid several high-profile EV flops, BMW has stuck to its philosophy of technological openness and continues to expect EVs to contribute more than 50% of its sales in 2030.

It now offers EVs in all key segments and these have proven a hit—even before the arrival of the latest Neue Klasse tech. In the first half of this year, EVs made up a quarter of BMW's deliveries in Europe, where its battery-powered models were outsold only by Volkswagen and Tesla. Admittedly, BMW is struggling in China, where it's downsizing its dealer network following a loss of market share. It's also facing a financial hit from US tariffs, albeit one it can offset by exporting vehicles more cheaply from its US factory to Europe (these are expected to be subject to zero tariffs instead of 10%).

Nevertheless, BMW has coped far better with these headaches than some of its peers. While Porsche has repeatedly cut earnings guidance this year and is poised to be ejected from Germany's blue-chip DAX Index, BMW has stuck by its forecast for its automotive activities to achieve an operating margin of between 5% and 7% in 2025—not bad, although below its usual target of 8-10%. With the heavy investments for Neue Klasse now behind it, and the batteries in its upcoming EVs set to cost far less than prior models, BMW's margins should improve in coming years.

While the company's shares have outperformed its peers this year, BMW's €56 billion market capitalisation isn't much higher than its €45 billion of automotive-related net financial assets; and it's just a sliver of Tesla's over \$1 trillion valuation. It likely won't change until BMW proves it can still charge premium prices for its new products when high-tech models like Xiaomi's YU7 SUV cost comparatively little.

Nevertheless, BMW has earned the right to take a big risk with the Neue Klasse and has clearly thought very carefully about it. Europe's auto industry can't avoid a reckoning—but I'm confident BMW can.

CHRIS BRYANT

Bloomberg

Double down on domestic oil and gas

DHANENDRA KUMAR

Chairman, Competition Advisory Services
India LLP (COMPAD)

India can shape a pragmatic model that offers clearances in a predictable time frame, balances environmental oversight, and creates confidence for long-term investors

ON AUGUST 6, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order adding a 25% tariff (beyond an earlier 25% imposed in July) on certain Indian imports because New Delhi continues to buy discounted Russian crude, raising the effective rate to 50%. The ministry of external affairs described the actions as “unfair, unjustified and unreasonable”, and “extremely unfortunate”. The White House order explicitly linked the measure to India's purchases of Russian oil. Markets have already begun pricing the geopolitical risk, and Indian exporters, of goods from leather to light engineering, are bracing for the additional bazooka. For an economy that imports the bulk of its crude, the tariff lands squarely on the country's energy security.

This comes at a time when India's energy appetite is expected to grow rapidly, driven by industrialisation and urbanisation; in fact the needs are existential. The ministry of statistics reported that in FY24, crude oil imports rose to 234.26 million tonnes. Import dependence remained high at around 89% for crude oil and 25.86% for coal, according to the ministry of petroleum and natural gas.

A domestic push linked to structural reform

India's long-term resilience depends on how effectively it develops its own reserves. As of April 2024, the country's crude oil reserves stood at 671.40 million tonnes, but production in FY24 was just 29.36 million tonnes. This mismatch in the new

urgency underscores the need for quick action. Ageing fields and a reliance on public sector undertakings highlight why a stronger role for private players is needed.

Private explorers, with global capital and advanced drilling technologies, are best placed to unlock frontier basins, deep-water prospects, and unconventional plays. Take the example of Guyana, where Chevron and Hess made significant new discoveries. Similarly, the recent discovery by British Petroleum in Brazil is said to be the largest in 25 years.

India's backbone remains its national oil companies: about 77% of crude is produced by ONGC and OIL under the nomination regime. ONGC's operating discipline in mature Western offshore and onshore clusters reflects base output and national energy resilience. In the post-crude-sale deregulation, ONGC can continue to focus on its role without legacy bottlenecks.

Reforms & private sector push

Cairn Oil & Gas, Vedanta's upstream arm, represents the private sector's potential. As India's largest private producer with ~73,000 sq km of acreage, it operates major fields in Rajasthan and has announced a ₹50,000-crore investment in Assam along with commitments in other basins and deep-water exploration. Its proposed demerger into a pure-play

upstream company offers a chance to link the domestic production push with corporate restructuring. By separating from Vedanta Ltd, Cairn would gain agility, attract fresh investment, and sharpen its focus on exploration and output growth.

The domestic production challenge and the Cairn demerger are two sides of the same coin: one meets the macro need for more energy, the other provides a structural pathway to achieve it. For the government, including the petroleum ministry, a stronger, focused producer not only enhances energy security but also boosts revenues and jobs. For investors, the timely completion of the demerger unlocks value and reduces uncertainty. Yet despite overwhelming shareholder approval, procedural uncertainties have slowed the progress of the demerger. Objections raised in such cases delay corporate restructuring, reduce the pace of wealth creation, and close off opportunities for growth.

A more agile and well-capitalised upstream sector would ultimately benefit investors, the petroleum ministry, and the exchequer alike. With consumption consistently outpacing domestic output, external shocks, tariffs, price-cap frictions, or shipping constraints can send ripples across the economy. This makes the case for a stronger domestic push clear: every incremental barrel produced in India reduces

foreign risk and improves macro stability.

Govt policy measures

Over the past decade, policy reforms have sought to re-energise exploration and production (E&P). The Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP, 2016), Open Acreage Licensing (2017), and creation of the National Data Repository have broadened participation. Monetisation of coal-bed methane, incentives for enhanced recovery, and crude sale deregulation in 2022 have also added flexibility. These measures create a foundation, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on how well private and public players are allowed to expand output.

Learning from abroad

The US offers lessons. Policies such as expanding offshore lease sales and accelerating approvals have been controversial, but they underline a consistent effort to ensure supply and reduce import vulnerability. The “drill, baby, drill” rhetoric may look political shorthand, yet the underlying principle—reducing barriers and enabling producers—is the need of the hour.

India may not mimic this approach, but it can take cues in shaping a pragmatic model, one that provides clearances in a predictable time frame, balances environmental oversight, and creates confidence for long-term investors. In such a framework, both policy reforms and corporate restructuring can play a role in moving the country closer to energy self-reliance.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Welcome reforms

Apropos of “Good & simple, finally” (FE, September 5), the much awaited reforms and rate rationalisation of the goods and services tax (GST) went well in the 56th GST Council meeting. Except for concerns raised by a few Opposition-ruled states on finding ways to compensate for the purported revenue loss due to the lowering of tax rates on many items, the proposed reforms were welcomed by one

and all. The suggestion to move sin goods from 40% to a higher slab has merit to rake in revenues. The tax rate cut on several items pertaining to farm mechanisation, inputs, and fertilisers would spur agricultural growth and spare farmers from huge spending. Estimates that the impact on the repo rate, lower interest rate on consumer credit, and the income tax relief would lead to lower retail inflation and help lift GDP growth are a positive sign. —RV Baskaran, Pune

Sops before polls?

The 18% goods and services tax (GST) charged on the premium payable by individuals for medical and life insurance policies have especially affected senior citizens and pensioners in the past eight years. It should not be forgotten that even life-saving medical-grade oxygen, diagnostic kits, glucometers, and corrective spectacles were taxed 12% and thermometers an alarming 18%.

After making the hapless public shell out maximum GST, the government has now rushed to reduce GST rates. The change of heart in the ruling dispensation, many allege, is due to a dip in popularity and upcoming polls in Bihar, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu. Insurance companies too should not use the GST waiver to hike the basic premium in a clandestine manner. —Shalini Gerald, Chennai

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Since the BJP formed its government in the national capital after 27 years, Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa says the party has initiated several steps towards improving the city's air quality and keeping pollution in check. In an interview with Agraj Pratap Singh of The Statesman, the 53-year-old senior BJP leader shares his vision for Delhi in terms of an improved pollution scenario, better waste disposal, and a clean environment to live in.

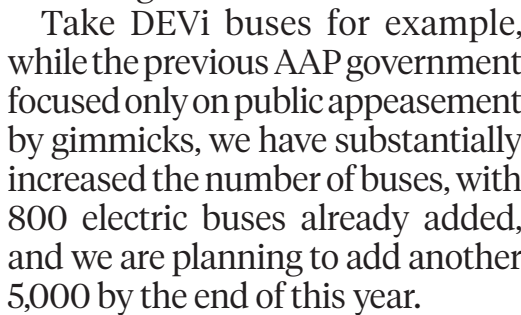
A. The Delhi government has unveiled the Air Pollution Mitigation Plan 2025, a blueprint for making the air clean. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta's vision of a Clean, Green and a Healthy Delhi, the plan focuses on four key actions, including a plantation drive of 70 lakh saplings under 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam', cloud seeding to induce artificial rainfall, focus on innovation through initiatives like innovation challenge to counter vehicular pollution from older vehicles, stricter monitoring of construction and demolition waste sites to control PM 10 levels, round the year MRS and anti smog guns coupled with water sprinklers.

A. Delhiites have long suffered due to poor waste management and the ever-rising garbage mountain. After our government took charge, we made it a priority to tackle this legacy issue. We have adopted a time-bound, technology-driven approach. About 80.59 lakh MT of waste remains to be cleared from these mountains, and accordingly two phases of bio mining tenders

A. Biomedical waste is a serious concern for both public health and air quality. At present, our two half-acre units cannot be expected to handle the city's 40 MT daily load. That is why, we are setting up new biomedical waste plants that will not only increase capacity, but also bring in modern, environment-friendly technology.

A. We are launching a pilot project to retrofit older BS3 and BS4 government vehicles with advanced catalytic converters. These devices can reduce particulate emissions by over 70 per cent, making them a powerful tool to clean Delhi's air while keeping essential transport functional. The project will be implemented in collaboration with

Beyond vehicles, our strategy focuses on building a sustainable



To address this, our government has launched a dedicated 'E-Waste Initiative' for Delhi. The focus is on creating formal collection channels, recycling infrastructure, and safe dismantling facilities so that electronic waste does not end up in landfills or informal markets.

WANG SON-TAEK

Trump was the elephant in the room, the gravitational force that

Putin's reentry into high diplomacy also reflects this moment. Since the International Criminal Court in 2023 issued a warrant for Putin - the first time in history for a UN Security

Kim's appearance is similarly entwined with Trump's choices. North

Even so, it would be premature to declare the US-led unipolar era over or to crown a consolidated anti-US

But a show is not yet a system. The difference is where the real power still lies.

The Korea Herald/ANN.

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- 1 Card game on which bridge is based? (7)
- 5 Low level of interest is dangerous sign during high economic growth (7)
- 9 Horse and cart transported pit workers (9)
- 10 Perhaps counters United being disqualified from event (5)
- 11 State time to head off (5)
- 12 Qualification voided company's ability to negotiate (9)

- 13 Item in magazine about game starting late (9)
16 City earnings initially take a dip (5)
17 Additional payment supported by British and American bank (5)
18 Musical about leaders of early English rebels looks like *Les Misérables*? (9)
20 Sailor from Arab country returns with adult girlfriend (9)
23 Meet with expert flying from terminal (5)

- 25 Joint resolution of
Kremlin was
regularly ignored (5)
- 26 Pariah state is
expelling six in
breach of
protocol? (9)
- 27 University degree
oddly inspired by
academic
resentment (7)
- 28 High-pitched male
parts wobble (7)
- DOWN**
- 1 Article penned by
expert really is du
(7)
- 2 Specialised
hospital takes on
delicate case (5)

- 3 Gets upset on
account of
changes (9)
- 4 Well-known day
school suffering
setback (5)
- 5 Curse affected
sheep and lamb (9)
- 6 Wireless router's
last two bits
connected by plug
(5)
- 7 Strip clubs
airbrushed from
record cover (9)
- 8 Steamy games at
school produce
inappropriate
characters (7)
- 14 Car close to black
sedan crashed and
turned upside
down (9)

- 15 Idiot can't supply
reading material
(9)
- 16 Obstacle to travel
around lines?
(9)
- 17 Outlaw musicians
stealing
equipment (7)
- 19 Unusual mountain
covered with
stone (7)
- 21 Honour terms of
previous invoice
with large
corporation?
(5)
- 22 U-boat could be
somewhere nearb
(5)
- 24 Conservative
member's route to
the top? (5)

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

Medina has been connected with the rest of the world by railway since 1908, and, although the Wahabi incursion has for the present cut off communication with Palestine and Damascus, there ought to be no real difficulty in the way of discovering the falsity or otherwise of the report that the mosque, within the precincts of which is the tomb of the Prophet, has been damaged by artillery fire. Histories mention that the jewels and plate of the mosque were plundered by Wahabis in the beginning of the 19th century, but since then more treasures have been collected. These are kept, it is stated, in the space between the tomb itself and the iron rails put up to keep worshippers from pressing upon the tomb. There are no other riches in Medina, which is no city of merchants like Mecca. The residents, apart from those who minister to the needs of pilgrims, are agriculturists. Ibn Saud denies that he has fired upon the mosque, but it remains to be seen whether he will succeed in persuading his following of Bedouins not to copy a precedent already set and avoid looting the treasures. Taif was certainly looted, and there is a good deal of evidence to prove that a great deal of looting went on in Mecca also.

SILVER PURCHASES

London, Sept.

The Treasury entered the silver market to-day for the first time in several months, purchasing a quarter of a million ounces at 72-72½ cents per ounce and a hundred thousand ounces at 70-75 cents. It is understood that the silver is required for subsidiary coinage.—Reuter's Special Service.

“BRITISH MARSHAL”

Gibraltar, Sept.

The steamer *British Marshal* which was found near Ceuta, and refloated last evening, has proceeded on her journey. A message from Ceuta says that while the *British Marshal* was endeavouring to right herself, a large quantity of petrol escaped and, catching fire, burnt down a number of bathing machines on the shore.—Reuter.

RAILWAY DEMANDS

(From Our Correspondent.)
Simla, Sept.

Mr. Sim will move the Assembly this session to grant supplementary railway demands for Rs. 13,000 and Rs. 3,80,000. The former represents expenditure under Audit. This demand is a corollary of the resolution on reorganization of the account and audit system on railways which Mr. Sim proposes to move in the Assembly. The amount asked for is based on an estimate of the extra cost involved, viz., Rs. 3 lakhs per annum which has been accepted by the Standing Finance Committee of Railways. A grant for five months' expenditure only is required in the current financial year. The latter demand for Rs. 38,00,000 represents Companies and Indian States share of surplus profits and net earnings. As a result of a large increase in net earnings in 1924-25 the amount of surplus profits and of net earnings payable to Companies and Indian States, in accordance with the terms of the working contracts, is Rs. 1,71,50,000. The grant voted by the Legislative Assembly is Rs. 1,33,50,000. The Standing Finance Committee for Railways has agreed to a supplementary demand for the excess of Rs. 38,00,000 being made.

FALL OF SUEIDA HUMOUR

Jerusalem, Sept.

It is persistently reported from Druse quarters that Saida has fallen after a bombardment, on September 2, in which the eastern wall of the citadel was destroyed and there was severe hand-to-hand fighting. It is further added that 150 French have been taken prisoners, and quantities of ammunition and supplies capture. Three armoured cars, a battery of guns, and numerous machine-guns, it is declared, have also been captured. — Reuter.

London, Sept.

The Delegate Conference of the Miners' Federation has unanimously accepted the draft constitution for the proposed inter-Union Alliance.—Reuter.



Editor's
TAKE

Demographic shift: Is India ageing too fast

It is a demographic paradox — once battling rapid population growth, the nation now faces the challenges of declining births and the prospect of an ageing society

It is a classic dilemma: Too much of anything is bad, but too little of it is equally worrisome. India has long been celebrated as a young nation with a large working-age population powering its growth story.

However, recent data suggest a quiet demographic transformation is underway. The latest Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2023 reveals that India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has declined to 1.9, down from 2.0 in the previous year, well below the replacement level of 2.1 births per woman. For the first time, rural India's TFR has touched the replacement rate of 2.1, while urban India's rate is even lower at 1.5.

The fall in fertility is driven by a combination of social, economic, and cultural changes – rising urbanisation growing cost of raising children, women education, availability of contraceptives – have altered family aspirations. Women's increasing participation in the workforce have played a decisive role, as they have delayed marriages, which reduce the reproductive window. Besides, fewer children and higher education ensure upward mobility. While this decline is a sign of progress, especially in terms of healthcare and gender empowerment, it carries complex implications for economic growth.

The most immediate concern is the risk to India's demographic dividend. The country's youthful workforce has been its biggest economic advantage, but now the working-age population will peak in the coming decades before beginning to shrink. This will mean fewer workers supporting a growing unproductive population.

The uneven fertility rates across states also add a layer of complexity. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh continue to record relatively high fertility, while states such as Delhi, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal are far below the average. This could result in inter-state labour migration, creating social tensions. Sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services may face shortages of young workers, while the pressure on pensions, healthcare, and elderly care will mount.

Addressing this shift will require a careful and balanced policy response. Family planning policies must adapt to regional variations, with high-fertility states focusing on population stabilisation while low-fertility states may need to encourage childbearing through supportive measures such as childcare facilities, parental leave, and financial incentives. More importantly, India must invest heavily in human capital. With fewer children being born, the emphasis must move from numbers to quality – ensuring good education, healthcare, and job opportunities. India's falling fertility rate is both a triumph and a test. The window of demographic advantage is narrowing, and unless India acts decisively to adapt, the very advantage it has could become a challenge for its future.

India's quest for knowledge

From the early vision of science and Gandhian thought to the contemporary framework of NEP-2020, each milestone reflects the nation's attempt to prepare its citizens for a changing world while remaining rooted in its cultural ethos

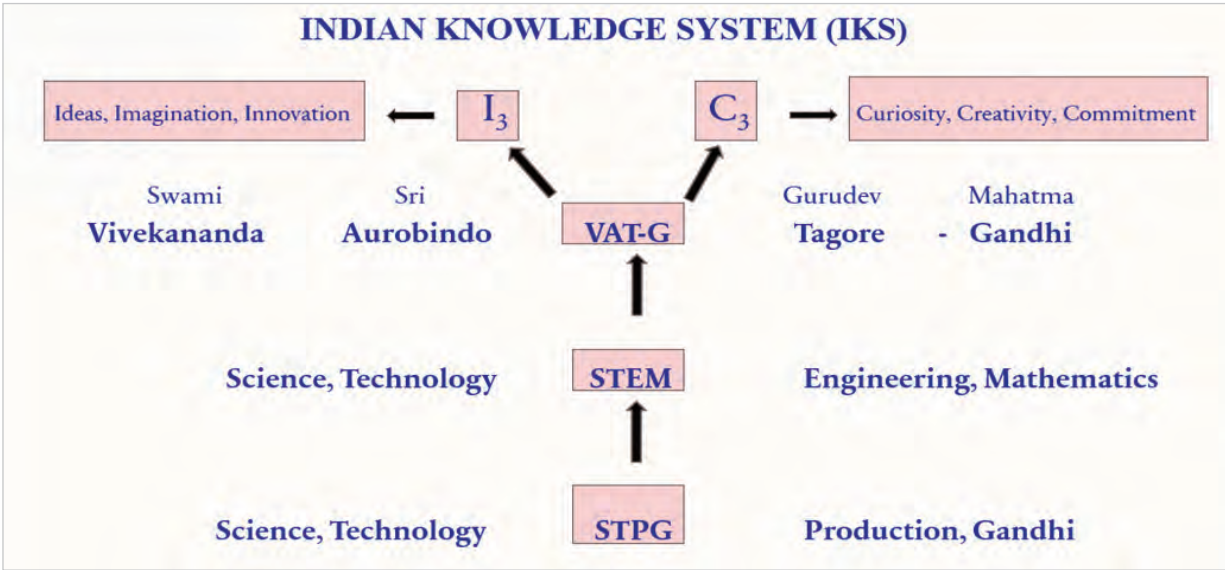


AARIF

India formulated its latest National Education Policy, NEP-2020, after a long gap, as the earlier National Policy on Education was formulated only in 1992. There was a major attempt to formulate a new curriculum framework for school education, 25 years. It was released on November 14, 2000, the birthday of Pandit Nehru, by the then Minister of HRD, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi.

Based upon it, the school textbooks, some of which were more than three decades old, were rewritten and revised. Focus must now be on where we stand at this juncture in education and how far we are preparing ourselves for the future in the national and global context. Unprecedented changes are taking place both in the content and process of education everywhere. Simultaneously, there is an ever-increasing global realisation of the interdependence of nations, communities, and people all around. It is now left to India to resume its leadership role in the process of the reshaping of the world, which was taking shape anyway! It needs to create a vibrant knowledge society, a highly acculturated people, and excellence in spirituality. Obviously, it has to be achieved only by seriously envisioning and implementing a dynamic and visionary Indian education system.

New challenges were emerging before the education systems globally, and every nation has to decipher its own challenges. India attempted the same through the reformulation of its education policy, the NEP-2020: "This National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all... The vision of policy is to instil among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development." This is a very comprehensive statement that would require not only tremendous efforts in implementation but also modern comprehension of the Indian tradition of knowledge quest, which in the ancient days commanded global respect and adulation. It shall have to be supplemented by the global philosophical and epistemological comprehension. The Centre for Contemporary Studies, PMML, Teen Murti Bhavan, New Delhi, has been re-energised under Nripendra Misra, chairman of the executive committee. He inspired a study on how education development during the second half of the 20th century could be reviewed and recalled for



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

THIS STUDY HAS BEEN COMPLETED OVER A PERIOD OF TWO YEARS, AND A MANUSCRIPT OF 553 PAGES ENTITLED MILLENNIAL TRANSITION: LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND SOCIAL COHESION HAS BEEN WRITTEN

The writer is a Research Fellow at Delhi University. He voluntarily assisted Professor JS Rajput, a Padma Shri awardee educationist, who conducted this project at the instance of the PMM, as an Atal Fellow for two years

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the benefit of the millennials, who would be holding the reins of power in practically every country in years to come. This study has been completed over a period of two years, and a manuscript of 553 pages entitled *Millennial Transition: Leadership, Education, Culture, and Social Cohesion* has been written. It has been prepared as an outcome of the study and submitted to the organisation on July 8, 2025. The National Book Trust of India, NBT, has accepted it for publication.

This study finds that India initially began its post-independence journey of education, knowledge, and development under the shadow of the times that were characterised by STPG: Science, Technology, Production, and Gandhi, an acronym often used by an outstanding scientist and academician, Prof Daulat Singh Kothari. This motto was the futuristic vision of those days and has subsequently been substituted by STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. It was incorporated for implementation in the National Policy on Education, 1986, which was revised in 1992. Afterwards, there was a long gap, and the next policy formation was completed only in 2020. The biggest challenge that India faced during the first five to six decades after independence was to take education to every child.

Focus at this stage is on excellence and skill acquisition. Today the biggest challenges are acculturation, social cohesion, and religious amity. Towards this, the passage passes through VAT-G, the ideas, thoughts, philosophy, and pragmatism of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Gurudev Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi. Swami Vivekananda was the most brilliant interpreter of the Indian quest of knowledge and wisdom in the contemporary context for international audiences. Sri Aurobindo, who understood Western culture and its inadequacies and

dwelled in great depth on the universality of the Indian interpretation of spirituality in the global context, and the Gurudev, who developed a subtle comprehension of the beauty of the man-nature interdependence. The comprehension of the thought, philosophy, and pragmatism of the great quartet offers an effective understanding of India, its knowledge traditions and systems, and its relationship to the global developments. Crossing this stage, one could go deeper into the works of the galaxy of illustrious persons and their works. Gurudev Tagore had highlighted the need to encourage the divine gift of the power of ideas and the power of imagination given in abundance to every child. The two I's, if inspired and nurtured with empathy, would lead to the third, Innovations, which constitutes the I³. To make it easier for the teachers and learners, three C's – Curiosity, Creativity, and Commitment – are also added: C³. Thus, the VAT-G, together with the I³ C³, constitutes the perfect combination for those interested in understanding and also in finding a solid base for Indian education, rooted in culture and committed to progress.

This identification comes after a thorough study and analysis of the initial post-independence emphasis on STPG – Science, Technology, Production, and Gandhi. It was followed by the STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Whatever the challenges, a nation like India cannot ignore its national and international responsibilities in the world of knowledge and skill acquisition. As the Indian tradition of knowledge quest, which is not confined to a particular region, community, religion, or language, has to be studied in its broader framework and, more importantly, in light of the modern traditions of knowledge generation and creation being developed on the international map.

Mentors illuminate the journey of lifelong learning



M J
WARSI

THE PIONEER 2ND OPINION

As we all know, teaching is truly a rewarding and unique profession, long regarded as one of the most sacred, noble, and pious services to both society and the nation. Teachers' Day is celebrated by students across the country with the purpose of expressing their gratitude towards their mentors for their invaluable contribution. The date of celebration varies from country to country. Since 1994, UNESCO has observed Teachers' Day on October 5. In India, however, it is celebrated on 5 September, the birth anniversary of Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Apart from being the first Vice-President and the second President of India, he also served as Chairman of the University Grants Commission in 1949. Radhakrishnan was a great scholar and an excellent

teacher, admired widely for his contribution to education. When his students and friends once sought his permission to celebrate his birthday, he modestly suggested that it would be far better if the day were dedicated to the entire teaching profession by honouring the hard work and commitment of teachers across the nation.

The purpose behind celebrating Teachers' Day is to acknowledge the dignity of the profession and the contribution of educators in nurturing young minds and nation-building. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also advocates restoring high respect for teachers and inspiring the best minds to join the profession. This year's celebration held special significance for Aligarh Muslim University, as Professor Vibha Sharma of the Department of English was selected for the National Education Award 2025 in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the field of education. The role of educators in shaping society is undeniable. Teaching is one of the most essential aspects of human life, pervading individuals, society, culture, and every dimension of human endeavour. Teachers, with their profound understanding of subject matter and deep reservoirs of wisdom, continually enrich the lives of their students. It is no coincidence that UNESCO has recognised India as one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, a fact reflected in the richness of its teaching traditions.

The principal role of a teacher is to transmit knowledge from one generation to another, ensuring that art, ideas, and cultural nuances are effectively preserved and carried forward. In India, there has long been a tradition of respecting and honouring teachers, known traditionally as gurus. Irrespective of religious belief or linguistic background, Teachers' Day is celebrated throughout the country. From childhood, we have heard the story of Eklavya, which defines exemplary discipleship. This tale illustrates dedication, hard work, obedience, and the spirit of *guru-dakshina*, the offering traditionally made by students in gratitude for learning. Dronacharya, by asking for Eklavya's thumb, immortalised his disciple's loyalty. In Islamic tradition, too, the teacher holds a very high status. Hazrat Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) once said, "If a person teaches me even one single word, he has made me his servant for a lifetime." The role of a teacher extends far beyond imparting knowledge or preparing students for examinations. It includes guiding them to distinguish right from wrong, correcting their mistakes, and shaping their moral character. Teachers are recognised for their contribution to society by inspiring, enlightening, and preparing students to become responsible citizens.

Prof M J Warsi, a widely acclaimed linguist, teaches in the Department of Linguistics at Aligarh Muslim University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Faith cannot bind language

An event featuring the proud Urdu speaker Javed Akhtar has been postponed by the West Bengal Urdu Academy due to threats from the orthodox section of his own linguistic-cum-religious group.

How can a liberal soul be allowed a free ground in this country where fundamentalism and orthodoxy call the last shot irrespective of community?

While attending the Kolkata Literary Meet in 2022, Akhtar sang paeans to Urdu, celebrating its secular literature and Indian credentials surpassing divides of Hinduism and Islam – with practitioners ranging from Mirza Ghalib to Munshi Premchand, Faiz Ahmed Faiz to Krishan Chander.

Akhtar stressed: "Languages belong to regions, not religions. Ten crore Muslims of erstwhile East Pakistan told seven crore Muslims of West Pakistan that they would not learn Urdu at the cost of Bengali. I love Urdu as you love Bengali, but I respect and salute those who defended Bengali. For them, mother tongue was far more important than religion." Surely this is not music to the ears of Urdu imperialists. Nor will harbingers of "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" be pleased. Thanks to Akhtar for practising "live and let live", reminding us that language transcends religion.

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

GST reforms yield mixed results

The announcement of rationalisation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates is a watershed in India's indirect tax regime. It focuses on boosting consumption with significant rate cuts on essentials, FMCG goods and consumer durables through a new two-tier slab: "Merit" and "Standard."

The exemption of life and health insurance, along with life-saving drugs, could address low insurance penetration and high out-of-pocket expenditure in health care.

From the export perspective, lower production costs in labour-intensive sectors due to reduced GST on raw materials may absorb additional tariff shocks announced by the United States. A simplified, consumer-friendly GST 2.0 appears a step towards removing the "Gabbat Singh Tax" tag. However, uncertainties remain. Revenue loss for states due to rate cuts may affect welfare schemes and fiscal stability.

To mitigate this, greater devolution of taxes under the Sixteenth Finance Commission and extension of Compensation Cess are crucial, alongside addressing concerns raised by MSMEs, consumers and other stakeholders. GST 2.0 offers hope but requires vigilance and cooperation.

PRASUN KUMAR DUTTA | KOLKATA

Mental health demands actions

Over one billion people live with mental health disorders, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Conditions such as anxiety and depression impose immense human and economic costs. While many nations have strengthened mental health policies, greater investment is needed globally to expand services that protect and promote well-being.

Mental health conditions are widespread, affecting all ages and incomes. They represent the second-largest cause of long-term disability, reducing healthy life expectancy. They increase health-care costs for families while inflicting significant global economic losses. Recent WHO reports – *World Mental Health Today and Mental Health Atlas 2024* – highlight progress but expose gaps in services. Governments and leaders must act urgently to ensure mental health care is treated not as privilege but as a basic right. The economic burden is staggering. While treatment costs are high, the indirect cost of lost productivity is higher still. Depression and anxiety alone cost the global economy over one trillion US dollars annually. These findings underscore the urgent need for sustained investment, prioritisation and collaboration to expand access, reduce stigma and address root causes of mental illness.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

BITS, PILANI (GOA) FACES STUDENT SAFETY CRISIS

The Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani, at Sancoale in Goa, has been shaken by a spate of student deaths since December 2024. On Thursday, a nineteen-year-old student was found dead in his hostel room. Undue pressure, harassment through ragging and pressing mental health concerns have been cited as possible reasons for five deaths within a single year. Parents of the deceased have expressed serious concern over the possibility of foul play in some cases.

Students in higher centres of learning need not only quality education but also proper communication and coordination mechanisms to support them. They must be kept engaged, motivated and energetic. Mere teaching, without sufficient extra-curricular activities, may

ultimately do more harm than good. A thorough relook at the curriculum and examination pattern is urgently required. The introduction of systematic and consistent wellness courses cannot be overemphasised.

At the same time, campus security must be enhanced, and vigilant monitoring of unwanted visitors should be considered a necessity rather than an optional measure. The committee constituted by the Goa Government has the onerous responsibility of not only identifying the causes of these unfortunate deaths and fixing accountability, but also of recommending practical ways and means to ensure a safe, healthy and secure environment for all students.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

PIC TALK



A young Newar girl, embodying divine feminine energy, waits for the Kumari Puja ritual, during which she will be venerated – at Hanuman Dhoka, Basantapur Durbar Square, Nepal.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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North India’s Floods: Not Seasonal Wrath, but Climate Collapse

It is tempting to see these floods as seasonal wrath. But they are not accidents of weather; they are a mirror to our misplaced idea of progress. Describing them as ‘natural calamities’ dangerously denies their man-made roots



ACHARYA
PRASHANT

Over the past weeks, North India has been brought to a standstill. The monsoon, once awaited as a lifeline, has turned into a chain of disasters with floods, landslides and water-logging. What should have replenished the soil has instead uprooted families, erased livelihoods, and scarred the land.

The scale of this devastation is staggering. Himachal Pradesh alone has lost over 340 lives since 20 June: 182 to landslides, flash floods and collapsing houses, the rest to rain-triggered accidents. More than 1,300 roads lie blocked, including four national highways; over 2,100 transformers are down; nearly 800 water supply schemes are disrupted. Entire tourist districts like Shimla, Kullu and Chamba are cut off. The State Disaster Management Authority has warned that restoring access to many remote villages may take weeks.

In Jammu & Kashmir, the Tawi and Chenab rivers have surged past danger levels, schools are closed, and evacuations are under way. Punjab reports devastation across 1,400 villages in 23 districts: 350,000 people affected, 148,000 hectares of crops gone. Delhi and NCR, too, wade through waterlogged streets, schools shut, and transport paralysed. Northern Railway has cancelled 68 trains; the Pathankot-Jammu line remains blocked. Relief teams are in the field, but the scale of loss dwarfs every effort.

It is tempting to see these floods as seasonal wrath. But they are not accidents of weather; they are a mirror to our misplaced idea of progress. Describing them as “natural calamities” dangerously denies their man-made roots.

Fragile Mountains, Fractured by Greed

Himachal's hills are collapsing because we drilled, blasted, and cemented them year after year. When rivers are forced into concrete and wetlands into real estate, the monsoon is bound to return the debt.

The Himalayas are geologically young, their slopes precariously held together. Yet we have treated them as construction sites. Every highway cut through rock, every tunnel bored into the mountain, every dam raised across a river has weakened what was already fragile. So when the rains come hard,



ASIA IS HEATING NEARLY TWICE AS FAST AS THE GLOBAL AVERAGE, WHICH MEANS MORE VIOLENT BURSTS OF RAIN AND MORE FREQUENT CLOUDBURSTS

The writer is philosopher and teacher of global wisdom literature and is the founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation

acharya_prashant_paf

@Advait_Prashant

prashantadvait

the mountains do not simply get wet, they collapse. In Uttarakhand too, the red alerts keep coming. The India Meteorological Department has warned of extremely heavy rainfall in Dehradun, Nainital, Rudraprayag, and Udham Singh Nagar. District administrations fear fresh landslides and cloudbursts in zones already scarred. These are not isolated accidents; they are the cumulative outcome of years of taking more from the hills than they can yield.

Cities That Engineer Their Own Floods

There is also a stark contrast between rural helplessness and urban negligence. Villages in the Himalayas collapse because they are too weak to resist. But what excuse do Delhi and Gurgaon have? These are the richest cities. They drown not from poverty, but from negligence: storm drains buried, floodplains encroached, public responsibility traded for private convenience.

Urbanisation was meant to expand our horizon. Instead, it has imported the village's narrowness into skyscrapers: responsibility ends at the boundary wall. Inside, polished roads and manicured

lawns; outside, chaos and waterlogging. The annual drowning of our richest cities is not a failure of funds, but a failure of mindset.

The Climate Crisis Is Not Distant, It Is Here

Climate change is the decisive force behind today's devastation. Asia is heating nearly twice as fast as the global average, which means more violent bursts of rain and more frequent cloudbursts. NASA confirms floods and droughts have already doubled worldwide in two decades.

According to the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, the average number of flood-affected districts in India has jumped from 19 a year (1970-2004) to 55 a year (2005-2019). This is not seasonal wrath, it is climate collapse unfolding before us. Yet three out of four of India's flood-prone districts still lack proper early-warning systems.

This crisis is inseparable from global feedback loops: permafrost is releasing methane, glaciers are vanishing, coral reefs are dying. Once these cycles begin, they drive themselves. To dismiss floods as accidents of weather is not realism, it is denial. This is not pessimism,

it is physics.

Inequality of Emissions, Inequality of Suffering

The world's richest 10% drive emissions with private jets and excess lifestyles, while farmers and labourers lose lives and crops. Climate change is not only an ecological crisis. It is the violence of the rich upon the poor.

Yet it is not the elites who die in landslides or lose their crops to floods. It is farmers in Punjab whose fields are destroyed, labourers in Himachal whose houses collapse, and migrant families in Delhi who lose what little they had. Climate change is not only measured in degrees or millimetres of rainfall, it is measured in uprooted families and broken livelihoods.

And inequality is not just global; it is domestic too. In India, urban elites consume far more energy, fuel, and goods than the rural majority, yet it is the poor who live on riverbanks, in fragile hillside settlements, and in unplanned colonies most exposed to disaster. The climate crisis is layered upon pre-existing injustice, deepening every faultline of class and geography.

REDEFINING PROGRESS BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

We need to redefine progress. A “good life” cannot remain defined by bigger cars, bigger houses, more air miles. That definition was implanted by those who profit from our desires.

Urgent reforms are overdue: restore wetlands and floodplains, tax carbon-heavy consumption, and disclose the footprints of corporations and celebrities. But there is a warning: no reform will hold without a shift in human consumption. Policies will fail unless minds change. Festivals need not mean firecrackers. Joy need not mean excess travel or display. The climate outside reflects the climate within, and when the inner self is restless, nature too collapses.

This is why the PrashantAdvait Foundation has launched Operation 2030, a mission to awaken citizens before the UN's climate deadline. Scientists warn that unless warming is capped at 1.5°C by 2030, feedback cycles-melting glaciers, rising seas, collapsing ecosystems-will lock us into irreversibility. Operation 2030 rests on one insight: only inner clarity can anchor outer change.

A Civilisational Test

Looking again at this week's disasters: highways blocked, villages drowned, pilgrims stranded, crops ruined, it is clear that these are not just damages to be compensated; they are reminders of what reckless choices bring.

Mountains can bear only so much blasting, rivers only so much encroachment, cities only so much concrete. When the limits are crossed, collapse follows. If we hurry to rebuild on the same foundations of ignorance, the next disaster is already assured. If we pause, reflect, and change direction, this moment could still become a turning point.

The Gita reminds us: action born of inner clarity liberates, while action born of delusion destroys. Development without wisdom is rehearsal for the next tragedy. The monsoon has spoken. The question is, will we listen?

And if we refuse to listen, it will not only be us who pay. It will be our children and grandchildren who inherit a land where the monsoon is feared, not welcomed; where rivers mean devastation, not fertility. History will ask what we were doing in 2025, when the signs were so clear. Our silence then will be the loudest testimony of all.

‘Voter Adhikar Yatra’ redefines Opposition unity, elevates RaGa’s stature



ANIL
ANAND

Mr Rahul Gandhi's 1,300-kilometre ‘Voter Adhikar Yatra’ criss-crossing the rough and tumble of the Hindi hinterland of poll-bound Bihar has certainly stirred the country's political pot afresh. If his across-the-country Bharat Jodo Yatra and Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra were meant to bring him out of the closet and erase the image of “Pappu” carelessly heaped upon him by the Narendra Modi dispensation, the Bihar outing has not only established him as the sole potential candidate to challenge Mr Modi, but also considerably increased his acceptability in the opposition camp.

This, importantly, is his first foray in the hard-core cow-belt where Congress has nothing to fall back upon. It is too early to gauge his endeavour's impact on the organisation or its electoral dividends. The net gain is that he has been able to set the narrative, forcing others, including the BJP, to follow, and has led the charge from the front.

His political rating has definitely increased, notwithstanding the fact that the ‘Voter Adhikar Yatra’ was supposed to be a local phenomenon with focus on the Bihar assembly elections. The idea was to corner the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the ruling BJP on the issue of surreptitiously deleting votes through a hurriedly called Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls barely three months before assembly polls.

No one, even Mr Gandhi's worst critics, can deny that he has been able to raise a crescendo over this issue single-handedly in true ‘Sansad se Sadak tak’ manner and succeeded singularly despite a hostile and partisan media. The fact of the matter is that he has successfully changed the tide from being reactive to launching the action straightaway. This is particularly so in Bihar. In the rest of the country, it has become a talking point and theme of discussion, thereby forcing the ECI to come out with unconvincing clarifications, leading to strengthening his narrative and the resultant doubt in the public mind.

Although the ‘Voter Adhikar Yatra’ was an I.N.D.I.A combined venture, which was testified by the presence of leading leaders and representatives of its constituents (regional parties from other parts of the country) but dominated by the Bihar-centric poll alliance, from the word go it had the stamp of Mr Gandhi affixed.

In fact, he became the star attraction pulling crowds, overwhelmingly youth, and finally his stamp was firmly affixed on the mega event by

the time it concluded.

The astounding success of the Rahul-focused march, as senior journalist and columnist Ms Neeraja Chaudhary described it after extensively covering the event, is solely ascribed to him. Despite the Congress organisation being in shambles in Bihar, he drew out enthusiastic crowds.

The immediate purpose of the march covering nearly 125 assembly constituencies was, of course, to galvanise public opinion in favour of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)-Congress-Left led opposition alliance. Despite the RJD being the dominant partner, Congress, courtesy of Mr Gandhi, has been able to steal the show. However, the success of the event with Mr Gandhi playing a dominant role has also brought into focus its impact on the national political scene, particularly the fragile opposition unity.

From the national perspective, it has raised the stature of Mr Gandhi by many notches, establishing him as the frontline challenger to Mr Modi in future electoral contests. The regional satraps, particularly the muscle-flexing Trinamool Congress supremo, Ms Mamata Banerjee, and self-styled rebel and AAP chief, Mr Arvind Kejriwal, seem to have fallen by the wayside as the Bihar event unfolded. As it is, the latter has disassociated himself from the I.N.D.I.A alliance but kept a window open as AAP has joined the opposition protest on SIR in Bihar. The just concluded monsoon session of Parliament saw a more co-ordinated show by the opposition alliance on the issue of alleged tampering of voters' lists and sudden SIR in Bihar. There was not a single voice of dissent and every constituent of I.N.D.I.A participated at one level or the other.

The SIR and resultant ‘Voter Adhikar Yatra’ have pushed Mr Modi, for the first time in the last decade, on the back foot. It is for the first time, all this while, that an issue has stuck around his neck, rendering his well-crafted counter-offensive mechanism ineffective.

The positive buzz over these issues combined with his relentless ‘Samvidhan Bachao’ campaign getting public traction, has proved a new trendsetter for Mr Gandhi. Although Mr Gandhi has emerged as the dramatis persona behind the success of the Bihar march and the main driving force behind his relentless campaign against the ECI and the BJP-led Central Government, it should in no way diminish the contribution of the other I.N.D.I.A bloc partners. The united show put by the opposition inside and outside Parliament, despite reluctance to direct participation by Ms Banerjee and her ilk, certainly gave strength to him as the leader of the premier opposition party of the country.

Another interesting outcome of these developments, owing to effective headship provided by Mr Gandhi, is acceptance of his leadership by

the bloc leaders as against earlier reluctance on their part. This is a hard-earned situation which he should not squander by only focusing on his solo drives and ignoring Congress's organisational weaknesses.

There is still a strong imponderable whether Mr Gandhi's stellar effort will help raise the Congress's graph both at the national level and in Bihar. Such a scenario had earlier emerged at the end of his nearly 6,500-kilometre twin yatras across the country, but it had fizzled out due to lack of organisational back-up from the party to carry forward the positive impact.

Will the ‘Voter Adhikar Yatra’, which has firmly saddled Mr Gandhi on the national political firmament, meet the fate of the Bharat Jodo yatras?

The question assumes significance as nothing much has changed on the organisational front in Congress, which continues to reel under a status quoist culture.

His efforts to change this culture, which primarily is being perpetuated by the old guard, have met stiff resistance after the culmination of the Bharat Jodo Yatras. The more he tried to change, though efforts were a tame affair, the more vicious the saboteurs became in the form of active BJP cells.

The Bihar yatra has fully empowered Mr Gandhi to act decisively and given him enough elbow space to act. The fact that he has shown guts to take the bull by the horns by launching a direct diatribe against Mr Modi, mostly over policy issues including “poll management”, means he should not let this opportunity go and must act to overhaul the Congress, removing deadwood, non-performers, and moles of the BJP (by Mr Gandhi's own admission).

This is not only in Mr Gandhi and Congress's interest, but more in the interest of the nation. A strong Congress and thereby a strong opposition could be an anathema to the ruling elite's attempts at creating a unitary system, undermining the basic democratic ethos of the country. The opposition parties, particularly Ms Banerjee and Mr Kejriwal, should also shed their biases and keep aside personal ambitions for a while to work for a bigger cause, which is to thwart the challenge posed by Mr Modi.

The hard fact which they cannot ignore is that a national party such as Congress with pan-India presence should act as a pivot to face this challenge. The sooner they realise, the better it would be to take the fight against the ECI's shenanigans, and for the protection of the Constitution, to its logical conclusion en route to electoral victories ahead.

The writer is Political and National Affairs Analyst

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How Mao misled Nehru as China-Pakistan axis took shape

A new book, “Trial By Water: Indus Basin and India-Pakistan Relations” by Uttam Sinha, brings out how, as the Indus Waters Treaty was being negotiated, Mao Zedong was already casting his eye on a strategic relationship with Pakistan

When India and Pakistan signed the Indus Waters Treaty in 1960, brokered by the World Bank and hailed internationally as a model of co-operation, it seemed a rare moment of stability in an otherwise fraught relationship. Yet even as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru extended his hand toward reconciliation with Pakistan, a more ominous challenge was quietly taking shape to the north-a China-Pakistan axis that would soon alter the strategic landscape of South Asia.

A new book, *Trial By Water: Indus Basin and India-Pakistan Relations* by Uttam Sinha, brings out how, as the Indus Waters Treaty was being negotiated, Mao Zedong was already casting his eye on a strategic relationship with Pakistan. What Nehru hoped would be a step toward peace with one neighbour coincided with the forging of an alliance between his two most difficult adversaries.

The seeds of this two-front challenge were sown in the 1950s. After occupying Tibet in 1950, Mao had set his eyes on Aksai Chin, a desolate but strategically crucial high-altitude desert of Ladakh. By the mid-1950s, China had built a road through the region, linking Xinjiang to Tibet. Nehru, downplaying its importance, told Parliament in 1959 that the area had “not a blade of grass,” a remark that would haunt India after China consolidated its grip during the 1962 war. Behind Mao's rhetoric of Asian solidarity, his ambitions were calculated and expansionist. When he met Nehru in 1954, Mao charmed the Indian leader with talk of shared struggles against Western imperialism. He spoke of peace, dismissed war as unprofitable, and even recited poetry at their farewell. But beneath the gestures lay a grand design. For Mao, rivers, mountains, and barren expanses were not empty landscapes; they were strategic levers. Control over the headwaters of the Indus in Tibet and Aksai Chin gave China the ability to influence lifelines that sustained millions downstream.

Even as Indian engineers were engaged in delicate negotiations with Pakistan over the Indus river system, China was tightening its grip over these contested territories. The Indus, beginning from Tibet's sacred Mount Kailash, passes through Aksai Chin before reaching Ladakh and eventually flowing into Pakistan. With the occupation of Aksai Chin and later the Shaksgam Valley ceded by Pakistan in 1963, China was steadily positioning itself as a decisive player in Kashmir's strategic geography.

The betrayal became clear as Pakistan and



China moved closer in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While Nehru defended the Indus Waters Treaty as a step toward peace with Pakistan, Islamabad was quietly negotiating with Beijing to define their common border. In 1963, Pakistan handed over 5,180 square kilometres of the Shaksgam Valley to China, giving Beijing a foothold in Gilgit-Baltistan and cementing the foundation of a long-term strategic partnership.

India's protests went unheeded. An official note to China in 1962 asserted India's sovereignty over the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, but by then, the ground reality had shifted. As New Delhi placed its faith in diplomacy and restraint, Beijing and Islamabad were forging an alliance that would eventually confront India on two fronts-militarily in wars and diplomatically in global forums.

The story of the Indus Waters Treaty, often celebrated as a triumph of co-operation, thus hides a parallel story of strategic miscalculation. As Nehru sought peace with Pakistan through water-sharing, Mao was setting the stage for a partnership with Islamabad that would redefine South Asia's security equation. The real trial was not in the Indus waters alone, but in the dangerous alignment of two neighbours-an axis that continues to test India to this day.

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GST 2.0: A REFORM THAT TOUCHES EVERY INDIAN

OPINION

TUHIN A. SINHA &
NAGENDER PARASHAR



India has entered a new era of economic governance. With the rollout of GST 2.0, the Union Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has delivered a reform that is not only historic but also deeply people-centric. This bold step reflects a careful balance of fiscal prudence and inclusive growth, bringing relief to households, industries, and entrepreneurs alike.

At the heart of GST 2.0 lies a dramatic simplification. The old 12% and 28% slabs have been scrapped in favour of a streamlined dual-rate system of 5% and 18%, with a 40% levy reserved for luxury and sin goods. For the common man, this means cheap-

er essentials, affordable healthcare, lower costs of education tools and appliances, and more money in hand to spend. For farmers, reduced taxation on agricultural inputs eases costs, increases profitability, and strengthens the rural economy. For the middle class, a simplified structure lowers day-to-day expenses, directly boosting purchasing power. This reform ensures that no group is left behind—it touches every household, every village, and every sector.

India's 63 million Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises—the true engines of job creation—are among the biggest winners of GST 2.0. By lowering input costs, easing compliance, and stimulating consumer demand, this reform pro-

vides a structural push to MSMEs. For too long, these enterprises struggled with complex paperwork, high tax burdens, and cash flow bottlenecks. Today, they stand empowered to compete, expand, and innovate. The ripple effects are clear: stronger MSMEs mean more jobs, higher incomes, and deeper penetration of entrepreneurship in rural and semi-urban India.

Perhaps the most progressive aspect of GST 2.0 is the reduction of GST on medical technology items from 12% to 5%. This single decision has the potential to transform India's healthcare landscape. Affordable access to diagnostics and devices will improve preventive care, consistency across preventive, curative, and rehabilitative healthcare will reduce disparities, and the expansion of early detection mechanisms will lower long-term costs for families. It is a reform with a human face—one that puts Swasth Bharat at the heart of Samridh Bharat.

Equally important is the way GST 2.0 strengthens India's economic foundation. By simplifying rates and processes, it rein-

forces predictability and transparency, which are crucial for attracting investment and driving industrial growth. Domestic consumption will rise as disposable incomes increase, entrepreneurs and investors will gain confidence in a transparent, pro-growth tax regime, supply chains will become more efficient, and fiscal prudence will be preserved even as demand-side expansion is encouraged. This is not a reform driven by populism; it is a strategic recalibration of India's fiscal architecture, carefully designed to balance immediate relief with long-term sustainability.

The brilliance of GST 2.0 lies in its universality. From agriculture to manufacturing, from healthcare to education, from startups to large industries—everyone benefits. Women-led businesses and youth-driven startups stand to gain from lower costs and easier compliance. By breaking down barriers and unlocking growth across sectors, this reform reaffirms India's commitment to inclusive development.

Over the last 11 years,

Prime Minister Modi has consistently delivered reforms that have put India on a stronger footing. GST 2.0 is the latest in this continuum. From the initial rollout in 2017 to today's simplified, futuristic framework, India has transitioned from fragmented taxation to a unified, citizen-friendly system. This is a historic milestone not just in tax reform but in governance itself, demonstrating how cooperative federalism—where the Union and States move together—can achieve transformative results for the nation.

GST 2.0 is more than a set of revised tax rates. It is a reform of lives and livelihoods, a powerful catalyst for national progress. It empowers households, energises industries, revitalises MSMEs, strengthens healthcare, and reinforces investor confidence. Above all, it demonstrates that reforms can be both fiscally responsible and socially progressive. In its vision and execution, GST 2.0 exemplifies the essence of New India: bold, inclusive, and future-ready. It will be remembered as a reform that touched not just balance sheets, but the very lives of ordinary Indians—proving that under PM Modi's leadership, governance is not about numbers, but about people.

Tubin A. Sinha, National Spokesperson, BJP
Nagender Parashar, Director, Parashar Future Technologies

Women-led businesses and youth-driven startups stand to gain from lower costs and easier compliance. By breaking down barriers and unlocking growth across sectors, this reform reaffirms India's commitment to inclusive development.



Learning without teachers

OPINION

NAVNEET SHARMA

"The destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms." When the Kothari Commission report began with this truism, it could scarcely have imagined that, even after six decades, India's ever-expanding classroom population would be compelled to write its destiny largely without guidance, or with only negligible support, because of the absence of teachers who were expected to mentor pupils in shaping both their own futures and that of the nation.

A recent press release by the Press Information Bureau (PIB) proudly proclaimed that India has one crore teachers to educate twenty-four crore school-going children. On the surface, this would appear to reflect the attainment of the ideal pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) of 1:24 required for the delivery of quality education. Yet, a closer interrogation of the data reveals a starkly different, and far more troubling, reality. The ten most populous states of India, which are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh, collectively home to more than seventy percent of the country's population, present a contrasting narrative.

Data from Uttar Pradesh's Basic Education Department illustrates this paradox. The state manages 1,32,855 schools with 1,03,441 teachers, averaging 4.5 teachers per school. However, official records also indicate that 8,866 of these schools function with only one teacher, accommodating a total enrolment of 6,11,950 students, which translates into a staggering PTR of 1:69. In practice, this means that in schools with five grades (I-V), a single teacher is expected not only to simultaneously teach all classes but also to oversee the PM-POSHAN (mid-day meal scheme) and engage in administrative and managerial tasks. By comparison, private school data from the same state reflects 4,14,144 teachers employed across 74,471 schools, underscoring the significant disparities in access to quality education between govern-

ment and private institutions.

The situation within Uttar Pradesh's districts further accentuates this divide. Hardoi, with the highest number of government schools, hosts 3,446 schools enrolling 4,83,678 students but staffed by only 14,609 teachers, yielding a PTR of 1:33. Conversely, Ghaziabad records 445 government schools against 1,356 private schools, where 2,643 teachers serve 96,993 students, producing a PTR of 1:37.

This crisis extends beyond Uttar Pradesh. Across the ten most populous states, 10,17,660 government schools include 1,10,971 single-teacher schools, enrolling nearly four crore students. These children are effectively denied meaningful access to teachers' time, guidance, and mentorship. Madhya Pradesh alone accounts for the highest number of single-teacher schools, catering to 5,87,208 students with a PTR of 1:44. Bihar has 2,637 such schools with an astonishing PTR of 1:110, while West Bengal reports 6,366 schools with 2,48,696 students and a PTR of 1:39.

By the government's own estimates, India requires an additional ten lakh teachers, with nearly four lakh vacancies at the elementary level alone. Addressing these shortages is not insurmountable; with political will and administrative resolve, such recruitment could be achieved within a year. What is more alarming, however, is the systemic apathy not only toward the teaching profession but also toward the very act of teaching itself, despite India being a signatory to numerous Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) conventions.

Teacher recruitment and teacher education programmes have been mired in neglect over the past decade. The constant experimentation with 1-, 2-, and 4-year teacher education programmes, often dictated by the whims of policymakers, has generated confusion rather than clarity regarding the pathways to becoming a qualified teacher. The frequency and rapidity of these curricular revisions

have blurred the vision of what constitutes a teacher and what professional competencies the role demands.

Equally disquieting are the conditions of service and remuneration. Salaries vary significantly depending on the nature of the appointment and the type of school management. In flagship government programmes such as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, contractual teachers receive monthly salaries of Rs 18,000 in Bihar and Rs 25,000 in Tamil Nadu. These figures are less than the government-prescribed minimum daily wage for semi-skilled labourers and, in some contexts, even half the wage of highly skilled labourers. Furthermore, sixty-nine percent of teachers in private schools and fourteen percent in government schools are employed on contractual terms, leaving them devoid of job security and financial stability. Prolonged delays in recruitment processes and the acute infrastructural deficits in rural schools further render teaching an unattractive career choice, dissuading talented individuals from entering the profession.

Unmindful policies exacerbate the crisis. Initiatives such as the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) and the mandatory fifty hours of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) annually risk compounding existing challenges. Rather than strengthening the profession, such measures often add bureaucratic burdens that undermine teacher autonomy and morale.

Before placing blame for policy failures on teachers themselves, it is imperative to reimagine policies that accord dignity, respect, and professional autonomy to the teaching vocation, rather than resorting to the hollow rhetoric of likening teachers to divinities. Without such structural reorientation, teachers will remain relegated to the role of subservient employees, compelled to comply with the ideological dictates of their superiors.

Without investing in human capacity, India risks fostering a nation of classrooms without teachers, and, consequently, a nation without direction.

(Navneet Sharma teaches in Central University of Himachal Pradesh. Views are personal)

The gains and pains of rains

FROWNING PROHIBITED

JAS KOHLI



It is a typical day. My 'to do list' is ever expanding- like

the fiscal deficit of states. Then, I hear my favourite sound- rain drops. I rush to the verandah and get spell-bound by the sight of pearls of aqua. Tasks can wait. The same scenario repeats multiple times every monsoon. However, I don't suffer from the peculiar stomach disorder which affects most Indians on a rainy day. It can only be cured by having pakoda, samosa or vada with

masala tea.

To state that the Indian subcontinent is a gift of the monsoon wouldn't be an exaggeration. Here, with the onset of rains, every creature, whether human or animal, develops euphoria which is equivalent to ingestion of a few measures of alcohol. Since times immemorial, our poets have gone into overdrive during rains. However, in poetic imagination, the beauty with the Kohl lined eyes has the upper hand. She teases the dark clouds, 'Your show is only for a few months. But my black tresses weave their magic throughout the year.' In fact, clouds, rain, winds, moon, rivers, boats, seashore and beautiful women are planning to sue the poets



and the shayars for the unpaid royalty.

During the wet season, if one's beloved is away to another city for a job, that job may be valued as worthless. Even if old lovers have been forgotten, their memories

resurface. This is also the best time to propose because boys and girls are the most receptive in Saawan.

But the romantic notion of rains turns traumatic if one has to make an unavoidable road trip during torrential

rain. With streams of water flowing through the streets, there is a constant prayer on the lips- I hope I don't hit a spine rattling pothole. And if one starts thinking of open manholes, collapse of bridges and sudden ap-

pearance of sinkholes, palpitations are guaranteed. While some reckless drivers splash water and mud on the pedestrians and the incoming vehicles, a lot of mudslinging also happens in the monsoon session of the parliament.

Also, people who live in low lying areas or in colonies with poor drainage, have mixed feelings about the rains. Surprisingly, the drainage problem has remained unresolved for decades in some areas- the authorities will surely find a solution once all the equations about the dark matter in the universe get solved. Another section of population who remain on edge during the monsoon are the government and private

weather forecasters. Their 'plus' forecast often turns out to be 'minus' and vice versa. Even the use of supercomputers in forecasting rain hasn't given super results on a consistent basis.

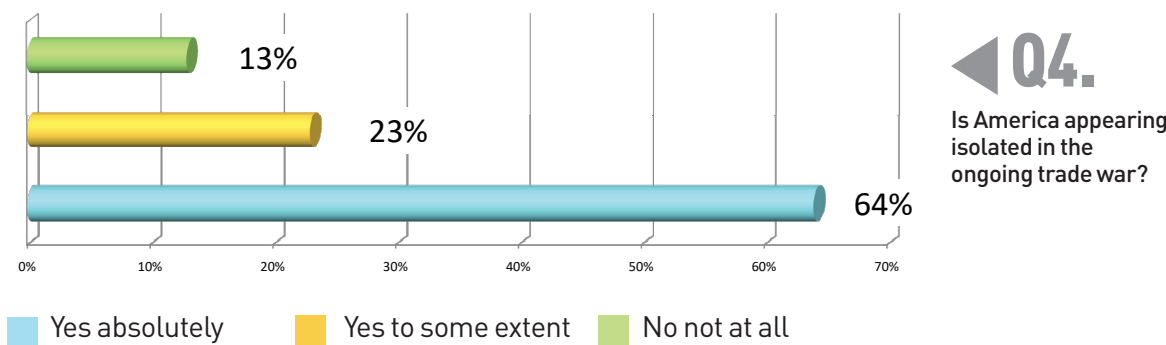
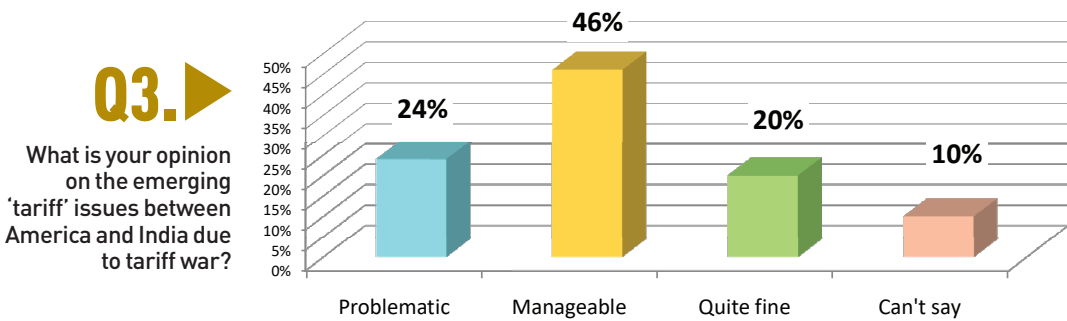
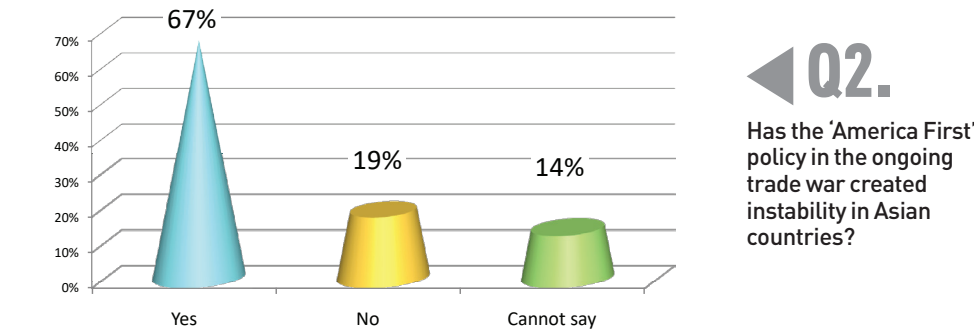
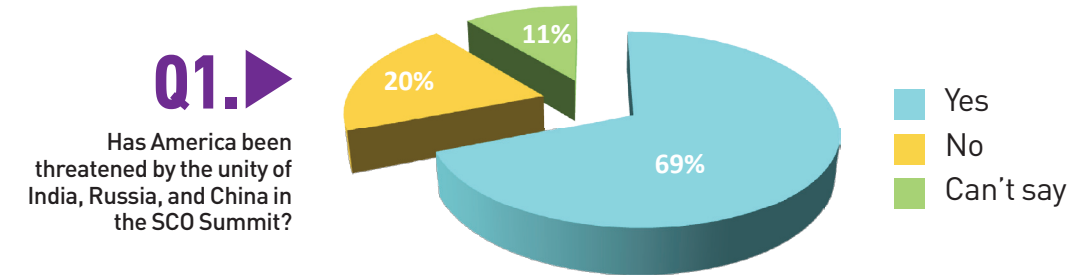
Lately, the monsoon has become quite moody. Sometimes it decides to dump lot of water in a place. On the other hand, it may decide to take an extended break, especially in August and September. The rain Gods must be annoyed. To reciprocate for the benevolence of our amazing planet, our return gifts have included- deforestation, pollution, illegal mining and global warming. The days of romancing under an umbrella are over. Nowadays couples prefer to go on long drives!

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON INDIA-US RELATIONS

64% people believe that US is appearing isolated in the ongoing trade war

India-U.S. ties have soured under Trump, marked by tariffs and insults, pushing India toward strategic autonomy. At the SCO, India deepened ties with Russia and began a reset

with China, reflecting multipolarity's rise. While negotiations with Washington continue, trust has eroded, and India pursues diversified relations to safeguard its interests.



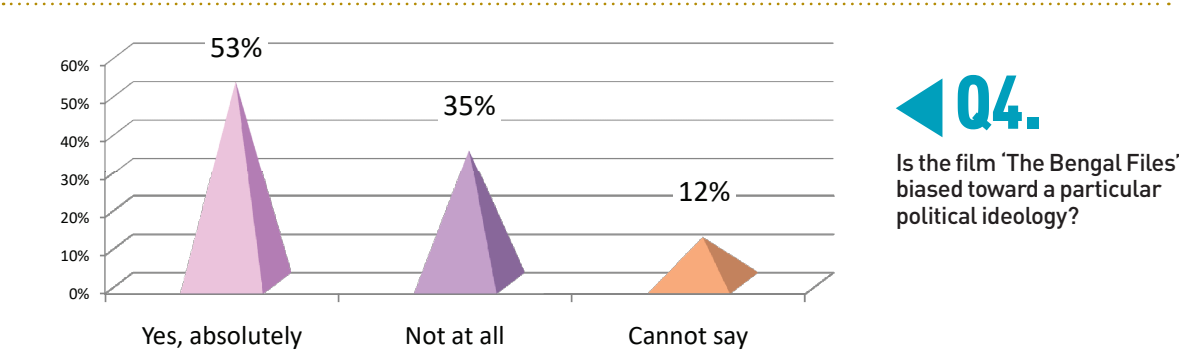
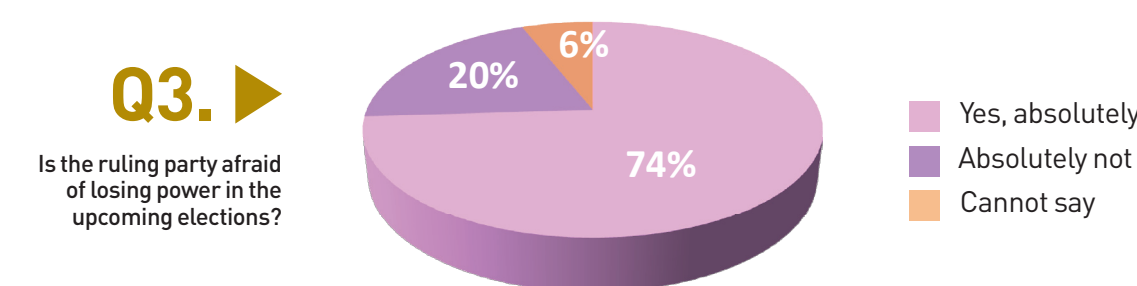
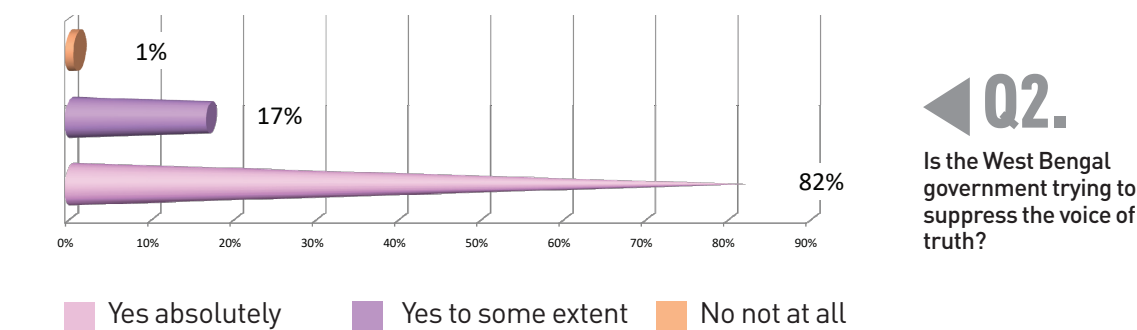
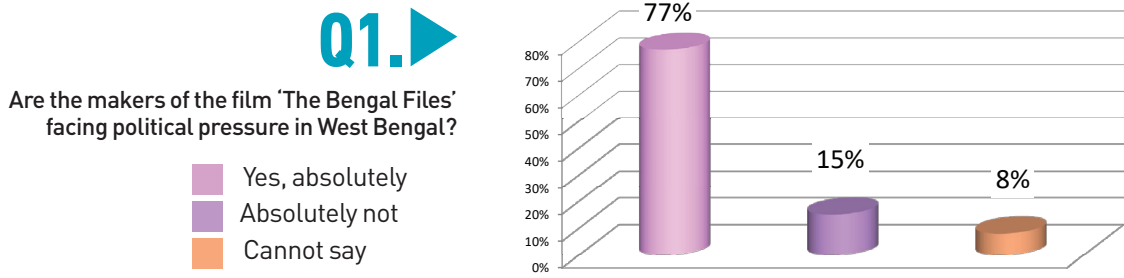
THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON BENGAL FILES CONTROVERSY

Voters see pressure, truth suppression, electoral impact

The Daily Guardian Survey on 5 September 2025 polled 243 respondents about the controversy around the film 'The Bengal Files'. The sample skewed

male (95%). A strong majority, 77%, believe the film's makers are facing political pressure in West Bengal. An even larger share, 82%, feel the state

government is trying to suppress the truth. Looking ahead to politics, 74% think the ruling party fears losing power in upcoming elections.



Delhi drowns, Punjab breaches: North India in severe flood grip

CONTINUED FROM P1

infestations. Kejriwal also urged the Union Government to extend urgent support, arguing that "if we can send aid abroad, surely we must help our own flood-hit states."

In neighbouring Punjab, a breach at Sasrali embankment in Ludhiana East had already submerged farmland and endangered 15 villages. Despite round-the-clock efforts by villagers, the army and NDRF to fortify the bundh with sandbags and stones, the Sutej's fury proved overwhelming. Thousands of acres of standing crops now lie destroyed, while residents have been moved into makeshift shelters. Deputy Commissioner Himanshu Jain said assessments of farmers' losses would be carried out once the waters stabilise.

The Bhakra Beas Management Board chairman Manoj Tripathi admitted that an earlier drawdown of reservoir levels "may have provided cushion," but dismissed claims that he had been prevented from releasing water during the Nangal protest.



BBMB Chairman Manoj Tripathi while sharing details of water level in Dam. ANI

His remarks, however, stood in sharp contrast to the Punjab government's position and fuelled political recriminations.

Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu went further, calling the Punjab floods a "man-made disaster, not destiny."

He accused both the Centre and the state of systemic failures — from illegal sand mining that weakened embankments to the absence of long-term desilting strategies and poor coordination of

dam releases. "The five rivers of Punjab, once a boon, have become a curse through sustained mismanagement," Sidhu declared.

As both the Yamuna and Sutlej rivers continue to rage, North India remains on high alert. With heavy rainfall still forecast, the immediate challenge for governments lies in relief and rescue, but the longer-term questions of accountability and preparedness remain unanswered.

Meghalaya CM urges Shah...

CONTINUED FROM P1

sure dedicated officials for Meghalaya, strengthening governance and administration.

He also pressed for the inclusion of Khasi and Garo languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Sangma reminded Shah that the Meghalaya Assembly had already passed a resolution to this effect and that several memoranda had been submitted to the Centre. Recognition

of these languages, he said, would provide a major boost to cultural identity and preservation. On the Inner Line Permit (ILP), the Chief Minister once again urged the Union Government to implement the system in Meghalaya.

He cited the Assembly resolution supporting ILP and flagged concerns over illegal immigration and infiltration, particularly given the state's international borders. He stressed that ILP

remained the most effective legal safeguard for Meghalaya's interests.

Sangma also proposed naming a road in New Delhi after the late P.A. Sangma, former Lok Sabha Speaker and one of the tallest leaders from the Northeast. Describing him as a national figure who consistently championed the rights of tribals, minorities, and the people of the region, he said the gesture would be a fitting tribute.

'B for Bidi, B for Bihar' remark...

CONTINUED FROM P1

ing Bihar with bidi is an insult that cannot be erased by simply saying sorry. Every Bihari feels disrespected," Suman told India News. He warned that voters would ensure the Congress is "wiped out from Bihar" in the coming elections.

Calling Bihar the "land of knowledge and Emperor Ashoka," Suman said, "Biharis will not tolerate this.

We are the best in every field and will give a fitting reply."

He further alleged that Congress has always been dismissive of Bihar's people. "They pushed Bihar back by 25-30 years and now dream of reviving jungle raj. Rahul Gandhi comes here for show while his party compares Bihar to bidi. This is a grave insult," he said. On the issue of smoking, Suman remarked, "Smoking bidi

is an individual's personal matter, you cannot associate it with any state or country." He also attacked RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, calling him "a leader of goons," and claimed Bihar has moved far ahead from the days of jungle raj.

As the backlash intensified, Congress maintained that the account which posted the remark had been hacked.

CM Bhajanlal Sharma to flag off 160 new Roadways Buses

CONTINUED FROM P1

state. Roadways employees, led by Executive Director (Mechanical) Ravi Soni, worked tirelessly to prepare 160 new buses for today's flag-off ceremony. Despite Friday's rain, the team worked day and night to ensure all vehicles were ready for the event.

The newly prepared fleet includes a maximum of 40 buses for Vaishalinar depot. The remaining buses have been allocated to various other depots across the state, with 22 each for Vidyannagar and Shahpura, 20 each for Jaipur and Dausa, and 21 for the Ajmer-Sawaimadhopur-Bhilwara

circuit. Additionally, 5 buses each have been assigned to the Kotputli, Hindaun, and Dholpur depots.

The state government had announced the inclusion of these new buses in the public transport system in the budget for the year 2025-26 with the aim of providing affordable, safe and modern transport facilities to the general public. Now, implementing this budget announcement, these buses are being officially introduced in the roadways fleet. The buses received by the corporation so far include 160 Blue Line Express buses, which are equipped with modern technologies with 3x2 seating arrange-

ment. These have modern features like GPS tracking system, CCTV cameras, panic button and e-ticketing facility. Apart from this, 12 new super luxury buses have also been received by the corporation, which will be used for long routes and special services.

The Roadways administration said that under the inauguration program, the first bus will be dispatched from Jaipur to Kainchi-dham, Uttarakhand. It was said that immediately after the inauguration, these buses will be sent to the respective depots and regular operations will be started on various districts and routes of the state.

Hazratbal emblem defaced; Waqf chief demands arrests

CONTINUED FROM P1

emblem damaged. Those who did this are not just miscreants, they are terrorists."

She urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and senior security officials to ensure swift arrests of those responsible.

Alleging political motives behind the incident, Dr Andrabi said, "This disruption appears to have been deliberately orchestrated by political elements and their supporters. I had already warned about the possibility of

such provocations."

She added that an FIR would be filed against all involved, including a legislator whose recent social media remarks allegedly inflamed tensions.

Reaffirming the Waqf Board's commitment to safeguarding religious sites, Dr Andrabi said the ongoing renovation of Hazratbal aims to enhance both sanctity and accessibility. "We will not allow anyone to politicise places of worship. These are sacred spaces meant for prayer and unity," she concluded

India holds firm as Japan bends to US...

CONTINUED FROM P1

Critics argue Japan has been left with little in exchange, while enforcement remains entirely under U.S. control. Trump invoked emergency powers under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to justify the measures, insisting persistent trade deficits threaten America's security.

The sharp imbalance in the U.S.-Japan pact comes as India has itself been dragged into Washington's tariff battles. Trump recently claimed New Delhi offered him a "no tariff" deal—remarks dismissed by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) as misleading. The U.S. has imposed a 50 per cent levy on Indian goods, including a 25 per cent penalty over its purchases of Russian crude.

Tensions escalated further when Trump, days after the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin, posted on Truth Social: "Looks like we've lost India and Russia to deepest, darkest China. May they have a long and prosperous fu-

SITHARAMAN STANDS FIRM ON RUSSIAN OIL

India will continue purchasing Russian crude, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, stressing that decisions will be driven solely by national interest, rates and logistics.

ture together!" He shared an old photograph of Modi with Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, while separately accusing Chinese President Xi of "conspiring against" America during a military parade in Beijing attended by Putin and Kim Jong Un.

India has brushed off these remarks. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal underlined that the India-U.S. partnership remains "comprehensive, strategic and resilient," citing ongoing military exercises in Alaska and continued engagement on trade and mobility issues. He also rejected comments from former White House trade adviser Peter Navarro that India was "feeding Russia's war machine," calling them "inaccurate and misleading."

CM Bhajanlal Sharma at State level Teacher's

CONTINUED FROM P1

only storehouses of knowledge but also awakeners of dreams. He referenced Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's belief that a good book equals a thousand friends, but a good friend equals a library. The CM added that, in his view, a good teacher is equal to a thousand libraries. Teachers inspire hope in strugg-

gling students and serve as role models who impart life values. Beyond academic knowledge, they instill important social values such as truth, non-violence, compassion, service, and patriotism. According to the CM, teachers also teach crucial life lessons like humility, honesty, and the idea that serving others is the highest form of worship.

FROM VILLAGE SCHOLAR TO PHILOSOPHER-PRESIDENT

After assuming the presidency in 1962, Radhakrishnan was asked to celebrate his birthday on 5 September; he declined and replied that it would be his “proud privilege” if that date were observed as Teachers’ Day instead.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (born Sept 5, 1888, Thirutani) grew up in a modest Telugu Brahmin family; his father hoped he'd be a temple priest, but scholarships carried him to Madras Christian College at sixteen, graduating with honors in 1907. A cousin's discarded philosophy textbooks diverted him from mathematics “by chance rather than choice,” sparking a thesis on Vedantic ethics at twenty and a lifelong defense of Indian thought. By his early thirties he was publishing widely, from *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (1918) to the two-volume *Indian Philosophy* (1923–27), establishing him internationally. In 1936 he became the first Indian to hold an Oxford chair—the Spalding Professorship of Eastern Religions and Ethics—while also lecturing abroad (e.g., the 1930 Haskell Lectures at Chicago). For all the eminence, he remained approachable, famed for quick, clarifying wit. As a teacher he inspired unusual devotion: on leaving the University of Mysore, students pulled his carriage to the railway station—a farewell of pure affection.

FAMILY AND PERSONAL LIFE

While Radhakrishnan's public life as a scholar and leader is well documented, his personal life was more private and is less widely discussed. In 1903, at the very young age of 15, he was married to Sivakamu, a distant cousin (she was only ten at the time, in keeping with the customs of that era). Despite the marriage's early start, it proved enduring and supportive. Sivakamu was a steady presence by Radhakrishnan's side for over five decades, until her death in 1956. The couple had five daughters and one son. Their son, Sarvepalli Gopal, would later become a prominent historian in his own right, indicating the scholarly atmosphere of the family.

Radhakrishnan's family life was not without difficulties and complexities. He came from humble origins and, as he rose in stat-



Vice President of India Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan with his family members on his 66th birthday, in New Delhi on September 5, 1954. Wikimedia Commons

ure, he carried the weight of supporting an extended family. There is evidence that he faced some personal estrangements: for instance, he maintained a formal distance from his mother for much of his adult life, a decision rooted in complicated family circumstances. He also endured the loss of his wife in his later years, which he poignantly described as “*the end of a long chapter*.” A close bond with his son Gopal helped sustain him through those trials. Gopal, who wrote a candid biography of his father, remarked that Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan “*throughout a long life had never been guilty of a mean deed; and it is unlikely that he ever had a mean thought*.” This loving tribute from his son suggests that, whatever personal shortcomings he may have had, Radhakrishnan was fundamentally a man of integrity and good heart.

Those who knew Radhakrishnan personally often commented on his simple lifestyle and self-discipline. Even at the height of his fame, he was austere in his habits. He cared little for luxury or leisure travel. In fact, friends joked that he never took time to sightsee even when abroad – after numerous trips through Egypt, he never bothered to visit the Pyramids, for example. He preferred to spend free hours quietly at home with a book, finding joy in intellectual pursuits and the company of family. He once half-jestly described his home as a “*caravanserai*,” a mere waystation, reflecting his philosophical view that in the grand scheme of things all of us are but

travelers in the world. This blend of humility and subtle humor in his private outlook meshed perfectly with his public persona.

PHILOSOPHER-STATESMAN: POLITICAL CONNECTIONS AND IDEOLOGY

Radhakrishnan was an academic by background and temperament, yet he became an influential figure in Indian public life during a crucial period of the nation's history. In 1947, as India gained independence, he was drawn into service by leaders who trusted his wisdom and non-partisan stature. Although he had not been active in the freedom struggle or a member of the dominant Congress Party, Radhakrishnan's reputation led to his inclusion in the Constituent Assembly of India – the body that drafted independent India's constitution. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in particular saw great value in Radhakrishnan. As Nehru once put it, Dr. Radhakrishnan was “*the symbol of India*” – a scholar-statesman embodying the country's civilization and its hopes.

In 1949, Nehru persuaded Radhakrishnan to accept a crucial diplomatic posting as India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. It was a surprising choice to many – sending a philosopher to handle one of India's most delicate foreign relationships – but Radhakrishnan excelled. He had an astute grasp of world affairs and a talent for communication that transcended cultural barriers. In Moscow, he patiently worked to dispel Soviet skepticism about India's independence. Fluent in the language of idealism and pragmatism alike, he engaged the Soviet leadership in discussions not only of politics but also of culture and philosophy. His efforts helped lay the groundwork for a friendly Indo-Soviet relationship in the decades to come. After completing this mission, Radhakrishnan returned home in 1952 to be elected as India's first Vice-President. For ten years he presided over the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of Parliament), bringing dignity and wisdom to parliamentary debates. Colleagues recall how he used his wit and erudition to diffuse tense moments in the chamber. When Radhakrishnan was elevated to the presidency in 1962, Nehru bade him farewell from the legislature by saying that under

Dr. Radhakrishnan's guidance “*you have made this a rather unique place and converted it into a family... Henceforth you will preside over the nation itself*.”

As the second President of India (1962–1967), Radhakrishnan continued to apply his philosophical outlook to matters of state. He saw his role as being above daily politics – a guide and conscience-keeper for the nation. By all accounts, he was a respected, non-controversial head of state, known for his intellect and moral standing. He acted as a mentor to statesmen of all parties. Lal Bahadur Shastri, who became Prime Minister in 1964, and Indira Gandhi, who succeeded Shastri in 1966, both benefited from Radhakrishnan's grandfatherly counsel. Indira Gandhi later reflected on

for all faiths. As chairman of the first Indian Education Commission in 1948, he argued that education in a secular state must still teach moral and spiritual values drawn from all the great world religions. “*To be secular is not to be religiously illiterate*,” Radhakrishnan wrote, “*It is to be deeply spiritual and not narrowly religious*.” In his view, India's pluralistic society could be a beacon to the world by affirming unity in diversity. He also believed in balancing tradition with progress: Radhakrishnan saw no contradiction between scientific, economic development and the inner development of the human spirit. “*We have to provide the material conditions of life... food, clothing and shelter – we believe in control and planning*,” he said, “*So far as the art of living is concerned... we*



Photograph of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan presented to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in 1962. Wikimedia Commons.

Radhakrishnan's contribution, saying it was “*our good fortune to have him as Vice-President for ten years and as President for five years. As a statesman, he had a developed understanding of all the practical problems of nation-building, and contributed significantly to the consolidation of our political traditions*.” Coming from the usually skeptical Indira, this was high praise indeed, indicating the regard he earned across the political spectrum.

Despite his elevation to high office, Radhakrishnan's core convictions remained those of a philosopher and humanist. He strongly advocated for a secular but spiritually informed ethos in India. Importantly, he interpreted “*secularism*” not as a rejection of religion, but as a stance of equal respect

believe in absolute freedom.” This synthesis of planning with personal freedom was reflective of his broader philosophy that sought harmony between opposites.

On the international stage, President Radhakrishnan was an eloquent spokesman for peace and cooperation. He traveled widely and addressed forums like the United Nations, where his speeches drew on both Western democratic ideals and Eastern philosophical wisdom. During a visit to the United States, he charmed audiences with his depth of knowledge of Jefferson and Lincoln, even as he gently reminded Americans that political freedom must lead to social justice. Likewise, he urged Soviet leaders to grant more intellectual and spiritual freedoms, fa-



President John F Kennedy with then Indian President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, in the Oval Office. This public-domain photograph comes from an official government record. Wikimedia Commons.



Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein, an Egyptian military officer receiving the Radhakrishnan. Wikimedia Commons.

mously toasting to a “new emphasis on intellectual and spiritual values” during a 1964 visit to Moscow. His global stature as a philosopher-statesman was such that Bertrand Russell – the renowned British mathematician and philosopher – remarked upon Radhakrishnan's rise to the presidency as “*an honor to*

ed with an impromptu parable: God, he said, first undercooked the human “pancake,” yielding underdone, pale Europeans – and on the second try he overcooked it into the darker Africans – but on the third try he got it just right, producing the nicely browned Indians. Such stories circulated widely, exemplifying

deprecating jokes. One of his college friends, a man named Usman, had a career that oddly kept crossing Radhakrishnan's path. Years later, Radhakrishnan recounted their trajectory with a chuckle: “*Usman was my senior in college, then became my classmate, and later my junior. When I was a professor, he was my Vice-Chancellor. When I became Vice-Chancellor, Usman was my Chancellor*.” Without directly saying so, the amusing chronology pointed out how titles and positions can sometimes tell a misleading story about merit – a subtle dig at how some less capable people manage to end up in high posts above their betters. In private and public, Radhakrishnan's humor was most often directed not to hurt but to enlighten. He believed that great people need not scold; they could convey truths “*delicately*,” as he did even when critiquing India's own shortcomings. For example, after a less-than-successful eye surgery in India left him half-blind in one eye, Radhakrishnan joked that he would go to Britain for the second eye's operation because “*here I was made Shukracharya (the one-eyed guru); if they operate on my other eye as poorly, I fear becoming Dhritarashtra (the blind king)*!”. Through a witty reference to Indian mythology, he conveyed a pointed criticism of medical standards without any rancor.

Radhakrishnan's legacy spans scholarship and statecraft: a pioneering comparativist (*Indian Philosophy, The Idealist View of Life*) and a secular, education-first President. He turned his birthday into India's Teachers' Day. Despite occasional controversy, honors—from the Bharat Ratna to the Templeton Prize, which he donated to Oxford—affirmed his stature. Above all, colleagues remembered a humane teacher whose wit and integrity continue to inspire.

Beyond his scholarly and political accomplishments, many of the most charming and instructive stories about Radhakrishnan come from recollections of his wit and quirky sense of humor.

philosophy... I, as a philosopher, take special pleasure in this.” It was indeed remarkable that a lifelong teacher and thinker had become the titular leader of the world's largest democracy. Radhakrishnan's presidency symbolized the value India placed on knowledge and wisdom.

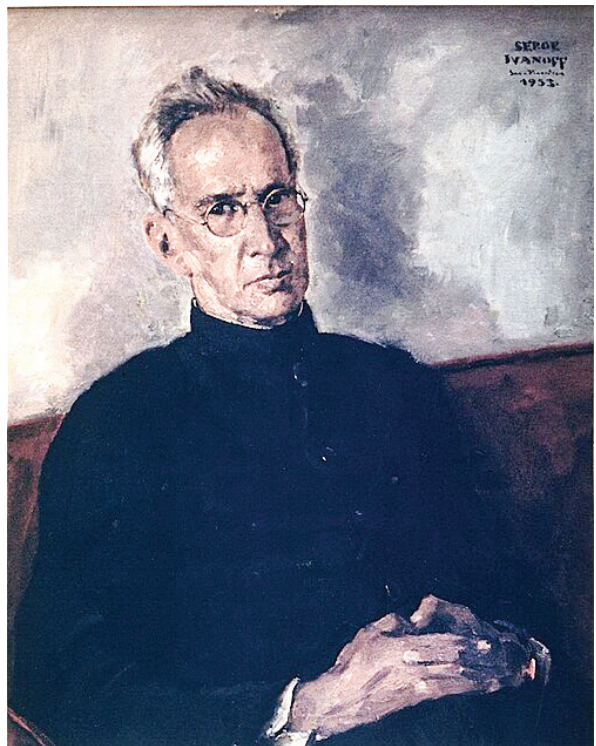
LEGACY

Beyond his scholarly and political accomplishments, many of the most charming and instructive stories about Radhakrishnan come from recollections of his wit and quirky sense of humor. He had an endless supply of anecdotes and a sharp, playful way of making a point. For instance, when the King of Greece paid a state visit to India in 1962, President Radhakrishnan welcomed him by cheerfully observing, “*Your Majesty, you are the first King of Greece to come to India as our guest; Alexander came uninvited!*”. The gentle barb broke the ice in the room with laughter, while also slyly alluding to Alexander the Great's ancient invasion of India. On another occasion, during a friendly banter, a British official made a patronizing remark that God gave white people a superior place. Radhakrishnan chuckled and respond-

how Radhakrishnan could counter bigotry with quick wit and a smile.

Even Mahatma Gandhi, who was two decades Radhakrishnan's senior, felt the sting of the younger man's logical ripostes in a friendly exchange. When they first met around 1915, Gandhi was espousing his early views on diet and medicine. Gandhi implored Radhakrishnan not to drink cow's milk, calling it “the essence of beef.” The ever-rational professor quipped, “*In that case we are all cannibals – for we drink our mother's milk, which is the essence of human flesh!*”. Gandhi, taken aback by the clever argument, soon countered with another point about nature healing without doctors, to which Radhakrishnan replied that many creatures still die without medical care. Observing this lively back-and-forth, their mutual friend wryly reminded Gandhi, “*Don't you know he is a professor of logic?*”. The story shows Radhakrishnan's combination of respect and irreverence – even as a young man he did not hesitate to debate the Mahatma with facts and reason, yet it was done in a spirit of good humor.

Those close to Radhakrishnan also remember his penchant for self-



A 1953 painted portrait of a distinguished scholar and statesman by artist Serge Ivanoff, created while he served in high office. Wikimedia Commons.



The failure of anti-austerity populism



KENNETH ROGOFF

To understand the populist revolt against free trade and other pillars of mainstream economics — a revolt that US President Donald Trump harnessed to his political ambitions with remarkable skill — one must look back to the anti-austerity movement that followed the 2008-09 global financial crisis.

In the aftermath of the crisis, anti-austerity advocates began arguing that the so-called “government budget constraint” is

less of an economic necessity than a malign intellectual construct that cruelly restricts social spending and transfers. In their view, governments — at least in advanced economies — could almost always issue more debt at minimal long-term cost.

During the 2010s, as interest rates — especially on long-term government debt — fell to historic lows, the anti-austerity case seemed not only politically convenient but also, to many, intellectually compelling. Even after the US government’s debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio rose by nearly 40 per cent in the years following the 2008 crisis, many economists asked: Why not borrow more?

The answer was that much of the debt was relatively short term, leaving the US highly exposed to rising interest rates. After the Covid-19 pandemic, as interest rates returned to more normal levels, US debt-service costs more than doubled, and they continue to climb as older bonds mature

and must be refinanced at higher rates.

In Europe, the shift is just as striking. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has openly declared that the welfare state, at least in its current form, is no longer affordable. European countries already face sluggish growth and ageing populations, and now they must also boost defence spending — an expense anti-austerity advocates may have little patience for, yet one that is increasingly unavoidable.

Historically, most debt and inflation crises have occurred when governments that could have met their obligations in full instead chose inflation or default. Once investors and the public sense a government’s willingness to resort to such heterodox measures, confidence can evaporate long before debt appears excessive, leaving policymakers with few options.

Thus, while the theoretical ceiling for government debt may be very high, the practical limits are often much lower. This

does not suggest that there is a precise threshold at which debt becomes unsustainable — there are simply too many variables and uncertainties at play. As Carmen Reinhart and I noted in a 2010 paper, debt dynamics are akin to speed limits: Driving too fast does not guarantee a crash, but it does increase the risk of one.

For advanced economies, the real danger posed by high debt is not imminent collapse but the loss of fiscal flexibility. Heavy debt burdens can limit governments’ willingness to deploy stimulus in response to financial crises, pandemics, or deep recessions. Moreover, history shows that all else being equal — currency dominance, wealth, and institutional strength — countries with high debt-to-income ratios tend to grow more slowly over the long run than otherwise similar economies with low debt.

Even so, Prof Reinhart and I were harshly criticised for an informal 2010

conference paper that examined the well-documented link between high public debt and slower growth using newly compiled historical data from our 2009 book *This Time Is Different*. The attacks escalated in 2013, when three anti-austerity economists claimed the paper was riddled with errors and argued that, once corrected, the data showed little evidence that high debt constrained economic growth.

In reality, their critique relied heavily on selective citation and polemic misrepresentation. Our paper did contain a single error — not unusual in early, informal work that is not peer-reviewed — but nothing beyond that. Crucially, recognising that governments must be mindful of debt does not automatically imply a need for austerity. Raising taxes or a moderate burst of inflation, as I argued in 2008, can sometimes be the lesser evil.

The full, published version of our paper, published in 2012 and based on a larger dataset, contained no errors and reached nearly identical conclusions — a fact that the anti-austerity camp con-

tinues to ignore. Since then, dozens of rigorous studies have consistently linked high debt levels to slower growth. The precise causal channels are still the subject of debate among economists, but the evidence is overwhelming.

Much of the confusion seems to stem from the common mistake of conflating debt with deficits. While deficits are an effective tool and are absolutely necessary during crises, large legacy debts almost always act as a drag on growth and leave governments with less room to manoeuvre.

The anti-austerity movement has lost both momentum and intellectual credibility in recent years, partly owing to post-pandemic inflation but more fundamentally because real interest rates appear to have normalised. As a result, the free-lunch logic underlying anti-austerity economics has been exposed for what it always was: A dangerous illusion.

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The author is professor of economics and public policy at Harvard University ©Project Syndicate, 2025



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Power puzzles in bright GDP



VIEWPOINT
DEVANGSHU DATTA

There are some apparent paradoxes visible in the data from the first quarter of 2025-26 (Q1FY26). The gross domestic product (GDP) delivered a positive surprise with 7.8 per cent year-on-year (Y-o-Y) growth. But electricity consumption fell 1.5 per cent Y-o-Y, a drawdown not seen since the Covid lockdowns.

At first glance, the GDP data would seem overstated. Power consumption, which is metered, correlates closely with economic activity and is likely to be more accurate than GDP calculations. But there may be another explanation, one that indicates future challenges for the power sector.

High rainfall meant there were only 12 days with above-normal temperature and humidity, so cooling demand was low. Beyond industrial needs, the increasing penetration of air conditioners in middle-income households is contributing to cooling demand. Extrapolating, household cooling could account for 20 – 25 per cent of power demand by 2030, leading to demand surges in hot, humid weather.

One consequence of climate change is wild weather patterns. Power demand volatility is related to weather volatility. Generators and discoms will have to develop accurate forecasting models since capacity expansion, and gener-

ation mix must be calibrated to be financially viable when demand is low, and to ensure no supply shortfalls occur at peak demand. This will require smarter grids and much smarter forecasting.

Price data from energy exchanges where power units are traded offers further insights. On average, the price of units was lower, which gels with lower demand. Data from the day ahead market (DAM) and real-time market (RTM) shows clear trends. RTM volumes exceeded DAM volumes for the first time ever in Q1FY26 – a reversal, since DAM volumes have been much higher than RTM volume in the past.

In June of Q1FY26, DAM prices fell from record peaks of around ₹6.95/unit in Q2FY24 to below ₹4/unit. Nine of the last 10 months have seen month-on-month declines in DAM prices. In the RTM market, prices dropped to nearly ₹0/unit between 7 am and 1 pm, and spiked to as high as ₹5/unit between 8 pm and midnight. This seems to be the norm during April-October.

The diurnal variations are huge. On the same days, RTM units were sold at a few paise/unit and also at above ₹5/unit. This is due to the intermittency of solar power, which is by far the largest component of renewable energy (RE) wheeled onto the grid. As more RE comes online, coping with that volatility will become an ever bigger challenge.

During sunlight hours, there are big surpluses. At night, shortfalls occur as solar no longer contributes and price surges. Peak RTM demand in summer typically occurs between 2000 and 2400 hours (8 pm and midnight). Solar is off at that time.

On most days in Q1FY26, nighttime supply was 10 per cent below demand, with shortfalls reaching 90

per cent sometimes. Conversely, during peak solar hours (0700–1700 or 7 am–5 pm), supply was nearly three times the demand.

RE capacity is scaling up at 25-30 Gw per year. There’s a case for a big push on the storage front, to ensure surplus solar units can be used at night. One scheme that supports this is viability gap funding (VGF) for battery energy storage systems (BESS) projects.

The VGF covers 30 Gwh (Gigawatt hours) of capacity with an incentive capped at ₹18 lakh /Mwh (Megawatt hours). This is expected to fund BESS requirements till FY28. Apart from the cash incentive, it offers 100 per cent waivers on interstate transmission system (ISTS) charges. BESS costs are also likely to drop sharply as technology scales, making investments attractive.

The diurnal high-low differentials on RTM units of about ₹4.85/unit, indicate BESS investments may be viable even without VGF. Of course, as storage catches on, peak unit prices will also drop. But battery technology will get cheaper at great pace, ensuring storage stays financially viable.

Returning to GDP data and the famous three-variable Li Keqiang Index, rail freight volumes grew 2 per cent Y-o-Y in Q1FY26, and bank credit off-take grew 9.5 per cent. Taken together, the moderate power, freight and credit data do suggest GDP estimates could be revised down.

Regardless, the trends of high volatility of power demand and price fluctuations caused by RE-related intermittencies will only grow, given climate change, rising AC usage, and decarbonisation. The sector needs massive investments in storage, in smart grids and in forecasting models.

Kabul not closer than Punjab

In its toughest time in decades because of floods, Punjab would’ve expected Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit. If he has the time for a Bihar tour, why not a short visit to next-door Punjab?

Just as he returned from Tianjin on September 1, Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote a tweet expressing grief over the earthquake in Afghanistan.

Almost on cue, he got a response in a tweet from Giani Harpreet Singh, former head priest of the Akal Takht and Takht Sri Damdama Sahib Gurudwara. He sees himself as a leadership claimant in Sikh religious politics, so dangerously broken by the divides in the Shiromani Akali Dal. In this perilous politico-religious vacuum, Giani Ji, as head of the breakaway Nawan (new) Akali Dal, is seeking space.

He objects to it being described as a breakaway faction. He’d rather insist that Sukhbir Singh Badal’s Akali Dal has broken away. Further, the third force in Sikh politics is Amritpal Singh’s Shiromani Akali Dal (Waris Punjab De). Dangerous forces, especially the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), are exploiting this.

He tweets often, at length, and almost always in Punjabi (Gurmukhi). Now, it’s filled with visuals of the flood havoc. Opposition to “Dilli” (New Delhi) is central to Sikh religious politics, and Giani Ji was quick to latch on to the Prime Minister’s tweet on Afghanistan and wrote in English, for once. “Mr Prime Minister,” he wrote, “it is good that you expressed sympathy for Afghanistan, but Punjab is also a part of this country, where nearly 1,500 villages and 300,000 people have been badly affected since August 17. Your lack of attention towards Punjab is extremely painful.” He followed this up with a three-page letter to the Prime Minister and posted it on his X handle.

Now, we know that the Prime Minister spoke to Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann immediately on his return and promised all support. Union Agriculture Minister Shriraj Singh Chouhan is in flood-affected areas, mostly on his feet, often in knee-deep water, checking out uprooted shoots, even trying to replant the odd one.

For the drowning Punjabis, however, this is no consolation.

In their toughest time in decades, they would’ve expected the Prime Minister in their state — even one from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which the Sikhs in Punjab mostly do not vote for. If the Prime Minister is like the father, elder brother, or the head of the family of all Indians, why is he not here? Are we Punjabis (especially the Sikhs) not members of the family?

If he has the time to plan a visit to Bihar, why not a short visit to next-door Punjab?

In the big picture, this is already fuelling alienation, simmering since the movement against the three farm laws. For the Sikh community, this confirms its chronic suspicion of Dilli.

It’s tragic that while we’ve used the “out of sight, out of mind” metaphor so far for how the Capital sees the Northeast, it also applies lately to a state so geographically close, so politically fragile, and so strategically vital. Or, the Prime Minister would’ve been here first thing on his return.

From our understanding of a party as sharp as the BJP, there can be two explanations. One is simply that the party and the Prime Minister are sullen with the state and its Sikh community, because it was primarily they who laid siege to Delhi over the farm laws. The separatist campaigns run by overseas Sikhs add to the pain.

The fact, however, is that the first was also a political failure of communication and credibility on the part of the central and state government (Congress then). In that wide open political space, sundry “farm leaders” moved in from all three sides: Ideological left, religious right and no-stakes anarchists.

This left an angry, bitter taste with the Centre. We’d only hope that this formulation on our part is erroneous. We explore the second possibility.

This BJP has an all-conquering mindset. They want to win every state where they haven’t counted. Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, and West Bengal, as we know, have been their obsession. Assam, Tripura, and Manipur they won after decades of work by dedicated pracharaks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Why not Punjab?

Punjab’s alienation foxes them. The only time they’ve come to share power is as junior partners with the Shiromani Akali Dal. It was a move that Atal Bihari Vajpayee made in the 1990s. This BJP leadership chose to break that compact and go it alone in Punjab. It brought it no seat but its vote percentage trebled from the 2022 Assembly (6.6 per cent) to 18.56 per cent in the 2024 Lok Sabha — ahead of once-senior partner Akalis’ 13.2 per cent. The Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party were at 26 each.

The BJP is a relentless poll-fighting army and its commanders might think that if the Sikh vote is divided three ways — between the Shiromani Akali Dal, Congress and the radicals —

and Hindus consolidate, it can win power by itself. Winning through Hindu-Muslim polarisation, especially where the Muslims are in a minority, is very different from Punjab, where the Sikhs are the majority. Even in the last Lok Sabha elections, the Akalis did so poorly because exactly half their vote, another 13 per cent, was taken by the radicals.

Like it or not, Punjab now has a problem with the rising popularity of radicals as disenchantment with the Akalis increases and the BJP is seen to be polarising. The separatists are playing in this space, as are the Pakistanis.

There is a plethora of new YouTube channels and social-media handles running really subtle propaganda, broadly suggesting that the Muslims and Sikhs, as fellow monotheists and Punjabis, have no real problems between them. The trouble is caused by the Hindus and, therefore, the Sikhs need to think “differently”. This propaganda also uses the ploy of *Punjabiat*, of the common culture, language, music and cultural bonds across the borders.

I have watched many of these, including some quite popular podcasts run by Sikhs from Canada and the United Kingdom, talking politics, again in a super-subtle manner. I just watched a 66-minute show from Canada where the anchor speaks to a Pakistan Air Force veteran and hagiographer on Operation Sindoor. It’s very sophisticated, with much compliment to the Indian Air Force and its professionalism, but the message is “how much better” the smaller, niftier Pakistan Air Force did.

In Punjab, a lot of this stuff is being watched. In their own twisted view, the ISI and its public relations wing see the Sikhs/Punjab as low-hanging fruit.

A nation that doesn’t learn from its own history pays severely. Sixty years ago, Mizoram (then Lushai Hills district in Assam) was hit by bamboo-flowering, rat famine. The alkaloid in bamboo flowers made rats super-fertile and soon, they had eaten up all the grain stores and people were starving. As the state government floundered and the Centre was too far, Laldenga, just demobbed by the army after troubles in his battalion, arrived and set up the Mizoram National Famine Front (MNFF). This became the Mizo National Front by early 1966 and it ran a withering China- and Pakistan-backed insurgency for two decades.

India can’t make the same mistake twice, and this time in Punjab. A calamity is, in fact, a great opportunity for the Centre, the Prime Minister, and his party to be with Punjab. Politically for the BJP, it is an opportunity to build a compact with the state they never had. For India, it’s a responsibility to do all it can for a state and people without whose affection and contribution the republic can’t be imagined.

By special arrangement with *ThePrint*

Beyond a fairytale engagement

EYE CULTURE
ATANU BISWAS

Instagram temporarily crashed with millions of reposts and likes after 14-time Grammy winner Taylor Swift and three-time Super Bowl champion, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, announced their engagement last week. “Your English teacher and your gym teacher are getting married,” they declared. Not really, though. No gym teacher could afford to propose to an English teacher with a \$650,000 diamond ring, as Kelce did. Swift is worth \$1.6 billion, while Kelce’s fortune — far less than hers — stands at \$70 million, according to *Forbes*.

The engagement announcement came a few weeks after Swift’s most in-depth interviews in years on Kelce’s “New Heights” podcast, co-hosted by his brother, Jason, where she also spoke about her upcoming album, *The Life of a Showgirl*.

Romanticisation of a fan-favourite “fairytale wedding” is not new. However, Swift and Kelce’s marriage may turn out to be the most sensational marriage ever in American history. It might possibly be at par with Prince Charles and Princess Diana’s 1981 wedding, which was dubbed the wedding of the 20th century and was viewed on television by an estimated 750 million people worldwide in addition to 3,500 attendees.

Charles and Diana’s youngest son, Prince Harry, and Meghan Markle got married in Britain in 2018 in yet another fairytale wedding. In addition

to stimulating the economy by boosting tourism and business, it also might have provided some respite for Prime Minister Theresa May amid the post-Brexit political scenario. Will the Swift-Kelce marriage boost the tariff-hit American market — and social harmony — a bit?

Swift-Kelce will be among the wealthiest celebrity power couples in the world. Swift actually creates an empire from music rather than selling it. And Kelce’s brand transcends touchdowns and championships; he is a dominant player on the football field. Celebrity couples usually help each other navigate through the gig economy; the Swift-Kelce engagement, however, goes much beyond that.

One may recall that the collective dancing and jumping of 144,000 Swifties at Taylor Swift’s July 2023 Seattle concerts resulted in seismic activity equivalent to a magnitude 2.3 earthquake. Now her marriage to a famous player should create an even greater seismic impact. Several ancillary businesses, including fashion, would benefit greatly from this. Consider some trailer. Twenty minutes after the engagement news broke, Swift’s \$400 striped sundress from her engagement photos quickly sold out. She also created a lot of buzz with her diamond ring and her approximately \$30,000 Cartier watch.

What about businesses vying to capitalise on it? They certainly need to be integrated with it, though. “But when will it be your Spanish teacher’s turn?” enquired the language-learn-

ing app Duolingo. Little Caesar’s post about a “pizza party for the English teacher and gym teacher” is the epitome of romance. Krispy Kreme celebrated the engagement by distributing free doughnuts. Buffalo Wild Wings offered to cater the wedding. And many other businesses didn’t miss the grand opportunity. Even Donald Trump, who Swift campaigned against in the 2024 election, wished the couple “a lot of luck”? Overall, it might be “the wedding of the century,” as it’s dubbed in Pad-dington Bear’s X account.

And it’s a Taylor-made event that America might need at the moment. A lot of speculations are afloat regarding the location, the guest list, wedding dresses, and the honeymoon spot. Will she sing at the wedding? And, importantly, will there really be a wedding eventually?

Taylor Swift is one of the greatest entertainers of today’s world, in the post-*Beatles*, post-*moonwalk* era. That entertainment carries over into her engagement as well and, potentially, into her upcoming wedding. The “Showgirl” may be asking, “Are you not entertained?” like the character of Russell Crowe in the movie *Gladiator*. However, Occam’s razor hardly ever applies to Taylor Swift. After all, she is not just making music and entertaining people, she is also sparking the economy and, most significantly, transcending boundaries — something that today’s America may really need.

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

The return of a familiar distrust



TICKER
MIHIR S SHARMA

Two decades ago, it was possible to believe that reflexive anti-Americanism would no longer determine how India positioned itself globally. But, in recent months and years, it has become clear that, far from declining to rational levels, an unthinking distrust of the West continues to be a major factor in Indian politics. It might be, in fact, increasing in intensity rather than decreasing.

This is not a product of American President Donald Trump, nor a consequence of his unfair singling out of India over the past few months. It had become a visible factor in Indian public life shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. A poll conducted by YouGov six or so months later found that slightly more Indians held “the West” responsible for the invasion than Russia. (The difference, however, was within the margin of error.) This had

global implications. A study by Ashoka University’s Centre for Analysis of Network Data and Insight Derivation demonstrated that in the first few months of the Ukraine war, Twitter users based in India were the most common source for posts making Russia’s side of the argument. Nor was it purely a social media-led phenomenon. One journal article conducted textual analysis of primetime television and found that “the most prevalent theme emerging from the narratives was the portrayal of the US (United States) as the ultimate beneficiary of the war”. The upsurge of anti-US sentiment in the past months, therefore, cannot be explained entirely by Mr Trump’s bad behaviour. In fact, the climate of tension under Mr Trump has merely created fresh space for sentiment that was already visible.

In some sense, the two decades between 2004 and 2024 could well be considered the exception in India’s independent history. It was only in this period that India’s leaders have allowed themselves a degree of comfort with the US as an actor in our region or in the world. It is easy to forget that this uneasiness was an attitude associated once most closely with the leadership of the Congress, which inherited a certain the Oxbridge disdain for the vulgar

Americans from the aristocratic generation that ran it during the freedom movement. (It is worth remembering that the only US-educated person of note in that generation was B R Ambedkar.) Even by 1956, the notion that non-alignment meant equidistance between the two poles of the Cold War was difficult to support; the difference in tone between India’s condemnation of the Anglo-French adventurism in the Suez and the Soviet Union’s invasion of Hungary made that very clear.

Much of this was due to the personality and preferences of the man who, for better or for worse, continues to be the greatest influence on India. Walter Crocker, in his notes on India’s first Prime Minister, says that it was Jawaharlal Nehru’s “fastidiousness” that caused him to find “a certain type of American, and certain American ways, uncongenial”. Dennis Kux suggests that Nehru’s policy reflected the “anti-American social prejudices of the British elite and the anti-American policy views of the left-wing of the British Labour Party”.

It was, in fact, the capital-friendly Bharatiya Jan Sangh that occasionally pushed back against the Congress-socialist faux-neutrality in the Cold War. As the political scientist Rahul Sagar has explained, by the 1960s the Sangh was urging

closer relations with the US — although the West was not making it easy for the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP’s) predecessors, given that a tilt towards Pakistan was already very visible in 1965. US diplomatic cables from 1977 — now declassified — celebrated the appointment of a new foreign minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who they said was critical of the Congress’ pro-Soviet posture, “while expressing admiration for democracy and freedom in the United States, which he contrasted with conditions in the USSR”.

The current Prime Minister has certainly made quite an effort to keep conditions with the US stable under difficult conditions. This is quite remarkable, given that he personally has excellent reasons for disliking a country that did, after all, revoke his visa in 2005. But the BJP’s leadership has also realised that many of its voters do not share this attitude. They see the West and the US as civilisational competitors, and its cultural ethos as inherently expansive and predatory; they do not have the same attitude to Russia or China. It is they who will determine the future orientation of this country — and they may take a line on the US that is closer to Nehru than to Narendra Modi. I suppose their embrace of China is also as well thought out as was Nehru’s.

{ OUR TAKE }

In Manipur, a ray of hope

The signing of a key pact and the reopening of a national highway can offer a pathway to peace. But further progress requires much more effort

After more than two years of tumult that has not only torn apart Manipur but also created seemingly unbridgeable chasms between communities, the state appears to be taking tentative steps toward peace. This week, the Centre signed a landmark tripartite agreement with Kuki-Zo insurgent groups and the state government, and convinced protesters to restart traffic on an arterial highway that was blocked for two years. The twin developments are significant, and coupled with the fact that fewer instances of violence have been reported since President’s Rule was imposed in the state in February, they represent tangible progress in a volatile sociopolitical landscape. The agreement’s immediate practical impact (the reopening of NH-2) addresses one of the most visible symbols of the state’s divisions. For two years, blockades on this route effectively partitioned Manipur between the Meitei-dominated valley districts and the Kuki-Zo hill areas. The restoration of movement on NH-2 is a crucial step toward normalising daily life and economic activity.

Similarly, the new Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact signed between the MHA, Manipur government, and Kuki National Organisation and United People’s Front on re-negotiated terms is a landmark moment. A similar pact was abruptly terminated by then CM, N Biren Singh, in March 2023 — two months before violence broke out between the Meiteis and Kukis. This unilateral termination was seen as contributing to the deteriorating community relations and removed a key check on the proliferation of arms and militancy that security agencies struggled to tamp down over the next two years. The new pact seems more stringent than its predecessor, with strict benchmarks for the locations of camps, relocation of weapons and monitoring.

The violence of the past two years claimed at least 260 lives and displaced 50,000 people; thus, any progress toward dialogue and de-escalation deserves careful attention and applause. The breakdown in community relations meant that faith in law and order evaporated even as the State apparatus splintered on sectarian lines and politicians manipulated kinship allegiances. This newspaper has expressed earlier its lack of confidence in Biren Singh’s leadership; he appeared to have lost the trust of a significant chunk of his constituents. This meant that meaningful political dialogue remained stillborn and militant ideologies hardened positions on both sides, pulling more communities into the vortex of violence. Reversing this trend will be painstaking and challenging, but not impossible.

Any hope must be tempered by an acknowledgment of the complexity of the ground situation. Even on Thursday, the acerbic responses by Meitei groups — describing the agreement as adding “fuel to the fire” — reflected the deep-seated mistrust still seeded in Manipur. Despite thousands of security personnel, sporadic violence has continued. Previous attempts to restore normalcy, including initiatives to start bus services that resulted in civilian casualties, underscore how quickly progress can unravel. The core issues driving the conflict — identity, land rights, political representation, and economic opportunities — remain largely unaddressed by security measures alone. Progress towards peace will depend on whether the new SoO can serve as a foundation for political dialogue addressing these deeper grievances. The PM’s potential visit to the region — he might visit the state on September 13, though no official announcements have been made — can perhaps move the needle on wide-ranging negotiations and genuine political progress.

{ THIRD EYE } Barkha Dutt



Stand up to the US, but be careful about standing with China

Trump has burnt painstakingly built bridges, but China can’t be counted on to not quietly burn bridges India builds with it

While I have had a fair idea of the US disconnect with Indian sentiment over President Donald Trump’s bizarre tariff war, the ever-widening gap between Americans of a certain ideological persuasion and the Indian response became evident to me on a recent show hosted by UK TV presenter Piers Morgan.

Brigadier general Mark Kimmitt, who retired from the US army, was among Morgan’s guests. A former assistant secretary of State in the George W Bush administration and a military veteran with 30 years in service, Kimmitt astonished me when he used the word ‘arrogance’ to describe India’s unbending position before Trump’s bullying. Then, he argued that the recent bonding between the US and Pakistan’s Field Marshal Asim Munir should “give India pause.”

The context for the show was China’s display of military might, with Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un by the side of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Morgan wanted to know if China was the new sheriff of the global neighbourhood.

The image of the Modi-Putin-Xi power huddle from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit a day before the Chinese military parade was on everyone’s minds. Kimmitt and a couple of others wanted to know what India was doing in the corner of “authoritarians”.

If the meltdown in America over the pictures from China is over “democratic values”, then the new love fest between Donald Trump and

Pakistan’s army chief makes the opposite argument, doesn’t it? After all, from no other country did the military chief accompany the supposedly elected prime minister to the SCO summit.

Of course, India has to stand up to Trump’s arm twisting and bullying. I have always argued that the “penalty” for India’s purchase of Russian oil is a bogey, and Trump’s pique is personal and full of staggering hypocrisy. That said, I remain a serious China-sceptic. After Galwan and, most recently, China’s active support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, I would see the images out of China as strictly tactical as of now. Trump necessitated a global reset, one which India should be embarking on with eyes wide open.

But the responses on the Morgan show and the kind of voluminous, near-panic stricken coverage in the western media that the SCO summit drove is instructive. Before Modi locked arms with Putin or took a limo ride with him, and before Xi rolled out the red carpet for Modi and others, coverage in the western media of Trump’s tariff war was, for most part, marginal.

I was speaking to an American analyst the other day, trying to gauge popular sentiment on the trade wars Trump had unleashed. He said people usually didn’t have an opinion on technical subjects such as trade policy. This wasn’t about trade policy, I argued back. It was about geopolitics, security, international security, and so on.

Truth is, till the SCO summit took place in China and the images from there went viral, you would never have heard CNN primetime devoted to why India had fallen out with Washington. Commentators like Van Jones commented on how the West had boxed itself in, isolated against a new world order.

So, in the short term, I am all for the shake-up the SCO summit has triggered in western understanding of what’s going down



The age of America as school captain is over. But if India is speaking of multi-polarity and strategic autonomy, then that’s what the coming months and years have to be steered by. ANI

between New Delhi and Washington. Given that the entire fight with Trump is over sovereignty and the right of India, as a free nation, to autonomously take decisions, it’s good to send a message loud and clear. The age of America as school captain — the age of ‘sit down, stand up, do push-ups, there’s a good girl’ — is over.

But if India is speaking of multi-polarity and strategic autonomy, then that’s what the coming months and years have to be steered by.

Let’s not be so quick to forget what the deputy chief of the Indian Army said about China’s role in Operation Sindoor. Lt Gen Rahul Singh spoke of the battle being on one border, but with two adversaries. He pointed out that Beijing had used the battleground like a “live lab”. And he used the metaphor of a “borrowed knife” to elaborate on how China had used Pakistan against India. The “Borrowed Knife” concept is purportedly part of 36 strategic dictums followed by China.

So, while it makes absolute sense to borrow from Trump’s own book of deal-making and transactionalism, we cannot overlook the fact

that our troops, in the thousands, are eyeball-to-eyeball with the Chinese in the high Himalayas of Eastern Ladakh.

Or that, by all accounts, we are not yet completely back to a pre-Galwan *status quo ante* at the Line of Actual Control. And that it is China that has historically blocked India’s resolutions against Pakistan-based terror groups at the United Nations.

India’s hard-wired to stand up to neo-imperialists. And that is something to be proud of. But the path ahead is challenging because, while Trump has burnt painstakingly-built bridges, China can’t be counted on to not bomb the bridge you build with it — metaphorically speaking.

India, while engaging with everyone, must aspire to greater power and economic heft. That is the only language of the new world order.

Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal

What could be in store with GST rationalisation

As the US tariffs kick in and impact India’s trade with its largest export destination, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council took a timely decision to lower GST rates for a considerable number of items, to boost domestic demand. Lower GST rates are expected to be passed on to consumers in the form of lower prices, which will provide them with additional purchasing power.

Lifting domestic demand is likely to offset falling external demand for Indian goods. The course expected now is goods with new, lower prices will hit the market stacks once the stock of goods lying as inventories in different stages of trade/distribution is exhausted. It is expected that the Union government will soon notify the new tax rates under the CGST Act, and the states will follow with similar notifications under their respective SGST Acts.

The speed of adjustment of prices, with reference to the new tax rates, will vary from commodity to commodity, depending on the gestation period between purchase of inputs and sale of finished products and the size of the existing stock of finished goods.

It is expected that governments will allow transitional credit provisions for businesses to adjust to the difference in the tax rates between the new and old rate regimes on inputs and finished goods. This provision could help businesses accommodate the difference in the availability of eligible input tax credit (ITC) and output tax liability arising due to GST rate restructuring. If this provision does not take

effect, it is unlikely that the prices of many commodities will fall soon.

A swift move can help businesses capitalise on the forthcoming festive season to boost demand. Consumers will be disappointed if prices do not reflect the reduced tax rates.

The rate rationalisation move will have three distinct areas of impact: Revenue, economic growth, and formalisation of the economy. Reducing tax rates for a considerable number of items and raising tax rates for some will have a clear revenue impact.

The ultimate revenue impact will depend on changes in the prices of goods and services and resulting changes in consumer behaviour. Rising demand for goods and services will boost the economy and, therefore, GST collection.

Given the present GST return system, assessing the size of the revenue effect is challenging as GST rate-wise tax collection figures are not available. The revenue impact of the GST rate restructuring will vary from state to state, depending on the size and composition of the consumption basket of consumers.

It should be noted that there will be an additional revenue stream for states as the GST compensation cess will be subsumed into the GST rates. The highest GST rate has been raised to 40% from 28%, and this change will apply to commodities that previously attracted GST cess. States together will receive 70.5% of the additional GST of 12% in addition to 28% tax on these commodities.

However, unlike GST compensation cess, a large part of this additional revenue, except the



Sacchidananda Mukherjee



The rate rationalisation will impact three distinct areas: Revenue, economic growth and formalisation of the economy. AFP

tax devolution part, will be realised by the states where consumption of the “sin goods” and purchases of luxury cars are high.

A lower GST rate will boost consumption, and, therefore, it will increase economic growth. An assessment based on Computable General Equilibrium modelling may provide some numbers on the impact on economic growth due to reductions in GST rates.

Higher economic growth can be expected to boost tax revenue, subject to the caveat that tax collection also depends on tax compliance and tax efficiency. It is expected that lowering the GST rates may encourage a segment of businesses to take GST registration and integrate them with a larger network of supply chains.

A business with input tax credit greater than

its output tax liability could apply for GST registration to claim ITC. Even businesses with lower value addition may find the new GST structure attractive.

This will help in the formalisation of the economy. It is expected that the new GST rate structure may face higher demand for refunds. Instances of an inverted duty structure, where the output tax rate is lower than the input tax rate, may rise.

As the majority of GST rates on services remain unchanged or have been raised, the possibility of a larger number of instances of inverted duty structure cannot be ruled out.

A broad-based lower rate is desirable for a modern VAT system. However, the new GST rate structure has lengthened the list of exempted items, which will have a revenue impact.

The GST is one of the most important sources of the states’ own tax revenue. Any revenue uncertainty related to GST makes states’ finances vulnerable to shocks. States will realise the revenue impact of GST rate rationalisation in the third and fourth quarters of the financial year 2025-26.

If they face a revenue shortfall with respect to the budgeted state GST figures for FY26, they will run a revenue as well as a fiscal deficit. Suppose the central transfers to states in terms of states’ share in central taxes and grants-in-aid do not compensate for the revenue shortfall in own tax revenue mobilisation of states. In that case, there will be a revenue deficit, and eventually it will turn into a fiscal deficit if states stick to the expenditure side of the budget.

Considering the uncertainty surrounding the GST revenue stream, states will have to be flexible in adjusting their expenditure to adhere to the fiscal consolidation path.

Sacchidananda Mukherjee is professor, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy. The views expressed are personal

India’s iodine delivery policy is worth its salt

Salt is ordinary, cheap and ubiquitous — and for decades, it has been a delivery vehicle for iodine, a micronutrient essential for the physical health of mothers and children. Iodine deficiency in pregnancy and early childhood can cause irreversible intellectual impairment, stunting and still births. Even mild deficiency harms school performance and long-term human capital. India began systematic salt iodisation in the 1980s, and evidence shows that when population iodine intake falls, measurable declines in learning and public health follow.

Recently, this humble, household ingredient has become the subject of public debate. In August, the Madras High Court heard a petition filed by a trade association of salt producers from Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, challenging the ban on the sale of non-iodised common

salt for human consumption (other variants like rock salt or pink salt are exempt from mandatory iodisation). The Court directed a fresh expert inquiry, reopening the question, whether public-health imperatives take precedence over commercial survival and consumer choice. There is enough evidence that iodine deficiencies can result in serious health problems. The nature and extent of this risk made the government ban non-iodised common salt in 1997, and then again in 2005.

The global public-health community and national programmes have relied on salt iodisation because it is the simplest, most economical way to prevent deficiencies. India’s own experience, starting in the 1960s and leading up to Universal Salt Iodi-

zation in the 1980s and 1990s, reinforces this fact. When the iodised-salt programme was implemented well, household coverage rose and IDD risk fell; when it was rolled back (c. 2000), coverage reduced, and risks returned. Given that the science backing iodised salt is clear, why did the trade association from Tuticorin then approach the Court?

Several members of the trade association are small-scale, coastal salt producers operating on razor-thin margins. Mandatory iodisation requires investment in dosing equipment, consistent quality-assurance, packaging and labelling, and regular testing. This changes production models from bulk, loose salt traded locally, to packaged, branded products. For producers who sell loose common salt at low prices, those changes could mean either exiting the market or accepting a lower income margin.

The association argued that the expert review that preceded the ban had not considered the challenges of salt traders like themselves.

These concerns may be legitimate and an



CK Mishra

effort at finding solutions must be considered. At the same time, public health risks of non-iodised salt are very real. Past progress in salt iodisation needs to be protected.

The Madras High Court returned the matter to the Centre, urging it to constitute an expert committee that includes voices from public health as well as the salt industry and consumers. The credibility of this process will depend on speed and openness. To offset costs for small producers, the Centre and state governments can provide support, such as testing labs and low-cost packing co-operatives. However, it is essential that until the committee report is finalised, regulators don’t permit reopening of a non-iodised market. Simultaneously, communities must be educated on the need for adequate iodine intake. Lifting a ban on non-iodised salt without an alternative delivery route for iodine will undo decades of good health policy.

CK Mishra is former secretary, ministry of health & family welfare and ministry of environment, forests and climate change. The views expressed are personal

{ EDITOR’S PICK }

HT’s editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

THE DRAGON AWAKENED

Two things that China did over the past few days — conduct a successful summit with the leaders of major non-Western economies and showcase military might as never seen before — have rattled the US and other Western nations.

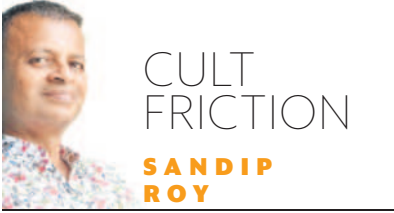
To understand how China has gained ground and won several rounds in the battle of optics — despite all that the West accuses it of — we recommend China expert Elizabeth C Economy’s *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*. The book examines the country’s transformative changes, Chinese President Xi Jinping’s political and economic reforms, the centralisation of power under him, the expansion of the Communist Party’s role, and the regulations controlling the exchange of ideas and capital between China and the outside world. It shows how Beijing has recast itself as a great power, seeking to create a world order that serves its objectives and reverses the trends toward greater political and economic opening.



The Third Revolution Elizabeth C Economy 2019

A world without the postman

The age of email and tariffs is slowly killing a system that once knit together communities, brought news of love and death, and gave us the romance of the letter that never arrived



CULT FRICTION
SANDIP ROY

My friend Milena was going postal. She had painstakingly gathered 20 cards and notes from her mother’s old friends for her birthday—her first grade best friend from 1946, her fencing club partner from 1959, her friend who went on a study trip with her to Tunisia in 1965 all the way up to her current physiotherapist and dental hygienists. She mailed the package from Berlin to her mother’s home in upstate New York as a birthday surprise. Milena got a birthday shock instead. Every day she checked in on the parcel, trying to track its progress. By the time the package finally reached, the birthday was over. It had taken 21 days and given Milena a migraine. “From now onwards, I will use personal couriers only,” she told me. As in friends and acquaintances carrying packages as a favour. She might have no other choice. Declining mail is affecting post offices all over the world. US President Donald Trump’s tariffs have made it worse. Goods valued under \$800 that previously entered the US without needing customs clearance now need to be vetted and can be subject to whatever tariff rate the Trump administration has slapped on that country. Many countries are pausing certain kinds of mail to America. India, for example, has suspended booking all categories of mail, including letters and parcels, valued up to \$100. The age of e-mail wreaked havoc on snail mail. But no one imagined it would lead to no mail. In fact, at this rate, my friend Milena might soon no longer be

able to go postal. No one will quite know what it even means. (Its origins lie in incidents in the 1980s and 1990s when disgruntled US postal workers ran amok, because of stress. The most infamous was in 1986 when a postman in Oklahoma killed 14 employees and wounded six before killing himself at the local post office.) The slow demise of the postal system is not unique to America. India is phasing out registered post services, folding it in as a value add to Speed Post. Post offices are being reimaged in the digital economy where they can become Aadhaar-enrolment-cum-updation centres. In the Union Budget 2025-26, the finance minister said India Post would transform itself into a public logistics organisation by revamping over 150,000 rural post offices. Meanwhile the red pillar post boxes are turning into backdrops for nostalgic Instagram reels. No one wants to return to a pre-email and pre-WhatsApp world. I remember as a student in America rushing down every day to check if a letter had arrived from home, always anxious to see if Mahatma Gandhi’s bespectacled face was peeking out from amidst the usual departmental store catalogues, supermarket fliers addressed to “Current Resident” and bills. A letter from India could take three weeks to reach me. Once I got a letter from a friend that reached me weeks after his sudden death in Delhi. It felt surreal to read the chatty gossip letter in his loopy scrawl knowing that the person was gone. The news the postman brought was often old and stale but getting a letter from home was truly a red-letter day for us homesick foreign immigrants. The post office might be reimaged as a “public logistics organisation” but it will require a cultural shift on our parts as well. Email *aayi haan* will just not resonate in the same way as *chithi aayi hai* does in Pankaj Udhas’ voice. Even my own novel *Don’t Let Him Know* relied on the post office. Sitting in a small university town in the US, a homesick Romola



A man writes a postcard at an India Post office at Dal Lake, Srinagar.

GETTY IMAGES

rushes to open a letter from India without checking whether it’s actually for her. It was actually meant for her husband. And she stumbles upon a secret she was never meant to know. It would have never worked with email. She would have never received that email in her mailbox at all. The story was fiction but when I wrote the scene of Romola running down to the mailbox, her excitement at getting her first letter from India, I was really writing about myself. Those were my rituals. The postman knit worlds together in ways we didn’t fully realise. But he was more than just a conduit for news. He was a witness to life’s highs and lows, bringing news of love, jobs and death. Perhaps that’s why a profession as

humble as a postman or as unglamorous as a postmaster, shows up so often in popular culture. He is a messenger but he also carries a message. Along with the weight of the world on his shoulders. In Sukanta Bhattacharya’s famous Bengali poem *Runner*, the poet says the mail runner dashes through the night determined to reach his bag of news to the destination before day breaks, but no one cares about his news. Salil Chowdhury, who put that poem to music, said in an interview, “The runner carries sacks of letters, maybe money. But he himself is penniless and nobody ever writes to him.” In Rabindranath Tagore’s *Postmaster*, he poignantly explores the issues of lon-

eliness and connection through a postmaster and the orphaned young girl assigned to take care of him in his rural posting. A man from the city, bored with rural Bengal, he starts teaching her to read and write to while away the time. When he leaves abruptly, he breaks her heart. To him it was just a posting in the boondocks. To her, the postmaster was a lifeline. He opened up new worlds. The postman was always meant to be the person we could rely on, the one who always delivered. Hence the famous James M. Cain story *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. A noir story about murder and adultery, it had no postmen in it. But the title just meant that even if you dodge fate or justice once, it will eventually catch up, if not

on the first ring, then on the second. As the song went *Daakiya daak laya (the postman brings the post)*, and he did it day in day out without fail. But the real romance is always about the letter that did not arrive, the letter that never got delivered. In Hindi film *Palkon ki Chhaon Mein*, Mohini keeps waiting for a letter that never comes. The postman Ravi falls in love with her but she is upset with him because he never has mail for her. In the film *Finding Fanny*, an old postman in Goa realises the love of his life Fanny, never actually got the love letter he wrote her almost 50 years earlier and sets out to find her. In real life, actor Steve Carell found undelivered mail underneath the seat of his car, left over from his stint as a rural mail carrier before he found fame as an actor. Carell sent it to the addressee, hoping better late than never. Recently I got to tour Kolkata at night where some heritage buildings are being lit up by a citizens’ group The Kolkata Restorers, bringing them to glowing life at night. One of them is the former Dead Letter Office. An old brick red colonial building with a bell tower, dating back to 1876, it was basically the morgue where letters that could not be delivered or returned to sender ended up. The tour leader said they would even open the letters to see if they could find clues. If nothing worked, but its contents were of some value, they were auctioned off and the letters were burned or shredded. It was later christened Returned Letter Office in 1959 probably because it sounded less morbid. But given the state of the postal service around the world, perhaps a return to Dead Letter Office might be more appropriate. Now we are in need of a place where our poor letters can go to rest in peace.

Cult Friction is a fortnightly column on issues we keep rubbing up against. Sandip Roy is a writer, journalist and radio host. He posts @sandipr

The true weight of a single calorie

Science Gallery Bengaluru’s latest exhibition season explores the financial, social and cultural impact of food

Shrabonti Bagchi
shrabonti.b@livermint.com

Food discourse has gotten out of hand. Protein bros name and shame people for their carb-laden plates, nutritionists talk about plant-based diets with cultish fervour, chefs can’t stop talking about umami, mouthfeel and hyperlocal eating. We probably think more about what we put in our bodies today than we ever have, or so it feels to those of us who spend too much time online. That’s why Science Gallery Bengaluru thought the time was right to explore humanity’s intimate-yet-fraught relationship with food with its new year-long exhibition season, *Calorie*. The idea behind Science Gallery’s exhibitions is, always, to pick up objects of inquiry, says director Jahnavi Phalkey—ideas and concepts that are studied by people in laboratories and in academic fields conceptually—and bring them to the public in ways that will expand our understanding of them. “The goal is to create a sort of familiarity and socialisation of ideas. But we also want to pick ideas that are already out there—so instead of talking about, say, quarks or mesons, which are not really doing the popularity rounds, we pick ideas that are already in the public consciousness, in people’s lives, on their social media, and then try to create different kinds of entry points that will allow them to understand things that they think they know in a much more rigorous manner,” explains Phalkey. Some of the previous exhibitions at the gallery, which stands at the confluence of science, culture, and art, have been *Car-*



bon, which called into question our relationship with the essential element; *Psyche*, which explored the mind and its complexities; and *Contagion*, held during the covid-19 pandemic, which looked at the transmission of diseases, behaviours and emotions. *Calorie* explores food, nutrition and the marketplace in a similarly elliptical manner—if you’re expecting science experiments, you might be disappointed, though most of the exhibits have interactive elements. You may even be puzzled, at times, by how some exhibits fit into a “science” paradigm: one of the largest spaces on the ground floor of the gallery, for instance, is given over to an exhibit called *Mapping Mapusa Market* by graphic artist Orijit Sen and consists of large poster-style prints of his graphic illustrations of the famous traditional market in Goa, a hub of Goan social life and the place to find the best *poi* bread and chorizo sausages. Another exhibit, *12 Lemons* by Irish multimedia art-

ist and Beth Fox, explores the connection between the food we consume and the gig economy—having worked at a food delivery service, the artist looks at the tightly controlled labour behind one-click deliveries through her video installation. Meanwhile, Bengaluru-based artist Sahithya Reddy seeks to understand the entangled relationship between digital content and our dinner plates today as we endlessly scroll through our screens, devouring visually while simultaneously consuming the food on our plates. How does all this connect with science? “The idea is, even as we measure the calories that go into our bodies, we need to also measure the financial, social, and cultural weight of those calories,” Phalkey says. That’s why the exhibition is divided into five broad categories—grow, buy, cook, eat, digest, waste—even as it aims to navigate the intersections of food, climate, culture, science, and technology. “It’s an invitation to look beyond what’s on our plate



(above) ‘Long Hanging Fruits’ by Elia Nurvita, a mural that explores the complex economy, politics, and consumption of palm oil; and the installation ‘Kanaja’ by Dayananda Nagaraju recalling the material labour of farming.

and to interrogate the systems, values, and choices that feed us... to foster a deeper understanding of how food connects us biologically, socially, and politically. In a world facing food, health, and climate crises, we need to ask ‘what does a calorie truly mean?’ Is every calorie the same?” The gallery will do this through the year not just via the permanent exhibits on view, but also through workshops, talks, film screenings, performances and conversations, with a schedule of events every month. Take the recent performance by interdisciplinary theatre artist Sri Vamsi Matta of his celebrated piece *Come Eat With Me*: through an experience involving actually cooking and eating along with the audience, Vamsi explores the fraught connection between food and caste in India through stories about the Dalit household and community he belongs to; its food preferences and the choices that were made available to them. “The burden of caste grows in the stomach,” says artist Rajyashri Goody about her exhibit *Don’t Lick it All Up*. Arranged on the floor are rings of ceramic forms—*roti*, rice, seeds, meat, cracked earth—resembling food which may have been left over, scavenged, or begged for, through which Goody draws out the complex relationship between caste, hunger, nutrition, and

survival. The piece references Omprakash Valmiki’s 1997 book *Joothan*, about the experiences of a Dalit family in newly independent India, and is accompanied by recipes extracted from Dalit memoirs. As you enter the gallery, one of the first exhibits you encounter is a large circular green and yellow mat that looks like something professional wrestlers use. It is, *Farmer is a Wrestler* by Delhi-based artists Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra is a visual depiction of the many challenges Indian farmers routinely grapple with, from global warming and climate change to inherited debt, rural-urban migration, inflation, changes in consumption patterns and so on, marked on the mat as dots. The visitor is encouraged to get on the mat and perform certain physical manoeuvres connecting these dots in order to better understand how overlapping obstacles can make farmers’ lives a one-step-forward-two-steps-back situation. As we leave the gallery, we see two teenage boys on the mat, trying out some of the moves suggested in the game. “This is what we are trying to do...to look at the energy that goes into putting that one calorie into our bodies—where it’s grown, how it reaches our plates,” says Phalkey. For updates, check [bengaluru.sciencegallery.com](https://www.bengaluru.sciencegallery.com). ‘Calorie’ will run till July 2026



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

COMPLETE THE STORY

Tax rate reduction and simplification is welcome. But a stalled agriculture reform agenda needs re-energising

INDIAN AGRICULTURE HAS suffered from lack of value addition and organised processing of raw produce enabling better integration from farm to fork. A major reason has been the multiplicity of taxes and state-level duties, cesses and surcharges. The latter levies have, thankfully, been subsumed under the unified Goods and Services Tax (GST) system since July 2017. That process has received a further fillip with the latest GST rate rationalisation exercise. Virtually every agricultural and processed food item will now attract either zero or 5 per cent duty. That includes ice cream, chocolates, biscuits, cookies, cakes, pastries, sugar confectioneries and corn flakes. These were all being taxed at 18 per cent in the mistaken belief that they are consumed by the better-off. The truth is, ice cream is a dairy product containing around 21 per cent milk solids. That's more than the 15 per cent in full-cream milk. The primary ingredient in bakery products and cereal flakes is, likewise, wheat and maize grown by farmers.

However, rationalisation isn't simply about lowering rates. The GST Council needs to also be lauded for doing away with the multiple duties on like or similarly-derived items. A good example is skimmed milk powder and butter fat. While both are directly processed from milk, the former attracted 5 per cent GST and the latter (including butter and ghee) 12 per cent. Furthermore, vegetable fats were taxed at 5 per cent, adding to the temptation to adulterate desi ghee with cheaper palm or hydrogenated oils. A uniform 5 per cent GST on all processed dairy products and nil on milk itself makes things simple. The same goes for removing distinctions between loose salted, savoury-flavoured and caramelised popcorn; all will henceforth be taxed at 5 per cent. Previously, chapati, roti and khakhra were leviable to 5 per cent GST, whereas it was 18 per cent on parathas. But now, all Indian breads — and also pizza bread — will see nil rates, thereby ending the scope for classification disputes and bureaucratic discretion.

But tax rate reductions and simplification — GST has also been cut to a uniform 5 per cent for tractors, harvesters, threshers and drip irrigation systems — is only one part. Equally important is the unfinished task of reforming Indian agriculture — specifically the dismantling of barriers to marketing, movement and stocking of farm produce. The Narendra Modi government had attempted these reforms through its three farm laws, only to repeal them under political pressure and subsequently violate their spirit by imposing export bans and stocking limits on wheat, rice, sugar and pulses. That stalled reform agenda needs re-energising. Agriculture is too important to be given a cavalier, do-nothing approach. The GST Council's reform should be the start of something much bigger.

START WITH THE SCHOOL

To remedy gender imbalance in IITs, encourage girls who tinker, question and solve at every step of their academic journey

IN 2018, WHEN the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) introduced a supernumerary quota for women in undergraduate engineering courses — allocating extra seats instead of carving them out from existing numbers — it was a necessary course correction to remedy decades of gender imbalance, especially across some of the older centres. The policy worked as intended, pushing up female enrolment between 19 and 21 per cent across campuses. But, according to Joint Implementation Committee data shared by the JEE Advanced examination organising institutes, despite the absolute numbers of women admitted having gone up due to the quota — from 16,053 seats in 2020 to 18,168 in 2025 — the proportion of women students has flattened at around 20 per cent of total admissions. Simply put, the policy has succeeded in halting the decline, but it has not moved the needle far enough towards greater inclusivity.

Behind these statistics lies a more complicated truth: Access does not automatically translate into belonging. The IITs, to their credit, recognise this. To stop the proverbial glass ceiling from capping ambitions, campuses have been moving towards structural and cultural change — better hostels, safe and equitable recreational spaces, improved washroom facilities, access to AI-driven mental health tools, peer-support groups, stress-management workshops, and even institutional innovations such as IIT Kharagpur's creation of the post of a dean of well-being, focused especially on student care, and to tackle obstacles female students face in environments long shaped by a male-majority ethos.

Yet, this is merely the groundwork. The next step must be about changing the culture that shapes female students even before they arrive at IITs. That means reforming school pedagogy to challenge gendered assumptions about aptitude; hosting workshops that address unconscious bias; creating curricula that foreground the achievements of women scientists, and encouraging girls who tinker, question and solve at every step of their academic journey. Government initiatives such as the Vigyan Jyoti programme and the CBSE's UDAAN scheme, which provide financial assistance, mentoring and exposure to IITs, IISERs, and CSIR labs for girls in Classes IX–XII, are important correctives, but their impact is still unevenly felt. Despite the parity achieved in certain STEM fields such as medicine, where female students have begun to outnumber men, barriers to aspiration continue to surface persistently, funnelling women away from technical fields. And yet, many of India's most ambitious scientific enterprises, including ISRO's Mars Orbiter Mission and Chandrayaan-2, are now helmed by women, offering proof that the glass ceiling is not immutable. And that change is possible once women learn to see themselves as part of this continuum, when they can walk into institutions like the IITs knowing they belong, not as outliers rewriting the rules, but as rightful heirs to a legacy that includes them unselfconsciously.

THE ARMANI WAY

In life, fashion and business, the Italian fashion designer remained an iconoclast

WHEN DID GIORGIO Armani learn the secret of fashion? Was it when he was a schoolboy in Milan in war-ravaged Italy of the late 1940s? In his 2023 autobiography, *Per Amore*, he recalled being the envy of classmates for the beautiful suits his mother would sew for the family: "We looked rich even though we were poor." Or, was it as an adult, under the tutelage of Italian tailors, learning how to make clothes that command attention even as they soften the lines of the body?

Over the course of his six-decade-long career, Armani, who died this week at the age of 91, became known for teasing out the tension between such contradictions to create a uniquely sensual approach to clothing: Luxurious fabrics in minimalist executions, masculine silhouettes feminised and feminine shapes made angular. It was an approach to design that was decidedly modern, refusing to recognise older, rigid boundaries of hierarchy and propriety. This was how he transformed the suit — his most notable contribution to fashion. An Armani suit was not a uniform for the office drone; as worn by some of the most famous men and women of the time, from Richard Gere and Don Johnson to Julia Roberts and Jodie Foster, it was a quiet assertion of individuality, each piece draped to draw attention to the wearer's personality.

This emerged from a thoroughly modern understanding of fashion, as did his realisation of the publicity potential of celebrities. Among the earliest movers in styling Hollywood A-listers for film and award ceremonies, Armani began reaping the benefits of his foresight long before "who are you wearing" became the number one red carpet question. It made him a household name, helping him build a multi-billion-dollar empire over which he retained sole control till the end. Unlike peers such as Gucci and Versace, he remained indifferent to the overtures of conglomerates like LVMH. In life, fashion and business, Armani did it his way.



KANTI BAJPAI

FOR THE PAST decade, if not longer, India has been touting a multipolar world. One cannot wish a multipolar world into being, though sometimes this is what Indian policymakers seem almost to suggest: The world either has several poles of strength, or it does not. Right now, it does not, with the US and China pre-eminent by a huge distance. The crisis with the US, however, is giving us a glimpse of a multipolar world. That glimpse is unsettling.

Having fantasised about multipolarity and brandished it as a good thing, we are now getting a ringside look at what it might entail. International Relations scholars are familiar with the debate on whether a bipolar or multipolar world is a more stable one, where stability means the absence of great power conflict and war. Probably the balance of scholarly opinion is that a bipolar world is the more stable since the two primary powers must only worry about each other. Their interactions, therefore, are more predictable even if they don't like each other.

A multipolar world, by contrast, has been thought to be less stable since multipolarity implies at least three more or less equal powers (and more likely, four or five co-equal powers). In such a world, keeping track of the interests, ambitions, and moves of several other powers is much more difficult. Permutations of allies and alliances can be quite dizzying, just by the mathematics of permutations.

We in India have favoured the emergence of multipolarity in the sense that it promises greater fluidity and choice in our external relations. But these must be balanced against the uncertainties let loose by three or more contending and mutually

It could mean a solitary, nasty, and brutal international existence where you dare not count on anyone

At the recent SCO summit, China and Russia supported India against the US with respect to Trump's tariffs. Can we really take much comfort from their words? The danger is that if they themselves cut a deal with Washington, the US President's bullying of India won't matter very much to them anymore. That's multipolarity — you cut your deals, and good luck to everyone else.



MANPREET SINGH BADAL

PUNJAB IS NOW ground zero for two converging crises. First came the brief but intense India-Pakistan conflict in May 2025, when the entire state reeled under blackouts, missile alerts, and cross-border escalation. Though the sirens have faded, another disaster has surged forth, this time in the form of floods. These floods are drowning not only its fields and villages, but also hopes of recovery. This is the time to fortify Punjab, not just its riverbanks, but its future as the nation's breadbasket and borderland.

Pakistan has been weaponising water. While both banks of the Sutlej and Beas rivers lie firmly within Indian control, the situation is more challenging on the Ravi, where only one bank remains under Indian sovereignty. The other bank runs through Pakistan, and its recent construction of embankments, spurs, and studs is certainly a part of a calculated plan. While Pakistan's economy is minuscule compared to India's, the embankments along the Ravi in Pakistan are formidable and overseen and executed by the Pakistani military. A similar scenario played out during the 1988 floods as well. The use of concrete embankments and the military's involvement underscore how Pakistan views the Ravi as a matter of national security, a lesson India cannot afford to ignore.

Recently, Pakistan has also launched a massive flood-control initiative on the Ravi, focusing on the construction of a 90-kilometre-long retaining wall on both sides of the river. This wall, planned to be 300 feet wide and 27 feet high, will incorporate specialised water training structures designed to regulate the river's flow. We need to invest in reinforced embankments, and use better flood control systems to protect our fields and villages from both natural overflows and cross-border manoeuvres.

Alongside this, I would also emphasise

REACHING OUT TO PUNJAB

Urgent relief from Centre and reinforcement of river embankments are needed

As a farmer and former finance minister, I can point to some practical realities facing the agricultural sector. Wheat sowing will begin in a few weeks, but first we must pump out water and clear silt from flooded fields. For this, local administrations require diesel. Second, as a one-off measure, farmers should be provided free seeds and fertilisers. This provision should go to those whose fields were inundated, with subsidies for others, since all have incurred losses.

the urgent need to invest in recharging groundwater. While canal irrigation is important when river water is available, a substantial number of farmers depend on groundwater for their crops. We should use flowing waters to refill our underground water reserves. According to the Central Ground Water Board's Master Plan, Punjab needs 1.1 million artificial recharge structures to harness nearly 1,200 million cubic metres of rainwater, improving long-term water security for agriculture.

While strengthening the Ravi embankment and recharging aquifers are medium-term measures, we must also strengthen the farming sector immediately. Five steps are essential.

As a farmer and former finance minister, I can point to some practical realities facing the agricultural sector. Wheat sowing will begin in a few weeks, but first we must pump out water and clear silt from flooded fields. For this, local administrations require diesel. Second, as a one-off measure, farmers should be provided free seeds and fertilisers. This provision should go to those whose fields were inundated, with subsidies for others, since all have incurred losses.

The Centre can effectively reach and support farmers by sending an additional instalment of relief directly under the PM KISAN scheme through direct benefit transfer (DBT). Similarly, targeted support for motor repairs, desilting, and social security benefits can also be delivered via DBT mechanisms. Additionally, the central government can open a portal for PM Awas Yojana beneficiaries to upload and geotag damaged houses for direct relief, with further assistance available to affected schools under the National Education Mission. Direct cash transfers are essential to quickly compensate farmers for immediate losses,

now reasonably clear, on the other hand, is that in the emerging multipolar system, multilateralism is receding. Or, at least, that its recession is an equally likely outcome of multipolarity.

Third, Trump and his shenanigans have given India a foretaste of the possible dangers and pitfalls of a multipolar world. New Delhi has made a shibboleth out of "multialignment" and "strategic autonomy" (whatever those vaporous terms mean). We are now seeing what they can mean — not what they have to mean but what they very well could mean.

They could mean a very solitary, nasty, and brutal international existence where you dare not count on anyone. At the just-concluded Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, China and Russia supported India against the US and Trump's tariffs. Can we really take much comfort from their words? The danger is that if they themselves cut a deal with Washington, the US President's bullying of India won't matter to them anymore. That's multipolarity — you cut your deals, and good luck to everyone else. What is true of China and Russia is also true of the EU and Japan and other so-called friends of India.

This is not a defence of, or nostalgia for, unipolarity or bipolarity. It is simply a thought experiment on the future. Beyond Trump's galling policies towards India, we need to think more seriously about the road ahead. That's the real issue now, strategically speaking.

The writer is visiting professor of International Relations, Ashoka University, and emeritus professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore



SEPTEMBER 6, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PUNJAB POLL ASPIRANTS

THE ELECTION PROCESS in Punjab entered the campaigning phase as the deadline for withdrawal of candidates expired, leaving 74 aspirants for the 13 Lok Sabha seats and 848 candidates for the 117 assembly seats for the September 25 polls in the state. According to information received at the state election office in Chandigarh, there was a massive rush for withdrawals during the day before the deadline expired at 3 pm.

FUNERAL OF ARJUN DASS

THE BODY OF Congress-I Metropolitan Councillor Arjun Dass was cremated at

Safdarjung *ghat*. The leader was shot dead by suspected terrorists in his office in Laxmibai Nagar. The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, who did not attend the funeral of Lalit Maken and his wife, murdered five weeks ago, was present at the cremation grounds along with his wife, Sonia Gandhi, for almost an hour.

TEACHERS' DAY PROTEST

TEACHERS' DAY WAS observed as a protest day by university and college teachers all over the country. In Delhi, the All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations could not hold the proposed protest rally outside the office of the University Grants Commission due to the prohibitory orders in

the city. The main demands of the teachers are revision of pay scales, protection of their democratic rights and payment of interim relief.

20 TAMILS KILLED

AT LEAST 20 Tamil civilians were killed in Trincomalee in the past two days, and the culprits were the so-called home guards, armed Sinhalese civilians, and armed forces personnel. Information reaching the Tamil United Liberation Front revealed that a number of houses and shops were burnt to ashes in the arson. The TULF secretary-general, A Amirthalingam, said the situation continued to be very bad in the area, though things seemed to be getting under control.

THE IDEAS PAGE

Whose Urdu is it anyway?

West Bengal Urdu Academy calling off an event featuring Javed Akhtar goes against the finest traditions of a civilised language



NASEERUDDIN SHAH

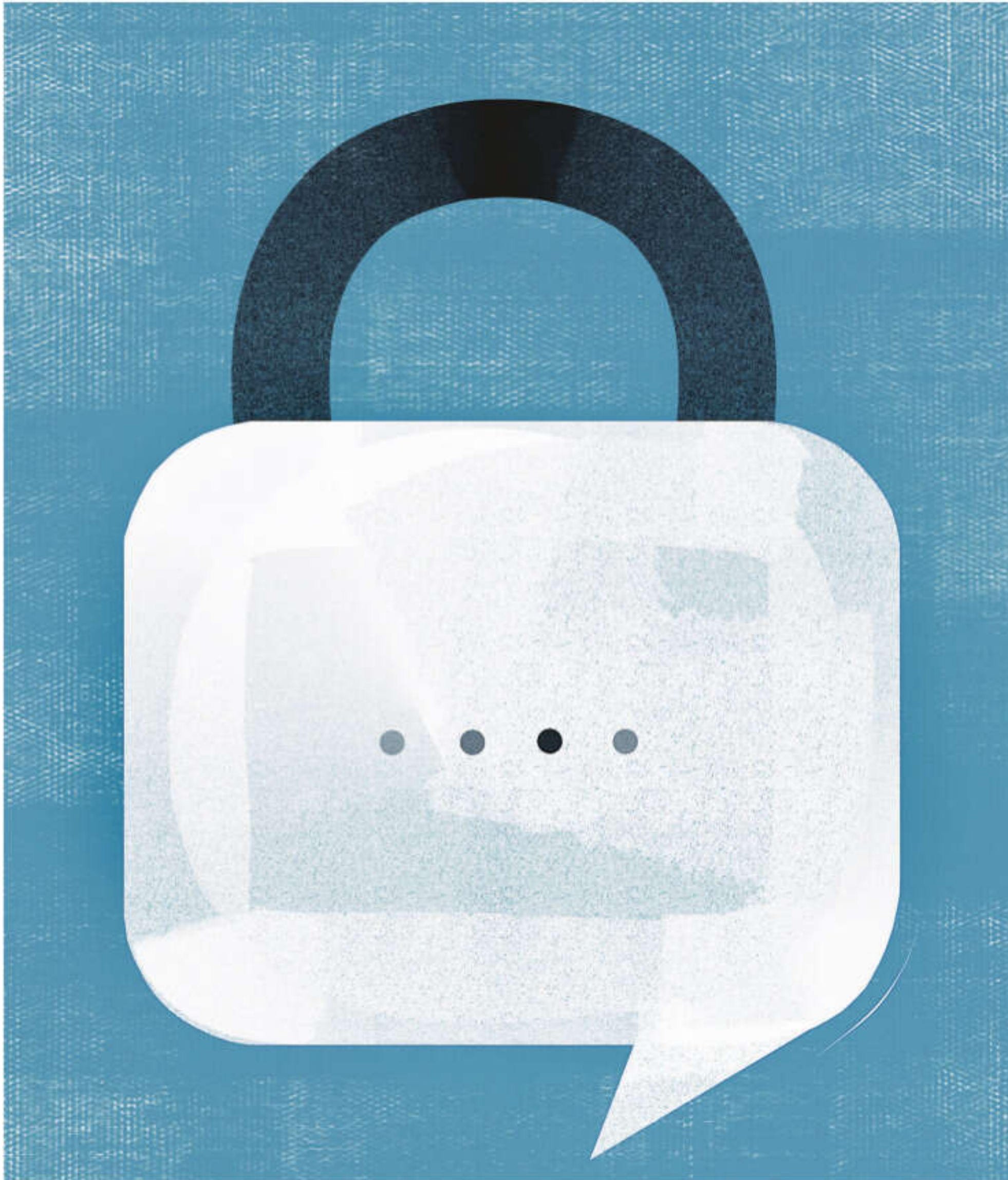
“LANGUAGES BELONG TO regions, not to religions,” Javed Akhtar once said in an interview. The veracity of this statement cannot be debated. Recently, West Bengal Urdu Academy, in its infinite wisdom, called off a seminar on Urdu due to the participation of this “*shaitaan, kaafir*” (their words, not mine) and managed to shoot itself in the foot while gaining some heavenly brownie points. I’m probably not the only one who would like to ask the Academy a few questions regarding *l’affaire* Javed Akhtar, so here goes.

In the first place, it would be straining credulity to believe that everyone there was oblivious to Javed *saheb*’s oft-repeated and vociferous opinions about the dangers of religious fundamentalism. But he hasn’t, as far as I know, recently said anything incendiary enough to warrant such a hostile reaction from “true believers”. Yet the vituperation against him was staggering, certainly not in the finest traditions of a civilised language. The people who spoke on behalf of the Academy only revealed their blinkered natures. Is it really unthinkable that the green-eyed monster could be gnawing at the breasts of some “holier than thou-s” on the committee who made this decision? Unthinkable! Perish the thought!

Ok, then. Is it possible that this abrupt and baffling cancellation happened not only to gain attention, but to deliberately insult an erudite, incisively original and encyclopaedically knowledgeable person, just for the fun of it? It certainly seems like it. Apart from an easy familiarity with innumerable subjects, Javed *saheb*’s awareness of the Bombay film industry and Urdu literature, its history, growth, usage and future, is truly unmatched. He has made no bones, ever, about his beliefs. So, if the Academy was aware that it was dealing with an iconoclast, why was he even invited in the first place? Something definitely smells rotten here.

The Academy’s reasons for the cancellation are specious enough to be laughable. It obviously considers Urdu the solitary domain of Muslims who are faithful believers in Islamic theology. It’s probably not necessary to remind them what the most commonly spoken languages in undivided Punjab were, and of course, still are, in the northern part. In that portion of Punjab that remains with us, the most widely circulated newspaper even now is in the Urdu script. Does the Academy, which presumably was established for the proliferation, appreciation and spread of Urdu, realise the harm it has done to itself by this act, which will only reinforce the belief that Urdu is, if not foreign, then a language spoken by Muslims, and only good Muslims at that? I really wish members of a “certain community” who were offended would realise that Akhtar’s salvation or damnation is his problem, not theirs. This act of the Academy could well alienate the remaining few who wish to learn Urdu: “Why learn it? It’s their language after all!” Do we really need a further division between the two certified “offence-taking” communities than the one already in place? Must blind faith be the only passport to Urdu-dom?

The contention that Javed *saheb*’s atheism is the cause for the cancellation holds



C R Sasikumar

no water at all. His alleged embrace of “Vande Mataram”, “Bharat Mata ki jai” and “criticism of Islam” cannot be weaponised against him. His criticism has more to do with the self-appointed guardians of the religion than the religion itself. In fact, he dismisses all religions. And there’s nothing wrong with respecting your motherland. Are only those who believe in God blessed enough to be able to contribute to society? What connection on Earth or in heaven does one’s learning have to do with the almighty? Bertrand Russell was a self-proclaimed atheist as well, so should all his writings be consigned to the flames? Would George Bernard Shaw be roasting in the eternal fire for poking fun at the ideas of heaven and hell?

One has to wonder if the disapproval extends to Munshi Premchand as well — he didn’t believe in Islam — and what about Sardar Rajinder Bedi or Firaq Gorakhpuri or Saadat Hasan Manto? They were hardly “believers”, so presumably these matchless Urdu writers, if still alive, would also be prevented from voicing their opinions by the West Bengal Urdu Academy. Does belief in your holy book negate the lifelong fascination with and study of Urdu by, for

Does the Academy, which presumably was established for the proliferation, appreciation and spread of Urdu, realise the harm it has done to itself by this act, which will only reinforce the belief that Urdu is, if not foreign, then a language spoken by Muslims, and only good Muslims at that? I really wish members of a “certain community” who were offended would realise that Akhtar’s salvation or damnation is his problem, not theirs. This act of the Academy could well alienate the remaining few who wish to learn Urdu: ‘Why learn it? It’s their language after all!’

example, people like the Irish Catholic professor Victor Kiernan, an Urdu and Farsi scholar, or Gopichand Narang, who, unless he kept it a closely guarded secret, as far as I know, was definitely not Muslim.

The list of non-Muslim Urdu writers and poets who contributed to the growth of Urdu is as long as one’s arm; if it weren’t, would we have had immortals in the past like Jagan Nath Azad or Brij Narayan Chakbast, to name only two, who would talk of a blending of and harmony between faiths, and draw a truthful picture of their times? Or even a patron of the language like Munshi Nawal Kishore? Or a Gulzar, with whom breathing the same air is a privilege? Speaking of Gulzar *saheb* brings to mind another non-conformist — Ghalib, whose fondness for alcohol and aversion to bargaining with God through prayer are legend. What about him? It might not be a bad idea for the West Bengal Urdu Academy to cancel any recitation of his poetry as well. After all, he was blasphemous enough to say, “*Hum ko maaloomb hai jan-nat ki haqeeqat lekin/ Dil ke khush rakhne ko Ghalib ye khayaal achha hai.*”

The writer is an actor and author



SUMANA ROY

We the teachers

That we repair ourselves makes us all teachers — we are our most difficult students

THE PEN THAT finds its life from human fingers feeding ink into its body is different from the pen whose intestines are consumed, used and discarded. That relationship, of keeping and throwing, can be seen in their forms, in the difference between the body — and skin — of the fountain pen and a biro. One looks for a button to match the rest on the shirt when it gets lost. That effort, along with the enterprise of sewing, makes the shirt a little more valued than it might have been before. And so with relationships between humans. Repair, with its rituals of attention, renews affection — the old becomes temporarily new. Repairing requires skills — of the hands, but, more importantly, of the mind, for it to return over and over again to the same place of tear, injury and incompleteness; it is also a gesture towards a renewal of commitment, to carry along with what has been given instead of raising a ticket for a new purchase. Repair, then, is a form of updating.

That any form of art is a practice of repair is so self-evident that neither teacher nor student need to say it to each other. *Riyaz* is repair, and it’s possible for this repairing to

happen without the obvious corollary — our art is only a synecdoche of our condition, that we too are in need of gentle repair. How this *rifu* (or *rafu*), this mending of cloth through stitches, that happens in our art makes us the artists we are, is only an extension of how we are constantly repairing ourselves. That creation is actually repair doesn’t occur to us because of our conditioning in stories of origin and anthems about originality. The “and” in the Bible is much more than a conjunction, for instance — it reminds us that all creative practice begins with “and”, in the middle, from the middle, but, more importantly, it is a reminder that creation is restoration, an unpredictable balance of scraping and adding, sawing and joining, loss and gain: The “and” is the manifestation of an urge to stay connected to what was, and to continue. This form of repair is like the self and the world that, while remaining in flux, continues to retain an essence of its identifiability.

It’s with brokenness that one comes to poetry. Think of the vocabulary, the violence in “cutting” lines, line “breaks” or “run on lines”, in which is the phonetic intuition of

being “run over”. But enjambment is neither surgery nor recuperation — it is a gardener’s trick to allow the plant to grow more fluently. “Repair” comes from an etymological history of preparation, a line of living that connects the empirical with the spiritual, the functional with the aesthetic. It has begun to seem to me that much of the idea of the Creative Writing workshop comes from the idea of repair. We must fix the writing. The workshop begins to feel like a garage — a space that provides the equivalent of a spare tyre, a painting job, and so on. I’d have given up on the analogy had it really not been as true — the writing must approximate a model, something as ready-made as an automobile. We’ve been bullied to believe in a preset idea of an efficient model — what we write must fit into that mould. Irrespective of the approach one takes — to demonstrate one’s unease with the writer’s style or suggesting ways in which the writing could be made more efficient — the idea of language needing repair is made obvious. It is a hurtful model of critique and pedagogy. This becomes even more compli-

cated when we come to an Indian Creative Writing workshop where there are different degrees of language fluency. But craft is not a skill alone. If it were, it would have remained tied to *techne*, the Greek word for craft, a concept that emphasises expertise. The more we are able to move away from this idea of craft, the easier it would be to liberate it from this capitalist model of training in creative practice that funds workshops and university programmes. Repair — as concept and practice — is far more equitable and democratic than the bullish investment in craft, whose industrialisation and consequent marketing has turned writers into the likeness of fortune cookies, with something stored inside them as ready-made response, no matter who bites into it. If repair, like prayer, is available to everyone, creativity is, too. That we can repair ourselves makes us all teachers — we are our closest but most difficult students.

Roy, a poet and writer, is associate professor at Ashoka University. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Images of the autocrats at Wednesday’s military parade reflected the shifting global order. But Donald Trump is hastening Beijing’s rise.” — THE GUARDIAN

The Sangh outside the Shakha

RSS chief Bhagwat wants the organisation to chart a more open and inclusive course. Yet, there is scope for debate over some of his averments



RAM RAJYA
BY RAM MADHAV

LAST WEEK, DELHI’S elites were treated to a three-day lecture series by RSS *sarsangchalak* Mohan Bhagwat on the occasion of the organisation’s centenary. In his usual unostentatious and candid manner, Bhagwat sought to present the 21st-century face of the organisation to the 1,000-plus audience at the Vigyan Bhawan auditorium.

The RSS leadership uses the phrase “progressive unfoldment” to describe its journey of 100 years. First used by the well-known thinker from the organisation, Dattopant Thengadi, the phrase essentially means that the organisation would not like to be confined to a rigid ideology — it wants to remain open-ended and adaptive to societal changes. While its end objective remains building *param vaibhav* — ultimate glory — of the Hindu Rashtra, the path to achieving that coveted goal was to be graduality and contemporaneity.

The Sangh’s current leadership — Bhagwat and his next-in-command, Dattatreya Hosabale — strongly believes in this principle of “constant evolution”. While Hosabale called it “evolution unfolding” without compromising core principles, Bhagwat said that everything in the Sangh is changeable, except the fundamental belief that “Hindustan is Hindu Rashtra”.

Bhagwat’s lecture series vividly portrayed the unfoldment in the thought and culture of the organisation. Successive RSS leaders have contributed to the unfoldment. For K B Hegdegar, the founder, the RSS was essentially a mission to build a physically strong and emotionally united Hindu society that would not only secure independence but also ensure that the nation thrives on its own soul power. Guruji Golwalkar, his successor, initiated the process of expanding the organisational network into all walks of national life. While Balasaheb Deoras, the third chief, put more emphasis on dealing with social issues like casteism, untouchability and disharmony within Hindu society, later chiefs propelled the organisation into newer areas like media, culture, literature, and even establishing think tanks.

Bhagwat’s most significant contribution in the past 25 years — first as *sarkaryavah* and then as *sarsangchalak* — has been to bring greater openness to organisational activity. At 100, the RSS seems to have undergone a major transformation from being a *shakha*-centric organisation to a *swayamsevak*-centric one. While the *shakha* — the unique daily meeting — continues to occupy an important place, today’s RSS is recognised more by the thousands of projects and activities its members undertake across multiple sectors. There was a time when the Sangh used to be described as “*Sangh yani shakha; shakha yani karyakram*” — Sangh means *shakha*, *shakha* means the activity within. But today, a more apt description could be: “*Sangh yani swayamsevak*;

swayamsevak yani prakalp” or Sangh means *swayamsevak*; *swayamsevak* means the projects he undertakes.

Today, 90 per cent of the Sangh is outside the shakha. That calls for greater engagement and accommodation with the wider society, a need Bhagwat diligently understood and put into action. Deoras and later chiefs like K S Sudarshan used to meet Muslim and Christian leaders. But that was sporadic. Bhagwat took it to the next level through more frequent formal and informal engagements, which gave more reassurance to these leaders. From the famous statement calling upon the Hindus not to “look for a Shivling under every mosque” to the insistence that “the day it is said that we do not need Muslims, that day it will not be Hindutva”, to the categorical assertion that the RSS would not be a party to any future struggle for temples in Kashi and Mathura, Bhagwat demonstrated a new vision of accommodation and acceptance. At Vigyan Bhawan, he emphasised that “no Hindu thinks there will be no Islam”.

Bhagwat wants the centenarian organisation to chart a more open and inclusive course — this has been received well by wider sections of society. Yet, there is scope for debate over some of his averments, both within and outside the RSS. The assumption that religions were nothing more than different “modes of worship” may need further deliberation given the religious strife being witnessed not only in India but globally. Semitic faiths are well-developed ideologies that need significant reform to be assimilated into the mainstream societies of various countries, the lack of which is leading to rising tensions and conflicts in Europe and elsewhere. Bhagwat approvingly quoted Maulana Azad’s statement that “changing religion does not change your community”. But the fact remains that a large number of Muslims did accept Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s formulation over that of Azad.

The other issue that may call for greater debate was Bhagwat’s call to families to have three children. As per the current data, over 10 per cent of Indian families have three children or more. India’s total fertility rate stands at 1.9 as per the UN Population Fund data for 2025. This is significantly below the TFR of 2.1 that is needed to maintain population balance. These figures have to be analysed scientifically. At the current fertility rate, India’s population will reach 1.7 billion by 2065 before starting to decline. Bhagwat’s suggestion that more families should have three children is welcome to the extent of restoring the TFR to 2.1, but going beyond this figure is fraught with the challenge of population explosion. That’s why Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for “greater discussion and awareness on population explosion” in his 2019 Independence Day address. He went on to describe population control as “an act of patriotism”.

These debates apart, Bhagwat’s vision for Bharat reflects the 21st-century unfoldment of the RSS. At the stroke of its centenary, as the organisation occupies the national centre stage, its voice brims with confidence and the vision expands to include all the 1.45 billion Indians.

Akhand Bharat begins there.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PROTECT LIBERTY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Injustice’ (*IE*, September 4). The Delhi HC’s decision to deny bail to Umar Khalid and others goes against the “bail is the rule and jail is the exception” doctrine, reaffirmed by CJI B R Gavai. Prolonged incarceration without framing charges and beginning the trial goes against the protection of personal liberty constitutionally guaranteed in Article 21. An accusation of “conspiracy” without reliable and irrefutable evidence cannot justify condemning a person to continue to languish in prison. We hope the SC will grant bail to Khalid and others languishing in jail without trial and protect their personal liberty and space for legitimate protest.

G David Milton, Maruthancode

DEATH OF INTIMACY

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘You, me and a lonely crowd’ (*IE*, September 4). The city’s drained enchantment echoes a crisis beyond urban India: The slow death of intimacy in a hyperconnected age. Scholars like Sherry Turkle have long warned that technology breeds “alone togetherness”, where constant connectivity paradoxically erodes genuine connection. Today, we inhabit echo chambers, with eyes fixed on screens and ears sealed by headphones.

Zainab Irshad, Patna

SINGLE ID

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘An EPIC exclusion’ (*IE*, September 4). A situation has emerged where voters are forced to struggle for an alternative ID as the EPIC issued by an authority is not accepted as valid by the same authority. It is appalling that citizens do not have a single ID that can be substituted for all others. The government ought to have taken serious efforts to replace the EPIC, Aadhaar, ration card, licence etc with a single, unique ID for all purposes. If these cards are not valid for a purpose, the government must stop issuing them.

Jiji Panicker K, Chengannur

THOUGHT CONTROL

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘The politics of horror’ (*IE*, September 4). The narrative of the current sociopolitical spectre is manipulated to suit the needs of the powers that be. The brainwashing is near-complete. *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980), sequel to the film *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* mentioned in the article, brilliantly captures the machinations of the dystopian state where the “*Jontor Montor Chor*” is used for hypnotising people. The machine brainwashes people to act as per its desire and serve its sinister purposes. Films like ‘*Vash Level 2*’ may serve as a reminder of such systematic manipulation.

Anol Roy, Sahibabad



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

What Rajasthan’s coaching centre Bill says, why it matters

HAMZAKHAN
JAIPUR, SEPTEMBER 5

THE RAJASTHAN Assembly this week passed a Bill to regulate the coaching centre industry in the state, and to “create a healthier and more supportive environment” for students to pursue “their academic and professional goals”.

Purpose and context

The Rajasthan Coaching Centres (Control and Regulation) Bill, 2025, passed on September 3, makes provisions for the registration, control, and regulation of coaching centres, and to determine the minimum standards and requirements for their registration.

It seeks to “take care of interests of students [in coaching centres] and provide them career guidance and psychological counselling for mental well-being... take appropriate measures to provide security and reduce [their] stress... and... [ensure their] holistic development... in preparation of different competitive examinations...”.

The Bill is described as “a decisive step to curb the commercialization of coaching institutes and [to] ensure that they operate within a framework prioritizing the well-being and success of students”.

Deputy Chief Minister and Higher Education Minister Prem Chand Bairwa said 88 coaching-centre students had died by suicide in the last four years, including 70 in Kota, the “coaching capital” of India, and 14 in Sikar.

Rajasthan High Court took suo motu cognizance of student suicides almost 10 years ago, after 19 students were reported to have taken their lives in coaching centres in 2015. “In the past five years, about 78 students... have committed suicide... No one has been held accountable,” the court said on January 4, 2016.

Over the years, the HC commissioned a study into student stress by Tata Institute of Social Sciences, issued guidelines, set up a committee, and pushed for legislation.

In its report submitted in March 2025, the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports, noted “the lack of a regu-

THE COACHING INDUSTRY IN RAJASTHAN

SIGNIFICANT IMPACT on state economy, especially in Kota and Sikar. Rajendra Pareek, Congress MLA from Sikar, has claimed that 30-35% of Sikar’s economy is dependent on coaching centres.

50 LAKH STUDENTS are enrolled in coaching centres in the state, the business is estimated at Rs 60,000 crore, and extends direct and indirect support to 10 lakh people, according to MLAs in the Assembly.

latory framework at the national level to regulate the proliferating coaching centre industry”, and the “widespread reports of financial fraud in these coaching centres, as well as instances of student suicide, drug abuse, and mental health struggles”.

Provisions of the Bill

The proposed law will be enforced by a Rajasthan Coaching Centres (Control and Regulation) Authority, which will have senior Education and police officials, a psychiatrist, and representatives of coaching centres and parents’ bodies.

Committees at the district level will have

the district magistrate, superintendent of police, and chief medical and health officer among their members. They will ensure the registration of coaching centres and their compliance with the law, and the setting up of grievance redressal cells. The district committees will also oversee various aspects of the functioning of the coaching centres, including the way in which fees are charged, complaints are dealt with, and teaching is carried out.

Coaching centres are required to apply for registration within three months of the Act coming into force. Eligibility conditions include having a physical area of not less than 1 sq metre per student, engaging tutors with at least a

graduate degree, and not making “misleading promises or guarantee of rank or good marks”.

They must have a system of counselling, a website with updated details including the qualifications of tutors, hostel facilities, policy on fees, and data on success rates. Students and teachers must have weekly days off, and coaching must not exceed five hours in a day.

Violations will attract fines of Rs 50,000 in the first instance, and Rs 2 lakh for a second offence. Subsequent violations could lead to a cancellation of registration. In an earlier version of the Bill, penalties for the first and second violations were Rs 2 lakh and Rs 5 lakh.

The proposed law will cover coaching centres with more than 100 students; the previous version of the Bill was applicable to centres with 50 students.

Criticism of provisions

During the Assembly debate on the Bill in March, deviations from the “Guidelines for Regulation of Coaching Centres”, published by the Union Ministry of Education in January 2024, were flagged. These included the requirement that “no coaching centre shall enroll a student below the age of 16 years”.

Other criticisms of the Bill included its alleged failure to adequately address the problem of suicides and its officials-heavy nature that could promote red-tapism and inspector raj. There were apprehensions that the Bill would adversely impact smaller coaching centres, and force coaching centres out of the state, adversely impacting the economy of Kota.

Amid the opposition, including by BJP MLAs, the Bill was sent to a Select Committee. The Committee presented its report on September 1, and made two changes — reducing the penalty, and increasing the size of the centres to which the law would apply.

On September 3, Opposition MLAs criticised these changes, and alleged that the Bill appears intended to protect coaching institutes rather than students. They repeated the criticism that the Bill does not do enough to address the increase in suicides, and fails to make psychological or career counselling mandatory. They again flagged the disregarding of the central guidelines.

In the government’s defence, Minister Bairwa said that the intention was to ensure “balance and justice”, and that coaching centres were not “unnecessarily” burdened.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

STORY OF U.S. ‘DEPT OF WAR’, THE NEW NAME TRUMP PLANS FOR DoD

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 5

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump has said he will soon sign an executive order to rename the Department of Defense (DoD) as the Department of War.

Trump first floated the idea in August, when he said that the Department of War sounded “like a better name”. “Defence is too defensive...and we want to be defensive, but we want to be offensive too if we have to be,” he said.

The move underscores “Trump’s efforts to reshape the military to align with his goals of projecting a more aggressive image by showcasing war-fighting capabilities,” *The New York Times* reported.

Origins in pre-WW2 history

The DoD was formed as the National Military Establishment in 1947 under President Harry Truman to create a unified military command, which would eliminate wasteful military spending and interdepartmental conflicts. For the previous 158 years, the US Department of War was in charge of the operation and maintenance of the US Army.

Trump’s decision has been made with this history in mind. “We had an unbelievable history of victory when it was Department of War,” he said, specifically mentioning World Wars I (1914-18) and II (1939-45).

The US Congress formally established the War Department in 1789 to oversee the operation and maintenance of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps. The Cabinet-level Secretary of War — a civilian with responsibilities such as finances and a minor role in directing military affairs — headed it.

In 1798, oversight of the Navy was transferred to the new Navy Department. The Marine Corps was also transferred to it in 1834. The US Army Air Corps was raised under the War

Department, which remained the most important arm of the military establishment till the 1940s, in 1926.

In the early 1940s, as the US was headed into World War II, the Army underwent sweeping reorganisation. Combat forces and logistics were grouped into new field organisations: Army Ground Forces, Army Air Forces and Army Service Forces. But through the war, the Army and Navy remained two separate entities.

Modern DoD emerges

The US fought World War II on two main fronts: the Pacific front, where the island-hopping campaign against Japan was led by the Navy (and the Marines) under Admiral Chester W Nimitz, and the European front, where the land campaign was spearheaded by the Army under General (later President) Dwight D. Eisenhower.

But post-War assessments found such an organisational setup to be sub-optimal. President Truman and several commanders believed that the fragmentation and rivalry among branches may have reduced the overall effectiveness. Truman thus sought to bring the national defence apparatus under a unified department.

Several proposals were drafted, and Truman secured enough Congressional support to pass the National Security Act in 1947. It established the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency, and, crucially, the National Military Establishment (NME).

The Act merged the Navy and War Departments, and the newly independent Air Force into a single organisation, the NME, under a civilian Defence Secretary who also oversaw the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The NME began operations in September 1947 but changed its name to DOD less than two years later. The reason? The acronym NME sounded like “enemy”.

ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA
JALANDHAR, SEPTEMBER 5

PUNJAB IS reeling from one of the worst floods in recent memory.

The state government has declared all 23 districts as flood-hit. Data from Friday show that 1,902 villages have been inundated, more than 3.8 lakh people affected, and more than 11.7 lakh hectares of farmland destroyed. At least 43 people have been killed so far.

This flooding is not entirely out of the ordinary: the geography of Punjab, the land of the five rivers, makes the region naturally flood-prone. That said, human factors have also played their part in the disasters.

Rivers: boon & bane

Three perennial rivers — Ravi, Beas and Sutlej — flow through the state of Punjab. The Ravi passes through Pathankot and Gurdaspur; the Beas through Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Kapurthala, Amritsar, Tarn Taran, and Harike; and the Sutlej through Nangal, Ropar, Nawanshahr, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Moga, Ferozepur, and Tarn Taran.

The seasonal river Ghaggar, and several smaller tributaries and hill streams, known locally as *choes*, also cut across the state.

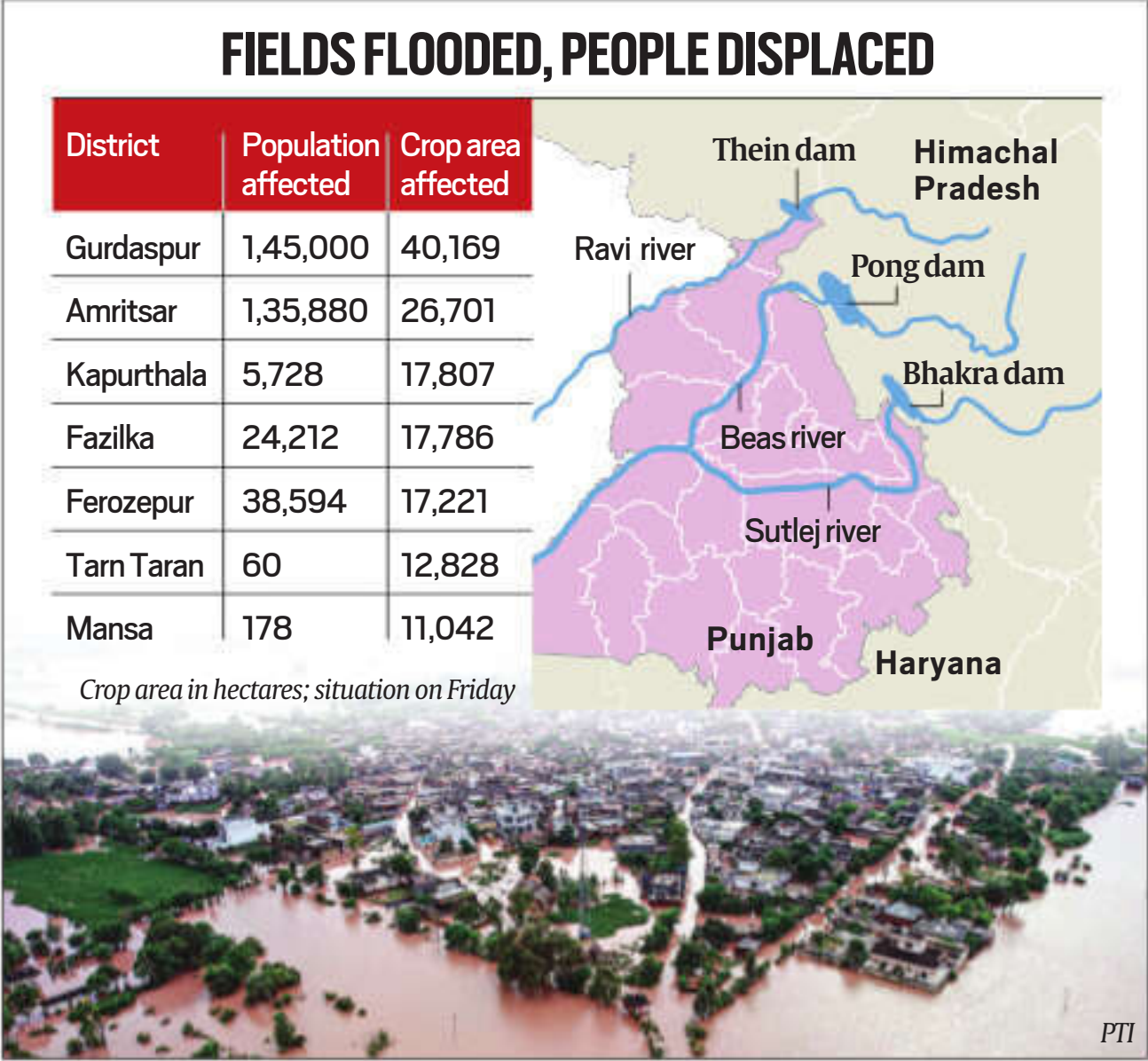
These rivers, and the alluvium they carry, makes Punjab one of the most fertile places on the planet. For millennia, agriculture has thrived in the floodplains, and today, Punjab produces nearly 20% of the country’s wheat and 12% of its rice, despite making up only 1.5% of its landmass.

This fertility, however, comes at a cost. Rainfall in Punjab and upstream catchment areas in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) make Punjab’s rivers swell during the monsoon. While an elaborate system of *dhussi bundhs* (earthen embankments) form a first line of defence against flooding, heavy rain often overwhelms these.

This is what has happened this year, and many times in the past, most notably in 1955, 1988, 1993, 2019, and 2023.

Beginning on August 10, exceptionally heavy rain in Himachal Pradesh led to the Beas swelling greatly. Inflows of 50,000-55,000 cusecs exceeded the river’s carrying capacity; villages and farmland in Kapurthala, Tarn Taran, Ferozepur, Fazilka and Hoshiarpur were flooded.

By mid- to late-August, the Ravi too had swollen up due to rainfall in Himachal and J&K. On August 26, two gates of the



Madhopur Barrage (near Pathankot) were destroyed, and the flow in the Ravi exceeded 2 lakh cusecs, causing a deluge in the districts of Pathankot, Gurdaspur and Amritsar.

All this while, incessant rain in Punjab made things worse. While most embankments on the Sutlej held up, heavy rain in southern Punjab’s Malwa region led to severe waterlogging in the districts of Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Ropar, Nawanshahr and Moga.

As of Friday, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and J&K have all recorded more than 45% excess rainfall (above the seasonal normal) this year, data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) show.

Dammed either way

Every time Punjab floods, the spotlight falls upon three dams that sit upstream on Punjab’s three perennial rivers, playing a significant role in controlling the rivers’ flow downstream.

The Bhakra dam is on the Sutlej in Himachal Pradesh’s Bilaspur district, and the Pong dam is on the Beas in Himachal’s Kangra district. Both are operated by the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), a

statutory body constituted under the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966. The Thein dam (officially the Ranjit Sagar dam) is on the Ravi at the border of J&K and Punjab, and is operated by the Punjab State Power Corporation Ltd and the state’s Irrigation Department.

When excessive rain fills up the dams’ reservoirs, water must be released to prevent overtopping, a potentially catastrophic situation when the water level in the reservoir exceeds the dam’s crest. “If catchment rain is extreme and reservoirs near their limits, BBMB must release water to preserve dam safety,” Sanjeev Kumar, Director (Water Regulation) at the BBMB, told *The Indian Express*.

During heavy rainfall, even controlled releases can cause flooding downstream. This is what happened this year. “This year’s inflow [on the Pong dam] is about 20% higher than 2023 (the last time Punjab flooded), and such unprecedented flow has never been recorded before,” BBMB chairman Manoj Tripathi said at a press conference on Friday. “We have managed it very well,” he said.

Punjab, however, has long felt that the BBMB does not act in the state’s interest. State officials say that the Board keeps reservoir

levels too high in July and August to ensure water for winter irrigation and power, and there isn’t much cushion when sudden rain arrives in August and September. Moreover, officials say, the BBMB often does not provide timely warnings, with sudden releases often blindsiding state officials downstream.

At the heart of Punjab’s complaints with the BBMB is the constitution of the body. The state feels it has too little say in the Centre-controlled Board whose primary mandate is to provide irrigation and generate power, not flood-management. The Centre’s decision to amend BBMB rules in 2022, which now allow officers from across India, not just Punjab and Haryana, to hold top posts in the Board, has aggravated Punjab’s concerns.

Large governance problem

Experts have long called for better management of dams, including Thein, which is operated by the state government. This year, the Madhopur barrage gates were destroyed after water was released from the Thein dam on August 26. The volume of rainfall aside, sources blame a lack of communication between officials upstream and downstream for the gates not being opened on time. In this case, both belonged to Punjab’s Irrigation Department.

“At Ranjit Sagar, Pong, and Bhakra, water was stored for many days and then released in massive volumes, causing sudden flooding downstream. A flood cushion was not maintained, and warnings were delayed,” environmentalist Jaskirat Singh of Public Action Committee Mattewara told *The Indian Express*.

“Heavy rain is natural, but the damage was made worse by human decisions. Unless dams are managed with transparency and scientific discipline, Punjab will continue to face such floods,” he said.

Also important is the maintenance of *dhussi bundhs*. Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, after visiting flood-hit districts in Punjab, on Friday blamed illegal mining for weakening these earthen embankments, and said “it is necessary to strengthen those structures so that Punjab can be saved from such tragedies in the future”.

A senior officer of the Punjab Drainage Department told *The Indian Express* that Punjab should strengthen embankments and invest in desilting bottlenecks on rivers, which would cost an estimated Rs 4,000-5,000 crore but prevent greater losses from flooding. He said, “Every year governments wake up only after floods.”

China’s massive military parade, and capabilities and concerns it displayed

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 5

A NEARLY 70-MINUTE-LONG parade was held in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square on Wednesday to commemorate 80 years of the end of World War II (1939-45).

In his address, delivered in the presence of leaders of 26 countries, including those of Russia, North Korea, and Iran, President Xi Jinping invoked history to emphasise the strength of the Chinese nation, which he said would not be “bullied”.

The reference to the United States seemed obvious — indeed, President Donald Trump responded on social media, asking Xi to “please give my warmest regards to Vladimir Putin, and Kim Jong Un, as you conspire against The United States of America”.

The parade was meant to showcase China’s growing military arsenal. Anushka Saxena, a staff research analyst whose work

at the Takshashila Institution focuses on the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), told *The Indian Express* that while a parade is not a “metric of combat efficacy,” it still reveals important information and signals.

Context of the parade

Beijing has hosted several military parades in the past, including one a decade ago to mark 70 years of the end of World War II.

Suyash Desai, a non-resident fellow at the US-based Foreign Policy Research Institute, who studies China’s defence, foreign, and nuclear policies, said this week’s parade was among the biggest-ever in scale, with 45 formations on display.

The Chinese demonstration of military prowess fits in the larger context of the way in which Beijing has attempted to project itself in global geopolitics. It comes alongside the assertion over the last several years of China’s claims over Taiwan

and the South China Sea.

All the key components of China’s defence apparatus were visible, Saxena said: “The tri-services and the rocket force, the four support arms, peacekeeping units, all-women units, unmanned combat and robotics units, and other entities demonstrated their commitment to fighting and winning wars.”

Weapons capabilities

“The parade aimed at not only displaying China’s military might but also China’s improved deterrence posture in conventional and unconventional spheres, using newer warfare technologies. This was apparent in the open display of unmanned and counter-unmanned systems”, Desai said.

While the efficacy of China’s military is often questioned given its lack of battle experience, “the PLA has a history of learning from others’ wars”, Desai said. These would

include the Russia-Ukraine war, the conflicts in the Middle East, and Operation Sindoor.

China has made significant advancements in drone warfare and drone-based defence systems, which Desai described as “possibly its biggest learnings from all the conflicts in the world in the last three to four years”. China’s defence indigenisation was also on display, which, Desai said, “helps its defence export industry, which is growing in South Asian, African, Latin American and West Asian countries”.

“In terms of weapons, the world has to worry about the Chinese new DF-61, possibly the longest-range intercontinental ballistic missile, displayed for the first time,” he said. China also displayed its complete nuclear triad and hypersonic missile capabilities, capable of launching from air, land, and sea.

Saxena pointed to the emphasis on manned-unmanned teaming — unmanned

combat platforms such as robot wolves, “Sharp Sword” reconnaissance and strike drones — showing China’s transition into “new-age warfare”.

Another novel addition to China’s arsenal is the YJ-19 hypersonic missile, which powers itself by a mixture of air and fuel during high-speed flight. The Dongfeng 5-C missile was also unveiled, the latest in the series of intercontinental missiles, with a reported range of 20,000 km.

“It was shown to be propelled by liquid fuel and not solid fuel, which is interesting because the latter is usually cheaper and takes less time to load and load”, Saxena said.

China’s messaging

With the Second World War as the backdrop, the Communist Party sought to broadcast the message that the “same spirit remains alive in the PLA and the citizens today”, Saxena said. “A secondary message”, she said, “was to communicate to allies that

China has built significant strength and capacity to support them in times of need”.

At the same time, the parade pointed to China’s mistrust of the Western world. President Xi said countries were adopting a path of zero-sum games instead of trying to create “win-win” cooperation, an expression that Beijing uses often. “It speaks to how China fears that even managed competition with the West will still curtail its continued rise”, Saxena said.

She also pointed to Xi’s vow that the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” would happen — and the fact that “reunification” with Taiwan is an important part of that “rejuvenation”.

Desai said that Xi’s speech reiterated Mao Zedong’s old slogan about the Party “commanding the Gun”. “Xi’s speech and every major slogan resolutely reinforced that the army should be loyal to the party and follow its instructions with absolute discipline,” he said.

Critical gaps

Value chain competence in critical minerals, a must

The shift towards renewable energy and e-mobility has put India at the threshold of a resource transformation. Critical minerals — lithium, cobalt, nickel and, importantly, rare earths — are at the heart of this transition. India, however, is overwhelmingly dependent on imports for these. The demand is enormous, as a 2024 report by the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) pointed out.



For instance, India’s projected demand for lithium is expected to rise from just 58 tonnes in 2030 to 20,845 tonnes by 2047. Nickel demand is projected to increase nearly 30-fold in the same period, while rare earths consumption is expected to soar with the growth of wind turbines, EV motors, and advanced electronics. In response, the government has unveiled a set of strategies. One is to secure mineral assets abroad. The government-owned Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. has been tasked with acquisitions, backed by a ₹4,500-crore war chest. In addition, amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act now allow the use of funds from the National Mineral Exploration Trust (formed through licence and mining lease payments and royalties) for overseas strategic acquisitions — potentially yielding another ₹8,700 crore. Furthermore, ₹500 crore has been earmarked for stockpiling critical minerals as a hedge against supply shocks, while ₹1,500 crore is being set aside to incentivise recyclers who extract minerals from used equipment.

All these measures have taken shape since January 2025, when the ₹16,300-crore National Critical Minerals Mission was announced. The government has also committed to 1,200 exploration projects and the auction of 100 critical mineral blocks by 2031. With funding now in place, the intent is unmistakable; the real test will be implementation. Meanwhile, gaps remain. The first concerns the long-stalled Deep Sea Mission. Originally conceived in the 1980s and formally announced in 2018, the mission aims to harvest polymetallic nodules — potato-like mineral-rich clumps that lie six kilometres deep on the Indian Ocean floor. These nodules contain manganese, cobalt, nickel, and copper in significant quantities. But the challenge of developing remotely operated mining equipment, coupled with the need for strict safeguards against damage to fragile deep-sea ecosystems, has delayed progress.

The second gap relates to refining, an area where there appears to be little focus. Refining critical minerals is environmentally difficult — China has situated much of its refining in Inner Mongolia, but for other countries the challenge is steep. Without a clear refining policy, India risks continuing dependence on China even if it secures raw mineral supply. Rare earths such as neodymium, crucial for permanent magnets, especially demand attention. Russia is reportedly assisting India in this area. Yet, the refining sector does not appear to be receiving adequate emphasis. If atmanirbharata is to be achieved in critical minerals, competencies must extend to the entire value chain.

OTHER VOICES.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Harvard’s pyrrhic legal victory

Harvard won a legal victory Wednesday when a federal judge ruled the Trump Administration illegally cancelled \$2.2 billion in grants, and huzzah for the rule of law, which is no small thing. But it might prove a pyrrhic victory, since President Trump seems willing to keep using and sometimes abusing government power to punish the school if it won’t unconditionally surrender. The White House is waging a multi-front war against Harvard that has involved cutting off federal funding, banning foreign student enrollment, and threatening its tax-exempt status and even its patents. Mr. Trump’s laudable aim is to clean up the anti-Semitic rot on campus. But its brass-knuckle tactics are doing damage to the rule of law and the First Amendment. (NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 4)

The Guardian

Heed China’s statement of intent, but don’t take it as fact

On Wednesday morning, Beijingers living near Tiananmen Square were issued with cold breakfast packs and ordered to refrain from cooking, lest smoke from stoves cloud the skies above the mammoth military parade. China’s Communist party goes to extraordinary lengths to ensure that nothing obscures the message of such performances — in this case, that Xi Jinping is reshaping the global order and that China is, in his words, “unstoppable”. The parade marked 80 years since the end of the second world war, positioning China as the critical force in victory in the east then, and a force to be similarly reckoned with today as “humanity is again faced with the choice of peace or war, dialogue or confrontation, win-win or zero-sum”, in Mr Xi’s words. China is “not afraid of bullies”. (LONDON, SEPTEMBER 4)

Q1 GDP reflects economic strength

FIRM GROUND. Doubts over growth lack basis. However, fresh dataset series and survey-based information are welcome



SAURABH GARG
V ANANTH NAGESWARAN

After securing a rating upgrade from the S&P credit rating agency, India recorded a robust GDP growth of 7.8 per cent in Q1FY26. Growth has been clearly broad-based. Agriculture did well in the last four consecutive quarters. Manufacturing did much better than the last three quarters, while services boomed across the board. Admittedly, production and exports were front-loaded due to the ongoing tariff uncertainty. Still, the overall resilience and health of the economy were unmistakably evident in the data.

Most informed commentators welcomed the numbers. However, the narrow wedge between nominal and real GDP growth rates has been unsettling for a few serious observers. Keeping this in view, this explanatory note aims to reassure stakeholders about the growing resilience of the economy that enables us to withstand external pressures.

Let’s begin by examining how some macro variables fared in Q1FY26. The government’s capital expenditure increased 52 per cent, supported by effective fiscal management. To a great extent, GST collection represents the whole economy, and it grew by 11.8 per cent. Buttressing this is the growth in the volume of e-way bills, which topped 20 per cent. Total exports of goods and services grew by 5.9 per cent, based on the strength of non-petroleum merchandise and services.

These pieces of evidence give a sense of economic momentum. However, GDP is estimated through an exhaustive exercise of analysing diverse datasets to capture all economic activities. Hence, the GDP results cannot be compared with model-based forecasts or evidence constructed with limited datasets.

THE METHODOLOGY

Both annual and quarterly GDP numbers are compiled based on established, publicly available methodology. The information flow for the quarterly compilation of GDP remains limited globally. Hence, quarterly estimates are prepared using the ‘benchmark-indicator’ method. The benchmark estimates are derived from the latest estimates of the previous year. Indicators are derived from credible, relevant datasets spanning the entire spectrum of the economy.

The indicators employed for India’s GDP estimation are a mix of volume indices and values. Wherever volume



ON THE RIGHT TRACK. The Indian economy is gearing to combat the fast-evolving external policy challenges through reforms, deregulation and market diversification ANI

indicators are used, real values are arrived at first, which are then inflated using the relevant WPI or CPI to derive nominal numbers. Where value indicators are used, nominal estimates are deflated using the relevant WPI or CPI. Therefore, in the case of volume indicator-based estimates, deflators do not have any impact on real GDP growth. However, on the whole, deployment of prices is a critical factor in estimating GDP.

GDP DEFLATOR

To keep inflation in check, the Government is meticulously taking administrative, fiscal and trade policy measures. This, along with the monetary policy responses and smoother supply chains, resulted in a steep decline in inflation. While wholesale inflation was only 0.3 per cent in Q1FY26, retail inflation fell to a 25-quarter low of 2.7 per cent. This resulted in a GVA deflator of 1 per cent in Q1FY26.

To elaborate, while estimating quarterly value-added, the compiler has to inflate or deflate values, based on whether the indicator employed is volume-based or value-based. The compiler applies WPI or CPI, depending on the sector at hand, to arrive at nominal and real values. This eventually results in aggregate gross value added in nominal and real terms. The rate of growth in the ratio of the two is the implicit price deflator for GVA. When inflation tends to be lower, naturally the

The upcoming GDP series is likely to do away with single deflation and move towards double deflation wherever possible, or use volume extrapolation

wedge between the nominal and real GDP growth rates declines. Hence, there is nothing baffling about a low deflator for Q1FY26. However, some of the issues raised are deeper, which are explained below.

IS PPI NECESSARY?

A producer price index (PPI) is a price index with quantities, prices, and weights relevant to different types of commodity producers. Input and output PPIs will help deflate intermediate consumption and output respectively. It is desirable that the economy has a PPI to estimate the real GVA. In the absence of a PPI, the current method of GVA compilation employs WPI, wherever applicable. India’s WPI, compiled at basic prices, is very close to an output PPI. Therefore, WPI was found suitable for sectors like agriculture, mining, manufacturing, electricity, construction and a few services. It is unlikely to distort the results in any significant way.

DOUBLE DEFLATION

Double deflation, whereby outputs and inputs are deflated by respective prices, is considered the most appropriate way to estimate GVA. However, applying double deflation requires a lot of additional datasets. Some advanced countries employ double deflation for specific sectors, depending on data availability.

India, like most developing countries, applies single deflation method for manufacturing. This involves an assumption that input and output prices are moving in sync. This need not always lead to overstatement of manufacturing GVA. In a situation where output and input price movements are synchronous, the current method will largely reflect the results of double deflation. When input and output prices

are diverging, estimates could be overstated or understated depending on the direction of divergence. This is a calculation that is challenged by data availability.

The upcoming GDP series is likely to do away with single deflation and move towards double deflation wherever possible, or use volume extrapolation. Base revision involves a fresh examination of sectors, data sources, prices and emerging best practices, resulting in a new series.

SERVICE PRICES AND GDP

The question about the representation of services in price indices used for GVA estimation has different dimensions. Firstly, the items represented in WPI are those that are traded in the wholesale market. To capture service price movements, a separate price index for services is desirable. Secondly, the weights of items covered under the CPI are derived from the household consumer expenditure surveys (HCES). The private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) on services flowing from National Accounts and the household consumption expenditure on services estimated from HCES are not strictly comparable.

Some important components of PFCE like gross rental incomes imputed for occupancy of own houses by households, financial services like insurance and banking whose values are indirectly estimated are not covered under HCES for justifiable reasons. These items accounted for about 13 per cent of the total PFCE in FY24. Another impactful PFCE component excluded from HCES is the consumption by non-profit institutions.

The work on the revision of the current CPI series is ongoing. The revised series will reflect an updated household basket of goods and services. As indicated in the HCES 2023-24, the share of services in the consumption basket of the upcoming CPI series is likely to be higher than the 2012 series.

TO SUM UP...

The Indian economy is gearing to combat the fast-evolving external policy challenges through reforms, deregulation, market diversification and other policy nudges. In this milieu, the GDP numbers for Q1FY26 unexceptionally indicate India’s economic strength and sound macro fundamentals. That said, the ongoing initiatives of revising the series of major macroeconomic datasets, coupled with fresh survey-based information, will certainly sharpen the evidence base for policy.

Garg is Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, and Nageswaran is Chief Economic Advisor, Government of India. Views are personal

GI law is ineffective against violations abroad

As the controversy over Kolhapuri chappals shows, GI law has territorial limits even as products of artisans cross borders

Priyasha Datt
Keshab Nandy

The Bombay High Court’s verdict in the Kolhapuri chappal versus Prada controversy set the tone for a debate that stretched far beyond the courtroom. The court refused to restrain Prada from selling its luxury sandals abroad despite their uncanny resemblance to India’s traditional Kolhapuri chappals. At the heart of the judgment lay two jurisprudential concerns, the territoriality of law and the *locus standi* of the petitioner.

The court stressed that geographical indication (GI) rights are territorial, their enforcement stops at the Indian border. Unless Prada sold footwear within India under the Kolhapuri name, no misrepresentation or deception was legally established. On *locus standi*, the court underlined that only the registered artisan associations and authorised users under the Geographical Indications of Goods Act, 1999, could file such a plea, not third parties acting in abstract public interest.

This reasoning may sound technical, yet it raises profound questions of justice. Kolhapuri artisans, whose collective labour and skill give the footwear its reputation, see their craft

imitated by a global luxury house selling sandals for more than ₹1 lakh. Their own earnings rarely cross a fraction of that amount. The court did not deny the moral injustice, but jurisprudence, it reminded, requires legal standing, evidence of deception, and territorial applicability. The law itself is robust within India. The GI Act provides both civil and criminal remedies against misuse. A violator may face injunctions, damages, and even imprisonment if found falsifying a GI. Prosecution can be initiated in civil and criminal courts, remedies range from injunctions and delivery up of infringing goods to imprisonment between six months and three years, coupled with fines up to ₹2 lakh. The law gives teeth to artisan communities, but only within India’s territorial jurisdiction.

FOREIGN ‘THREAT’

But what happens when the violation occurs abroad. This is where jurisprudence meets its hardest limit. Take the example of Odisha Rasgolla, another GI protected sweet. If someone in New York falsely labels ordinary rasgullas as Odisha Rasgolla, the Odisha association cannot directly rely on the Indian GI Act. Enforcement outside India requires resort to international agreements like the WTO’s TRIPS,



SAFEGUARD. Indigenous knowledge

which obligates members to protect GIs, yet leaves the form of protection to each country’s legal system.

In the US, there is no standalone GI law. Instead, GIs are protected as certification marks or collective marks under trademark law. Darjeeling Tea, for instance, has secured a certification mark in the US. Odisha Rasgolla too would need to register with the USPTO before attempting enforcement. Without such registration, the association could only bring claims under the Lanham Act for false advertising or passing off, a far weaker position. This exposes a jurisprudential grey area. Indian law provides strong remedies at home but relies on foreign legal systems abroad. International enforcement of GI is patchy, dependent

on local registration and litigation in expensive foreign courts. For small artisan collectives, the process is often unaffordable. Luxury houses, with global legal teams, exploit this asymmetry with ease.

The Kolhapuri chappal controversy thus is not merely about Prada and sandals. It is about the limits of legal protection when indigenous knowledge crosses borders and collides with global commerce. Jurisprudence speaks of territoriality and *locus standi*, yet artisans live in a world without such neat boundaries. Their creations travel far beyond Kolhapur or Odisha, carried by culture, migration, and memory. When Prada sells a sandal echoing Kolhapuri lines, or when a New York sweet shop labels its syrupy rounds Odisha Rasgolla, the law hesitates. It hesitates between respecting territorial sovereignty and answering a deeper moral claim that culture should not be exploited without credit or benefit.

Until there is a truly harmonised global framework for GIs, this space will remain a grey area, a liminal zone where jurisprudence falters and culture is left vulnerable to appropriation masked as inspiration.

Datt is a student, and Nandy is Professor, School of Law, NMIMS University

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.

GST reforms

This refers to ‘GST rate revamp is transformative’ (September 5). While there can’t be two opinions about the fact that the GST Council has, at its 56th meeting, dismantled a harsh indirect tax structure for the benefit of lay citizens, the ultimate success of such a well meaning GST reforms would depend upon their effective implementation at the ground level. It could be a strenuous task for the authorities concerned, owing to procedural intricacies involved in such a massive transformation. However, credit

truly goes to the Centre for successfully bringing all States on the same page amid several odds.

SK Gupta
New Delhi

A joint effort

The hugely restructured GST is a thoughtfully conceived measure that will ensure ease of doing business by facilitating ease of spending, thus benefiting both businesses and consumers. This casts a responsibility on the former to transfer the benefit of lower prices to the latter in full.

While the Prime Minister is being rightly showered with applause, it would be appropriate to pay tribute to the Finance Ministry as well as the GST Council for reaching the consensus in favour of the game-changing GST, overriding the ideological differences.

YG Chouksey
Pune

Amnesty scheme

The GST Council’s reforms are a fresh breeze, but legacy disputes still stink up the system. It’s time for a nationwide GST detox through a fair

amnesty scheme. Let businesses wipe the slate clean, reduce litigation clutter, and move forward. A one-time window to self-correct will boost trust, compliance, and revenue. Why carry tax baggage from the past when we can start afresh with GST 2.0?

Arul Mozhi Varman
Sivakasi, TN

Push for innovation

Apropos, ‘Time for innovation corridors’ (September 5). Unlike isolated research parks or incubators, innovation corridors can

foster end-to-end ecosystems — linking research, funding, market access, and policy support under one roof. With countries racing ahead in AI, green energy, and semiconductor technologies, India cannot rely solely on incremental reforms. It must channel resources into creating robust platforms that transform knowledge into wealth and employment. Innovation corridors can become the crucibles of India’s economic resilience and global technological leadership.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru



The Chancellor

Universities need to be headed by distinguished academicians

The recent submission by Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar to the Supreme Court of India, contending that the Chief Minister of Kerala has no role in the appointment of the Vice-Chancellors (V-C) of A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Technological University and Digital University Kerala, is another instance of how recent Governors are the political and ideological adversaries of an elected State government – as seen in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and, to some extent, West Bengal. Mr. Arlekar had appealed against an attempt by the Court to break the long-standing impasse over V-C appointments to these universities by guiding the creation of search-cum-selection committees and laying down rules. The Governor submitted that the 2018 UGC rules for search-cum-selection committees mandate persons of eminence in higher education and must not be connected in any manner with the university or its colleges. Thus, according to his submission, the Chief Minister, as someone intimately connected to all such institutions in the State, had no role. The draft 2025 UGC Regulations take this further by divesting State governments of a role in appointing V-Cs and bringing it under the Chancellor’s purview. While the Court will rule on the merit of Mr. Arlekar’s position, it is worth noting that Governors in States ruled by the BJP or its allies do not seem to have such problems with the governments they nominally head.

Governors were originally instruments of colonial power and were retained by independent India. From the very beginning, however, they have often acted as political agents of the ruling party at the Centre. Over time, central and State legislation defined and restricted the discretionary powers of Governors which were vested in them by the Constitution. After Independence, State governments retained the colonial-era practice of having Governors as heads of universities – to continue the stated intention of ensuring independent higher education as well as to have a “father figure” or a wise elder. The Acts passed by State legislatures, such as those for A.P.J. Abdul Kalam University, specifically define who the Chancellor will be. The Governor owes his or her position as Chancellor of a university to the respective State government. Even as the Court circumscribes the gubernatorial powers regarding the signing of Bills into law, State governments are acting decisively against having Governors as Chancellors of State universities – one of the few other domains where Governors have a strong say. Punjab and West Bengal, for instance, have passed a law making the Chief Minister the Chancellor. University heads need to be hands-on, distinguished academicians with a broader profile and vision, and strong managerial skills, rather than political appointees, State or Union.

A new leaf

Environmental compliance needs to be monitored at all levels

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has brought into effect a set of rules called the Environment Audit Rules, 2025, that allows the vital activity of environmental monitoring and auditing to go beyond the remit of State Pollution Control Boards. The rules will largely scrutinise whether industrial units are compliant with environmental regulation. The overall framework for monitoring and compliance within the existing environmental framework is presently supported by the Central Pollution Control Board, the Regional Offices of the Environment Ministry, and the State Pollution Control Boards/Pollution Control Committees. They have, however, been facing significant constraints in terms of manpower, resources, capacity and infrastructure. “These limitations have hampered their ability to comprehensively monitor and enforce environmental compliance across the vast number of projects and industries operating nationwide,” said a press statement by the Environment Ministry. This scheme aims to bridge the manpower and infrastructure deficits faced by regulatory authorities, thereby strengthening the effective implementation of environmental compliance mechanisms.

Under the new rules, private agencies can get themselves accredited as auditors. Much like chartered accountants, environment auditors can get themselves licensed and be authorised to evaluate the compliance of projects with environmental laws and their adherence with best practices in the prevention, control and abatement of pollution. Environmental regulation has, in recent years, transcended policing and bookkeeping. Given that human-caused climate change is seen as a problem that nations must collectively fix, new dimensions to environmental regulations have emerged. Thus, audits undertaken by these agencies can also be used for compliance with ‘Green Credit Rules’, under which individuals and organisations can gain tradeable ‘credits’ for afforestation, sustainable water management and waste management among other activities. Beyond industrial units, nearly every company in India will have to account for its direct and indirect carbon emissions. This will entail fairly complex accounting practices, which are beyond what Pollution Control Board officials can handle. However, preparing for the future should not be at the expense of compromising core responsibilities. It is usually at the district, block and panchayat levels that the most flagrant environmental travesties abound, which escape notice usually because of the lack of trained staff. The new regime must seek to empower them too.

In the lexicon of international relations, few concepts have evolved as dynamically as “strategic autonomy”. Once a term confined to academic debate, it now sits at the heart of India’s foreign policy discourse, shaping decisions in an increasingly multipolar and volatile world. As global power shifts accelerate and traditional alliances fray, India finds itself navigating a delicate path between competing giants: the United States, China and Russia. The pursuit of strategic autonomy is no longer a theoretical aspiration. It is a daily diplomatic practice, fraught with complexity and consequence.

Strategic autonomy refers to a nation’s ability to make sovereign decisions in foreign policy and defence without being constrained by external pressures or alliance obligations. It is not synonymous with isolationism or neutrality. Rather, it implies flexibility, independence and the capacity to engage with multiple powers on one’s own terms. For India, the concept has deep historical roots, going back to colonial subjugation and free India’s determination never to let anybody else decide our place in the world for us. From Nehru’s non-alignment during the Cold War to the Modi government’s “multi-alignment” in the current era, successive governments have sought to preserve India’s freedom of action while adapting to changing geopolitical realities. In theory, strategic autonomy offers a middle path between rigid bloc politics and passive disengagement. In practice, it demands deft diplomacy, institutional resilience, and a clear-eyed understanding of national interest. It is a balancing act – sometimes precarious, often imperfect, but essential for a country such as India that aspires to global leadership without becoming a client state.

The current global landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for India’s strategic autonomy. The unipolar moment of American dominance has given way to a fragmented world order, where China’s assertiveness, Russia’s revisionism and the West’s internal divisions, accentuated by Washington’s unpredictability, create a fluid and unpredictable environment. For India, this means recalibrating its relationships with major powers while safeguarding its core interests – territorial integrity, economic growth, technological advancement, and regional stability.

India’s relationship with the United States has deepened dramatically over the past two decades. From defence cooperation and intelligence sharing to joint military exercises and technology transfers, the strategic partnership has matured. The Quad grouping (Australia, Japan India, the U.S.), Indo-Pacific dialogues, the incipient I2U2 (India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the U.S.) and India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and shared concerns over China’s rise have further



Shashi Tharoor

is a fourth-term Member of Parliament, Congress (Lok Sabha) from Thiruvananthapuram, is chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, and the author of ‘Pax Indica: India and the world of the 21st century’

As the global order shifts, India must continue to walk the tightrope, treading a delicate path between the United States, China, and Russia

cemented ties. Yet, the relationship is not without friction. The Trump administration’s erratic trade policies, followed by stinging tariffs and sanctions in his second term, have strained economic ties. Washington’s pressure on India to reduce its energy and defence dealings with Russia, and to align more closely with western positions, has tested New Delhi’s resolve.

India’s response has been measured. It continues to engage with the U.S., maintains independent positions on global conflicts, and insists on the primacy of national interest over ideological alignment. This is strategic autonomy in action, not anti-Americanism, but a refusal to be subsumed by American priorities.

Ties with Beijing and Moscow

China presents a more complex challenge. The border clashes with India of 2020 shattered illusions of benign coexistence, and tensions remain high despite diplomatic overtures. Yet, China is also one of India’s largest trading partners, a key player in regional institutions, and a competitor whose actions shape the strategic environment. India’s approach is one of cautious engagement and firm deterrence. It strengthens border infrastructure, deepens ties with Indo-Pacific partners, and invests in indigenous defence capabilities. At the same time, it participates in multilateral forums such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, where China plays a leading role – a difficult but necessary balancing act.

Strategic autonomy here means resisting both confrontation and capitulation. It means asserting sovereignty and refusing to be another country’s counterweight to a rising China, while controlling Chinese access to the Indian economy, and simultaneously keeping channels of communication open. It means recognising that rivalry does not preclude diplomacy, and that decoupling is not always desirable or feasible.

India’s relationship with Russia is rooted in Cold War solidarity, defence cooperation and shared strategic interests. Despite Moscow’s growing closeness to Beijing and Russia’s global isolation following the Ukraine conflict, India has maintained its ties – buying oil, importing weapons, and engaging diplomatically. This has drawn criticism from western capitals, but India has stood firm. Its relationship with Russia is historical, multidimensional and not subject to external veto. It continues to diversify its military imports, invest in indigenous production and explore new partnerships, but without abandoning old ones. Strategic autonomy here is about refusing to choose sides in a binary contest, and, instead, crafting a foreign policy that reflects India’s unique geography, history and aspirations.

During India’s G-20 presidency in 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that India was now the voice of the Global South – unbowed,

plural and potent. Its democracy, he said, was not just a system but a “bouquet of hope”, nourished by the strength of its multilingual, multicultural fabric. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar argues that partnerships must be shaped by interest, not sentiment or inherited bias. This is diplomacy with a spine – assertive, pragmatic, and unapologetically Indian, seeking to be “non-West” without being “anti-West”. This stance resonates across the Global South, where many rising and middle powers concerned with peace and stability in their own regions, are choosing to safeguard their geopolitical and economic interests rather than be swept into the vortex of great-power rivalries. They seek agency, not alignment; voice, not vassalage.

What emerges is a vision of India as a sovereign pole in a rebalancing world – a nation that neither aligns blindly nor isolates itself. India’s rise, then, is civilisational, plural and deeply political. While India’s pursuit of strategic autonomy is principled, it faces headwinds as it walks the tightrope among the major powers. The global economy is increasingly interdependent, and technological ecosystems are dominated by a few players. Defence modernisation requires partnerships and climate diplomacy demands coordination. In such a world, autonomy must be redefined – not as isolation, but as resilience and adaptability.

Domestic factors also play a role. Political polarisation, economic vulnerabilities and institutional constraints can limit the effectiveness of autonomous decision-making. Strategic autonomy requires not just diplomatic skill, but economic strength, technological capability and political coherence. We cannot be truly autonomous from a position of weakness.

Moreover, in a world of cyber threats, Artificial Intelligence warfare and space competition, autonomy must extend beyond traditional domains. It must encompass data sovereignty, digital infrastructure and supply chain security. India’s recent efforts to build indigenous platforms, secure critical minerals and assert its voice in global tech governance are steps in this direction.

More than a slogan

Strategic autonomy is not just a slogan. It is a strategy. It is the art of navigating a turbulent world without losing one’s bearings. As the global order shifts, India must continue steadily to walk the tightrope – engaging with the U.S. without becoming a vassal, deterring China without provoking war, and partnering with Russia without inheriting its isolation. It must invest in capabilities, cultivate partnerships, and assert its interests with clarity and confidence.

In doing so, India does not reject the world – it reclaims its agency within it. Strategic autonomy is not about standing alone; it is about standing straight, and standing tall.

Fixing problems, unlocking India’s growth potential



Harsha Vardhan Agarwal

is President, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)

GST 2.0 is both a tax reform and the start of a new chapter in the growth journey

boost as now more affordable small cars, motorcycles, buses and trucks will encourage demand and investment in auto-manufacturing hubs.

Helping exporters and MSMEs

The rationalisation of rates would also help exporters. Long-standing distortions created by inverted duty structures in textiles, fertilizers and renewables are finally being corrected. This will make Indian products more competitive globally while reducing import dependence. Export-heavy sectors such as handicrafts, leather, and engineering goods – most driven by micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) – are well placed to gain benefits. Lower duties on capital goods and intermediates will also promote local value addition, directly supporting the ‘Make in India’ initiative.

One of GST’s biggest challenges has always been litigation. Interpretational disputes, classification complexities and uncertainty over tax treatment have burdened businesses and clogged up the system. Rationalisation addresses this by simplifying slabs and harmonising rates for similar goods. Clarifications on intermediary services and post-sale discounts further reduce ambiguity, bringing long-awaited relief to service exporters and aligning tax rules with commercial practices.

Small exporters will welcome the decision to remove thresholds for refunds on low-value consignments. This ensures fairer treatment for courier and e-commerce players, where liquidity pressures are acute. Faster, more reliable refunds will ease working capital challenges and encourage reinvestment in growth.

Perhaps the most path-breaking measure is the Simplified GST Registration Scheme for Small and Low-Risk Businesses. By introducing automated approvals within three days, the government has dramatically reduced entry barriers, which will cut compliance costs, encourage formalisation, and allow MSMEs to expand into new markets with greater ease.

Given that MSMEs are the backbone of India’s economy – contributing to jobs, exports and

innovation – the significance of this step cannot be overstated.

Institutional reform has also received a boost with the operationalisation of the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT). By enabling faster and fairer resolution of disputes, GSTAT will strengthen confidence in the system and reduce case backlogs. This signals that GST is not just about revenue collection but also about building a fair and predictable tax framework that businesses can trust.

The broader message is equally important. The streamlined two-rate GST structure (a standard rate of 18% and a merit rate of 5% with a special de-merit rate of 40% for a select few goods and services) aligns India more closely with global best practices, moving it to the kind of tax regime that advanced economies employ. For international investors, the reforms send a strong signal of policy stability, predictability and ease of doing business. In a world where global supply chains are being reconfigured, India is positioning itself not just as a vast market but also as a reliable and competitive investment destination.

A pathway to economic expansion

Of course, reforms are never the end of the road. Implementation will be key, and challenges such as delays and procedural complexities still need attention. But what stands out is the intent. The government has shown that it is listening to industry, willing to act decisively, and committed to building a tax system that fuels, rather than impedes, growth.

GST 2.0 is more than just a tax reform. It is an economic reform that promises to boost consumption, empower MSMEs, strengthen competitiveness, and reinforce India’s growth momentum. It lays the foundation for India’s next phase of economic expansion.

The story of GST has always been one of bold ambition. With these reforms, India has taken a decisive step toward realising that ambition. For businesses, consumers and policymakers alike, this is not just an adjustment of rates. It is the start of a new chapter in India’s growth journey.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sops in GST slabs

There can be no second opinion that the 18% GST charged on the premium payable by individuals for their medical and life insurance policies affected many, especially senior

citizens and pensioners. Many of them stopped renewing the policies as they were unable to afford payment of the basic premium with the levy of a steep 18% GST. Their genuine requests to reduce

the rate of GST fell on deaf ears. Many of them suffered as they were left with no valid medical insurance to cover exorbitant hospitalisation charges when they fell sick. It should not be forgotten that

even life-saving medical grade oxygen, diagnostic kits, glucometers and corrective spectacles were charged at 12% and an alarming 18% for thermometers. After making the hapless public shell out

the maximum GST, the government has now rushed to revise the GST slabs. One wonders whether this change of mind is on account of the Assembly elections in crucial States. Insurance companies too

should not use the GST waiver to hike the basic premium, unethically.

Shalini Gerald,
Chennai

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

GROUND ZERO



Tariff shock: Fabric piled up at RRK Cotton in Palladam in Tamil Nadu as buyers in the United States have cancelled their orders. M. PERIASAMY

Unravelling at the seams

From August 27, the United States has levied a 50% tariff on Indian goods exported to them, disrupting business for thousands of micro, small and medium-scale enterprises in India in sectors such as textiles, garments, and jewellery. **M. Soundariya Preetha** reports on how America's tariffs have upended operations in the apparel hubs of Tiruppur and Karur in Tamil Nadu, a major garment-exporting State

Twenty-year-old Vanaja, a tailor in Tiruppur district of Tamil Nadu, is worried that U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs on Indian imports could impact her wages.

Vanaja has been working at RRK Cottons India Private Limited, a garment company in Palladam town in the industrial district, for the last two years. She earns ₹480 a day.

She is among the handful of tailors at work on a Tuesday afternoon at the plant. Both work and workers have reduced drastically over the last few days, she says.

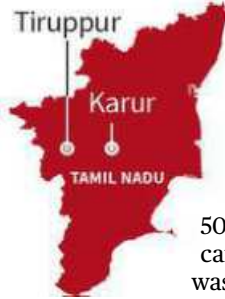
"People are saying there is no work because the U.S. has placed a tax on us. I have informed my parents (who live about 300 kilometres away in Tiruvannamalai district) about the situation at the factory," she says.

RRK Cottons has been manufacturing T-shirts and underwear for some of the largest U.S. retailers for the last 10 years. Its website says the company takes "immense pride as one of the largest underwear manufacturers in India." Its customers include eight U.S. brands.

On September 2, less than a week after a 50% tariff imposed by the U.S. on Indian goods came into effect, its Palladam factory, which was buzzing with activity a year ago (the problems started in January when Mr. Trump assumed office) is silent. A few workers move the fabric stocks and a handful of women and men do minimal work at the garment making hall. Only 100 of the 480 sewing machines and one of the five fabric spreader machines are in operation on the sparsely-lit shop floors. Stocks worth ₹65 crore have piled up. Two of the company's five plants have shut down in the last four months and the workforce of 2,000 has reduced by half, says R. Rajkumar, Managing Director of RRK Cottons.

He has no idea what to do next. "Almost 80% of my business is to the U.S. The trouble started in January when talks of tariffs started. The buyers prioritised China suppliers, delayed our shipments, and then cut back on their orders from us. Now, all the goods that we had produced for orders placed earlier are on hold. I have not received payments for shipments made in the last two months," he says.

Rajkumar believes he can "manage" for another two weeks. "But after that I will have no option but to shut down operations because I have to make payments to nearly 150 vendors, to banks, for electricity," he says.



Piles of stocks

India exports \$11 billion worth of textiles and apparel to the U.S. each year, of which nearly \$4 billion is contributed by Tamil Nadu's western districts – Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Karur, Erode, and Salem, according to the Southern India Mills Association. Exporters in Tiruppur, Karur, and Coimbatore produce a range of goods for multiple buyers in the U.S., including retail chains such as Walmart, Costco, and Target; fashion brands such as GAP; and smaller retailers and brands.

Since these western districts in Tamil Nadu

We fear that Tiruppur may lose ₹3,000 crore- ₹5,000 crore worth of annual business that involves core products as buyers can easily source them from other countries

K.M. SUBRAMANIAN
President of the Tiruppur Exporters Association

host a dense textile supply chain, even a small dip in exports ripples through the entire ecosystem.

In Tiruppur, popularly known as the 'dollar city', R. Gopalakrishnan, chairman of Royal Classic Mills who was on a visit to the Tiruppur Exporters Association (TEA), said that 80% of his business is to the U.S. He has stopped work at his factory since August 27 – the day when a punitive 25% tariff imposed by the U.S. on India for its purchases of Russian oil came into effect. That was in addition to Trump's 25% tariff on many imports from India. The total duties amounting to 50% have been imposed for a variety of goods, including garments, gems and jewellery, footwear, sporting goods, and furniture and chemicals.

"When the tariff was initially 25%, buyers said the cost could be shared between us," says Gopalakrishnan. "When the U.S. raised it to 50%, a buyer I've worked with for 20 years said he would still pay for the fabric since he had committed to it. He said I could ship the fabric to his suppliers in Vietnam, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka to be made into garments. The buyers don't want to take completed goods from us for sales in the U.S. because of the 50% tariff."

According to K.M. Subramanian, president of TEA, Tiruppur ships garments worth ₹12,000 crore-₹15,000 crore to the U.S. each year, which makes up 32%-35% of its total exports.

He says garment exporters include those who do business only with U.S. buyers; those who export to the U.S. and other countries; and those who export to countries other than the U.S. and the European Union (EU). Among companies that export goods to the U.S., some export basic products or core products that are shipped all through the year and some export high fashion goods that are seasonal in demand.

Subramanian, who has seven factories in Tiruppur district, explains how the situation changed for the worse over the last few months. Before Mr. Trump announced the tariffs, Indian



Women workers at a home textiles unit in Karur, Tamil Nadu M. PERIASAMY

garments faced tariffs ranging from 4% to 16%. When the U.S. imposed 25% tariffs, buyers discussed sharing the costs of orders already placed with exporters, since competing countries faced similar duties. But with tariffs now at 50%, most buyers no longer want the goods though it is not easy for them to quickly find alternative suppliers for high fashion products, he says.

"We fear that Tiruppur may lose ₹3,000 crore- ₹5,000 crore worth of annual business that involves core products as buyers can easily source them from other countries," says Subramanian.

Displaying some of the garments for children that he has made for a brand based in the U.S., he says he also has stocks worth nearly ₹18 crore that were made for the US buyers. "On average, garment units make only a 5% profit on their sales. We have all been negotiating with the wholesale buyers in the U.S. or the brands for the last few days. We want to ship the goods because if we sell these products in the domestic market, we will get only 20% of the value," he adds.

The problem is more acute for Siva Subramanian of Raft Garments, who recently expanded his factory in the hope that India would gain from Trump's tariffs. He believed that the tariffs would not be as high for India as it has been on countries such as China, Bangladesh, and Vietnam.

"My customers place their orders through wholesalers. I have 25% goods ready for shipment and some in the production stage. One customer demanded a 16% discount and has given me a week's time to make a decision and ship the garments. Another customer said he could bear 10% of the tariffs. Two other buyers have put the orders on hold. I make less than 10% profit on my sales and employ 350 workers. There are just 40 days to go before the Deepavali season starts and the workers are anticipating a good amount as bonus. Even if the business is disrupted only for a couple of months, we will lose orders for the next six months," he says.

Impact on MSMEs

The garment export business in Tiruppur is supported by thousands of Micro, Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) engaged in production and supply of yarn and fabric, textile processing, compacting, printing, embroidery work, and ironing and packing.

Just a few feet off P.N. Road in Tiruppur city, Premier Textile can be located on a narrow lane, among the MSMEs that do sub-contracting work for garment exporters. A few young men from the northern States and women from other districts of Tamil Nadu are busy sorting and folding fabrics.

"I run eight embroidery machines with 80 workers and take on sub-contract work from garment exporters. Now, I have only 50% of the usual workload, and fabric is piling up because the exporter won't lift it – his American buyer has put the order on hold," says M. Thirupathy, Managing Director of Premier Textile.

"About 2,000 embroidery machines supply work worth ₹1,000 crore a year to garment exporters. Even if a portion of the export order is lost, the entire supply chain struggles and that results in job losses," he says.

One of the dyeing units, which is among the MSMEs in Tiruppur, has decided to stop operations and send home 50 workers as it is not been getting fabrics from exporters.

While about two lakh people are directly employed at the exporting industries in Tiruppur, another two lakh are indirectly employed. This



Absenteeism has reduced from 25% to 15% in the last few days because the workers fear that they may lose their job

GOPINATH
Factory manager at an exporting unit. Karur

includes workers from 19 States across India.

Though some of the export units have suspended operations, the workers in these units have been able to get jobs because Tiruppur faces a labour shortage. However, the gravity of the situation will be known in another two weeks, say exporters.

Wage worries

Karur, another textile hub in Tamil Nadu with over 800 units, exports kitchen, bed, and bath textiles – such as towels, tablecloths, and cushion covers – worth ₹6,500 crore annually, of which about ₹2,500 crore goes to the U.S.

At one factory, workers troop out at 5.30 p.m. "We do not give overtime for the workers now as there is no work and finished goods worth ₹2 crore are in stock with us," said Azeem, the factory manager.

"In the last few days, the buyers have just started talking to us. They are asking for huge discounts or threatening to shift the orders to other countries. The immediate impact is for ₹1,500 crore," says P. Gopalakrishnan, president of the Karur Textile Manufacturers Exporters Association.

At the 110-acre Karur Textile Park, Sudhamani, 39, a tailor at a home textile export unit, says she is aware that some of the exporting factories in Karur are reducing workers because of lack of orders from the U.S. "I earn ₹11,000 a month and have a son and daughter to take care of. If work reduces, my wages will also come down," she says.

Prakash, who is employed at the packing section, harbours the same fear. He earns ₹12,000 a month and lives with his parents and brother. Less work means no overtime, fewer working days, and loss of wages.

"All the workers have this fear. In fact, absenteeism has reduced from 25% to 15% in the last few days because the workers fear that they may lose their job," says Gopinath, the factory manager at the exporting unit.

The factory has dedicated production lines for each brand that it supplies to. A board in one of the halls in the seven-storeyed building lists the brands that the company supplies to. "Walmart has stopped buying from us and Target has reduced its orders," says Gopinath.

Planning for the future

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, when orders dipped, we did not send workers home. We reduced the working days and working hours. If the U.S. tariff issue is not resolved, we may have to resort to similar measures. In the long term, we are looking at diversifying to value-added technical textile products," says Gopalakrishnan.

In recent years, e-commerce shipments from Karur have started picking up. "Not only Amazon; some retailers are also in talks with us, asking us to sell through their platforms," he adds.

As suggested by some of the American buyers, exporters in Tiruppur and Karur are also wondering whether they can partner with companies in African countries or Sri Lanka for value-additions and shipping from those locations. However, these steps will take time and cannot be decided immediately, they say. "Our buyers have been asking us if we can add value in the African countries as it will reduce the logistics cost too. But we do not know the capabilities in those countries," says Gopalakrishnan.

If the government announces a package that will meet 25% of the tariffs, exporters will be able to talk to the buyers and get order for the summer season. If those orders do not come, businesses will be in deep trouble, says Raja Shanmugham, founder of Warsaw International at Tiruppur.

Further, the European market slowed down in the last two to three years and buyers there have started asking for reduced prices, say garment exporters.

N. Thirukumaran, secretary of TEA, says that as an immediate relief measure, the government should announce a relief package that will enable the exporters to negotiate with buyers. And for the long-term, exporters will start studying new markets. "The India-EU Free Trade Agreement is critical," he says stressing the urgency for an announcement.

Members of the INDIA bloc led a protest in Tiruppur demanding immediate support from the Central government. On the same day, representatives of more than 25 textile associations met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Chennai and submitted their demands. "We have sought reintroduction of the Focus Market Scheme and at least a one year moratorium," said A. Sakthivel, vice chairman of AEPC.

"The government is working on a package and has assured us of its support," said Ravi Sam, vice chairman of the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council.

The associations are hopeful of support measures from the government. However, they want the government to continue talks with the U.S. and resolve the tariff issue amicably even as they start exploring new markets.

"My exposure to the U.S. is only 20%. We just had a call with one of the U.S. buyers. If they ask for a discount, the exporter will give it and ship the goods because there is no other option. We need higher duty drawback rates to meet the high tariffs. What is also worrying is the European buyers are also asking for a price cut now because they know our situation," says C.R. Anandakrishnan, Executive Director of KPR Mill.

Experience Will Trump Youth in AI Workplaces

Bots will replace eager entry-level workers

HR, take note. The way AI is shaping up, it appears to be a tool for mid-career employees more than for fresh recruits. Workflows will tend to become automated, starting with the simplest tasks, allowing businesses to rely on their managerial experience to create an optimal structure that combines human and digital elements. The technical skills entry-level employees are expected to provide to organisations are those most at risk of being displaced by automation. A few steps up the hierarchy, however, decision-making involves emotional and cultural factors that are beyond the scope of an agentic workforce. Moreover, when a series of business tasks is turned over to digital resources, the process must be designed for adequate human intervention so that overrides can be made within the context. This requires experience in business processes that entry-level hires are unlikely to possess.

AI also needs to be trained to mimic human decision-making for it to be able to provide an effective alternative. It can train on additional context by processing data, or it can be set up to train itself selectively through human mentoring. Senior executives can feed conflict-resolution inputs into a system based on their exposure to specific situations. This exposure can only be gained with time spent within an organisation and in roles meant to deliver specific outcomes. Leadership skills that motivate a workforce are unlikely to be diluted by digital agents assisting humans. Supervisory roles may change when teams are automated, but it is unlikely that organisations will hand over control to a self-healing agentic system.

Human resource management will have to be tailored to workforces where strategic skills are emphasised at the cost of technical ability. It may be difficult to adapt to a scenario where a premium is attached to experience, as opportunities to acquire it continue to shrink. Companies may be moving into an era where the entry level starts at middle management. But can middle managers qualify for jobs if they happen to be fresh out of college?

Rawalpindi Espresso, Pak-Style ‘Autostrat’

Pakistan’s ‘strategic autonomy’ is, one must admit, as intriguing as it’s amusing. With Asim Munir having lunch in Washington with Donald Trump in June, his tea with Xi Jinping in Beijing on Tuesday — as part of prime minister Shehbaz Sharif’s entourage — has raised eyebrows. As the Joni Mitchell song goes, this is China’s ‘all-weather friend’ and the US ‘major non-Nato ally’ looking at clouds from both sides now.

As a policy approach, ‘strategic autonomy’ has been getting bad press, especially from countries like the US that prefer everyone comes inside its tepee. Its advocates — autostrats? — come in for much criticism. When France talks of it, it’s brushed off as an ineffective effort to get out from under Washington’s shadow. In India’s case, it’s downright scandalous, amounting to bankrolling the ‘other side’s war’. But even as Pakistan’s quite the hunter with the hounds and runner with the hare — never mind its questionable democratic values that seem to bear fruit in Washington and Beijing with Rawalpindi openly stepping out of Islamabad’s shadow — its litany of economic hardships, and its willingness to host groups with a propensity for terror is hosted by the two largest economies in the world.

The Rawalpindi Espresso can sup with Trump and have a cup with Xi without worrying about choosing sides *because* it’s not, say, India. As the fourth-largest economy, the rumours of its death exaggerated, India is a threshold power. Acting the burr under New Delhi’s saddle, Rawalpindi-Islamabad is a strategic tool for both Beijing and Washington — to keep India from not getting too big for its kolhapuris, and to gain better leverage. So, even as Munir hops from luncheon to lunch, all that wooing shouldn’t matter much. It’s gastro-ptics.

JUST IN JEST
We defend Trump’s renaming of the US Department of Defense

War By Another Name is ‘War’ Again

It’s not every day that we get to say, ‘Well done, Don Don.’ But when Trump decides to call a spade a spade — instead of ‘a tool primarily for digging consisting of a long handle and blade’ — we do appreciate his honesty. In a move that finally aligns government nomenclature with actual behaviour, Don Don has decided to rename the US Department of Defense to the Department of War. Bravo. At last, truth in advertising. Governments across the world, including in the Land of Gandhi, insist on using the euphemism ‘defence’. It’s like calling greed ‘ambition’ and hogging food, ‘sating hunger’. True, Don Don has been compelled to make the name change after the US Army’s 250th birth anniversary — which coincidentally also happened to be his 79th birthday — military parade on June 14 looked like a school parade in comparison to China’s Victory Day parade on September 3. But still....

Stanley Kubrick, in his 1964 satirical film, Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb, had that compelling line to Top: ‘Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here! This is the War Room!’ Don Don has called out this universal hypocrisy. This, of course, won’t please the shallow deep state that thrives in careful synonymising where propaganda ministries are I&B ministries, and censor boards are central board of film certification. Well done, Agent Orange.

Use AI for efficiency, but recognise that culture-shaping narratives need human fault lines

It’s Our Algorithm & Blues



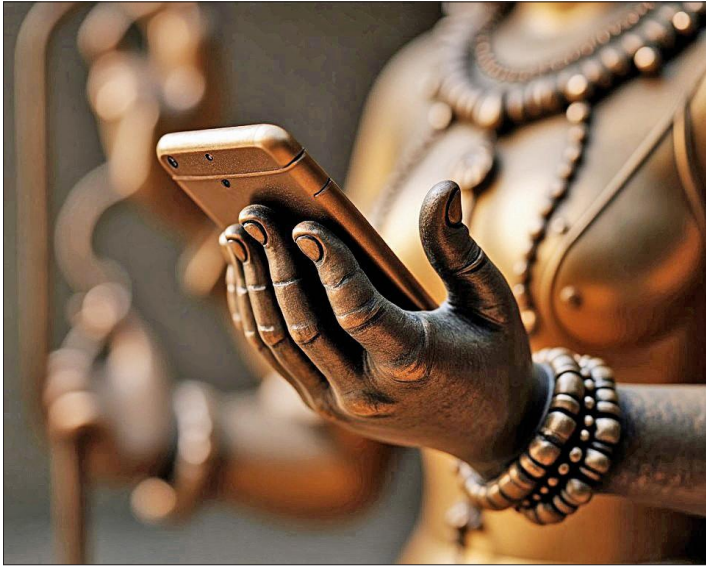
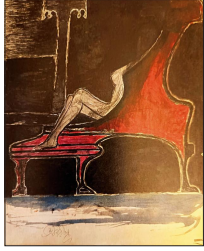
Prasoon Joshi

Creativity has always been about more than expression. It’s been about building identity and cultural capital. In the modern era, brands have expanded their role to become storytellers, carrying culture, values and meaning into consumers’ lives. Today, creativity faces a new lens: AI. Celebrated, doubted and endlessly debated, it stands both as a mirror and a disruptor. With AI amplifying both expression and influence, it is tempting to believe that meaning can be fully extracted from existing patterns. The word ‘AI’ itself is ironic. AI is built not on void but on human matter: our words, images, histories. Our data. Every sentence and image it renders is a recombination of what we’ve already lived. What feels transformative is the speed and polish of this recombination. But true equity needs more.

AI thrives in the known. It’s a master of manifesting the already expressed. From this, it can spin endless refinements. What marks human creativity is the irrational leap, the instinctive break of pattern.

Philip Larkin once said our best manuscripts are blank notebooks, because they hold infinite possibilities. AI fills them instantly. Humans, in turn, stare at blankness until, suddenly, a leap occurs. That leap is illogical, instinctive and disobedient. It is where imagination lives.

Ask AI for a poem on life’s journey, and it may reply: ‘The path is the destination/ Enjoy the journey, not just the end point.’ Polished, predictable. I may instead write:



It’s in thy hand, great Anarch!

‘Paths call me to travel,/ But when the destination lies within,/ Where is the journey?/ I want to pause./ And listen to my own sky.’ This is not syntax. It’s a voice shaped by my own experience, culture and inner seeking. ► **AI and avyakt** AI can polish the known. But it can’t reach into the ‘avyakt’ — the unexpressed, yet-unsaid. This is the instinct to wander where there are no paths, to hear what has not been heard. ‘Sabse sundar geet racha nahin gaya ab tak, sabse sundar muskaan khili nahin ab tak, sabse unchi udaan huvi nahin abhi tak.’ (The most beautiful song has yet to be written, the most luminous smile still to be smiled, the highest flight still to be taken.)

To build an enduring presence, one cannot merely optimise what is. One must articulate what people didn’t know they were waiting to hear; the latent, the still unspoken.

AI can predict, but it cannot rupture. Every act of genuine creativity — whether in art, design or communication — was once an irrational leap against the grain of pattern. That human leap is what brands must still embody.

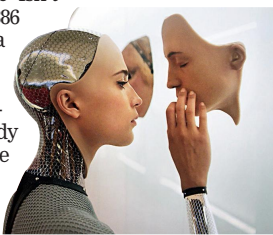
► **Ethics of persuasion** This power to anticipate and influence isn’t new. In Anton Chekhov’s 1886 short story, ‘A Misfortune’, a woman finds herself courted by her husband’s friend — not through open declarations but through the steady drip of suggestion, influence and covert narrative. She feels the pull, even recognises it. Yet, she remains suspended in uncertainty.

Chekhov does not resolve the story. Instead, he leaves us in that fragile moment where attraction and conscience collide. The point is not whether she yields or not, but how persuasion operates — indirectly, almost invisibly — until a boundary must be drawn.

That is where brand communication finds its parallel. Algorithms and data-driven marketing often persuade in similar ways, through subtle prompts and timely cues. Efficiency is remarkable. But so is the responsibility it places on us. For, if the line between influence and manipulation is crossed, the loss is not merely transactional, it’s

► **From precision to meaning** Moment marketing, predictive nudges and programmatic funnels are great precision instruments. Yet, each is, at its core, a way of meeting people in their most unguarded states: the tired, grieving, hopeful. These drip-feed signals, until behaviour bends. To exploit such moments is easy; to dignify them with meaning requires restraint. Through intent and practice, we need to balance the use of AI in creative endeavours, so that authenticity of human expression and diverse cultural narratives is not diluted.

The enduring brand isn’t the one that converts behaviour; but the one that earns trust in a way that honours the audience’s humanity. This trust is what pays off, be it brand stickiness, resilience in downturns, premiums or equity. ► **Trust as compass** Manipulation is simple. Trust is rare. In business, trust is the most compounding asset in the brand balance sheet. Yes, trust can be treated as a KPI. For campaigns built on targeting or algorithmic nudges, they may deliver quarterly spikes. But they rarely create lasting equity.



For campaigns built on targeting or algorithmic nudges, they may deliver quarterly spikes. But they rarely create lasting equity

Cultural trust — earned when a brand connects meaningfully with values, beliefs and aspirations of its audience, and not just for profit alone — is the true measure of enduring brand-building.

A brand without trust is like noise with a budget. As data races ahead, creativity must still dare to fall out of line to create new movements, markets and meaning.

The writer is CEO,

McCann Worldgroup India.

This is an edited version of an article first published in Navbharat Times on Aug 11

Give BARC More Bite for Viewers



Divya Karani

India’s M&E sector continues to morph along at breakneck speed, with delivery diverging and consumption converging simultaneously. Today, news is delivered continuously and concurrently through print, online platforms, social media, TV, podcasts and events. Entertainment flows through a similarly vast spectrum, from traditional TV to streaming services, social media, video games, and every other screen in our hands and homes.

Simultaneously, we’re also witnessing a convergence in media consumption, where people no longer differentiate between formats or delivery modes. From bingeing on a series to scrolling reels or joining interactive platforms, they are engaging, reacting, participating and even co-creating content in real time. This seamless, personalised media journey is tracked by marketers deploying \$12 bn in ad spend, all in pursuit of meaningful connections.

It’s in this complex context that I&B ministry has decided to revisit its policy on TV rating agencies, to encourage our measurement system to deliver an accurate and unified assessment of India’s dynamic content consumption.

India’s prevailing measurement agency, Broadcast Audience Research Council (Barc), functions under the combined stewardship of industry stakeholder bodies: Indian Broadcasting & Digital Foundation (IBDF), Indian Society of Advertisers (ISA), and Advertising Agencies Association of India (AAAI).

For over a decade, Barc has been the sole provider of the metric for ‘what India watches’. Modelled on global best practices like Britain’s Barb Audiences and France’s Médiamétrie, but tailored to the unique complexity of India’s media market. Barc has also joined hands with international peers to form Global Alliance for the Measurement of Media Audiences (GAMMA), working to establish unified standards and a single, credible currency for audience measurement across countries.

This achievement hasn’t come easy. Barc has navigated challenges, setting industry benchmarks and reaching key milestones. Its steps taken to capture connected TV (CTV) viewership



Come out and play

by installing panels in premium households is one of the many ways in which the ratings body has attempted to enhance its measurement framework with advanced tech.

But far more needs to be done to capture India’s diverse and dynamic consumption. We should heed I&B ministry’s directive as a clarion call to arm ourselves and reimagine and upgrade our systems once again to address India’s morphing media consumption.

It demands building a measurement system that provides a unified, device- and platform-agnostic metric across media. Of course, it must be designed for India’s far more complex media market due to our unique combination of demographic, linguistic, technological and behavioural diversity. Delivering on this mandate requires three key pillars:

- **Singularity of vision** Delivering a trusted, holistic metric across media types.
- **Design thinking** Harnessing tech to meet complex, evolving market needs.
- **Shared resources** This calls for leveraging Barc’s rich experience, drawing on the collective wisdom of all stakeholders, and making the investments needed to scale this challenge.

In this context, I&B ministry’s proposal to allow multiple rating agencies and dilute governance norms risks destabilising the industry at a time when regulatory stability and a unified, trusted measurement currency are crucial. History reminds us of the confusion caused by multiple competing currencies — and the mistrust that emerges when media or agency stakeholders hold cross-ownership in the measurement provider.

Instead of disruption, we should build on Barc’s proven experience across key pillars and urge stakeholders to come together in response to GoI’s underlying call to action. In doing so, India can shape a world-class audience measurement framework, one that not only serves our diverse market but also sets a benchmark for the world to follow.

The writer is former CEO, Media, South Asia, Dentisu

Look Before You Make That CEO Leap



M Muneer & Ralph Ward

Appointing a CEO is the board’s most consequential act. It’s not just a fiduciary duty but an act of stewardship that shapes the future. History shows how cursory vetting can turn this solemn task into a boardroom tragedy.

Earlier this week, Nestlé sacked its CEO Laurent Freix after he failed to disclose an affair with a subordinate. More in the public spotlight, Astronumer CEO Andy Byron was forced to resign after being caught embracing a co-worker on ‘kiss cam’ in a Coldplay concert in July. Erstwhile Kohl’s CEO Ashley Buchanan was removed in April four months into his job after news of clandestine dealings favouring a vendor linked to a former romantic partner emerged. Complicity had prevented the board from probing interpersonal undercurrents and latent loyalties that would later metastasise into scandal.

In this context, Sebi’s recent relaxation of related-party transaction rules is a governance gamble that India Inc can ill afford. It could be harmful to minority shareholders. This is especially so when dereliction is arguably more endemic in India — given a complex cocktail of dynastic ownership,

informal governance norms and opacity in succession planning.

A 2018 study by BAF Consultants noted that 97% of Indian family-run businesses lack formal succession charters or governance frameworks. The result? Boardrooms mutate into battlegrounds at the first hint of a leadership vacuum. Sona Comstar’s unravelling is telling. Sunjay Kapur’s death sparked a bitter contest between his widow Priya Sachdev and mother for control. With no governance mechanism, the board floundered, hurting continuity and confidence.

Five fallacies plague Indian boards in CEO selection:

- **Collective memory** Boards must not fail to scour digital footprints if they don’t want to relinquish control of the narrative to journalists, whistleblowers and activist shareholders. It’s better to dig up any dirt first.
- **Inflated credentials** Remember the incident of a former NSE official who was elevated to a quasi-CEO, by-



Whaddya mean you have to vet me?

passing protocol? His credentials were never scrutinised. The result: a regulatory firestorm that consumed the premier stock exchange and laid bare the fragility of its internal governance.

- **Ambiguities go unscrutinised** Not all red flags are sinister. Some are just misunderstandings. An otherwise-perfect CEO candidate was red-flagged for being linked to a criminal case after his identity was misused by criminals. Boards risk losing good candidates by discarding context. India’s creaky public records systems and erratic law enforcement documentation can be problematic for false positives and negatives.
- **Myth of good faith** Family business boards get into the habit of equating familiarity with integrity. This false premise blinds such boards and causes them to falter. In countries like India, where goodwill queries are eclipsed by social camaraderie or caste loyalties, this complacency is pernicious.
- **Hidden deals, open fault lines** Cloaked conflicts of interest, such as layers of opaque holding structures and interlocking directorates, are commonplace in India. Hardly any checks exist on hidden non-competes, ongoing supplier affiliations or undeclared related-party interests. The Chanda Kochhar issue at ICICI Bank is still fresh. The board had neglected to dissect the web of external affiliations.

India Inc’s board blunders form an expanding compendium. Recall the corruption scandal at NSE and the subsequent resignation of MD Ravi Narain. Structural infirmities in succession planning were evident. His successor Chitra Ramkrishna’s decisions, inclu-

ding consulting a mysterious ‘Himalayan yogi’, drew regulatory censure. Indian boards must abandon the myth that CEO succession is just a formality or a ceremonial baton transfer. They must embrace a gold standard on this:

- **Make external vetting mandatory** Hire independent lawyers, risk consultants and executive search firms to eschew the echo chamber of false beliefs.
- **Exercise digital dive** What stops the board from assessing image risk across social media, litigation history and media archives?

► **Deconstruct networks** This is needed to unearth concealed conflicts, commercial interests or family ties that might impact objectivity.

- **Vet credentials** Use third-party firms to double-check educational qualifications and regulatory certifications.
- **Use scenario planning** Involve stakeholder relations and legal affairs to anticipate and manage any post-appointment turbulence.

CEO selection need not be a leap of faith but an alignment check of character, capability, culture and values. The CEO is the story in motion. Miscalculate them, and you don’t just rewrite the script, you burn the plot.

It isn’t just a gap in India Inc, but a governance grenade. As Jon Lenzen observed, ‘Don’t let your next CEO be your next crisis.’ In loosening its grip, Sebi may have just greased the wheels of the next scandal.

Muneer is co-founder, Medici Institute for Innovation, and Ward is a global board adviser



THE SPEAKING TREE

Symbolism Of Visarjan

BRAHMA KUMARI CHAKRADHARI

The visarjan ceremony of Vinayak’s murtis signifies the ending of humanity’s attachment to all ephemeral or transient things and beings — a reason for human miseries, sorrows and sufferings.

Vinayak murtis metaphorically convey overcoming obstacles to enjoy true peace, progress, happiness and success. For instance, Ganesh’s large forehead symbolises wisdom and broad-mindedness. His big sieve-shaped ears should entice us to receive and retain only relevant information. The deity’s eyes are symbolic of human far-sightedness. His small mouth also serves as a reminder to talk less. Ganesh’s large stomach teaches us to develop inner powers to accommodate and assimilate others’ weaknesses.

One of his hands holds an axe, an indication to curtail our negative habits, while a rope in the other hand asks us to stay tied to a pure lifestyle. The lotus flower in the third implores us to live like a lotus, pure and unaffected. His fourth hand in the blessing posture prompts us to offer blessings of well-being to others.

Gajanan’s trunk enlightens us to be both soft and strong emotionally, to balance love and law. His single tusk motivates us to develop single-minded devotion to one incorporeal Supreme Soul Shiv and His one world family of human souls, for fostering universal peace, unity, fraternity and equanimity amidst dualities of life.



Tax Right Off The Bat

Post-GST announcement, a tech startup founder (aren’t they all?) tried to write off his entire life as a business expense. ► ‘My dog?’ Emotional support for investor meetings.’ ► ‘My Amazon Prime, JioTV and Netflix subscription? Market research on consumer behaviour.’ ► ‘My vacation to Bali? A spiritual offsite.’ The tax officer raised an eyebrow and asked, ‘And the ₹2 lakh spent on crystals?’ Founder: They align our fiscal chakras. The officer paused, then nodded solemnly and said, ‘I see. You’re in the super wellness-tech-finance-spirituality sector. That’s in the 40%’



GST bracket now, with a surcharge for cosmic ambiguity.’ To which the founder threatened to emigrate to the US, and the tax officer wished him the best. Meanwhile, a Trump regime immigration officer awaits in some US airport.


Existential Crisis

A philosopher walks into the I-T department to file his returns. The auditor asks, ‘Occupation?’ Philosopher: I contemplate existence. Auditor: So, unemployed? Philosopher: No. I generate intellectual capital. Auditor: Is that taxable? Philosopher: Only if enlightenment counts as income. The auditor, unfazed, begins calculating depreciation on the philosopher’s soul, deducts karma as a liability and taxes his metaphysical assets. The philosopher leaves enlightened, broke, and owing ₹12,000 in back taxes for ‘excessive introspection’.

Chat Room

Net-Net, Right Foot Forward

Apoptosis ‘40%, 28%, 18%, 12%, 5%, 0%...’ by Anil Padmanabhan (Sep 5), it may be useful to recall the hurdles in its journey of 8 years to appreciate whether the restructured GST is a cup half-full. The BJP govt dared to introduce it, but it did so in a hurry and miscalculated the extent of choke points. As such, the measure played havoc with business and consumers. As the demand for change grew, the hurdle was to win the acceptance of all states, including those ruled by the Opposition. The change, and to make it palatable, was bound to take time. GST 2.0 may, therefore, look like a suboptimal outcome. YG Chouksey Pune



A thought for today

*I know imitation is the highest form of flattery,
but stealing one's identity is totally different*

-ANNALYNNE MCCORD

Pawar Moves

Politicians will never give up interfering in police affairs

Maharashtra deputy CM Ajit Pawar has clarified that his diktat to an IPS officer to stop work, reinforced with the threat of “action”, was not intended as interference. Seriously? Moving on from that ‘clarification’, netas intimidating police is an all-party, all-states thing. Last month, an Andhra minister’s brother was in the news for slapping a cop who stopped him from entering a restricted area in a temple. In April, Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah made a slap gesture at a police officer during a rally. Last year, a Congress legislator slapped a woman constable in Shimla, but had the rare experience of being paid back in kind.

The point, briefly, is that police that works under the executive’s thumb, just as it did during the Raj, cannot do its democratic duty. Kerala Police Reorganisation Committee stressed on this in 1959: “result of partisan interference is often reflected in lawless enforcement of laws, inferior service and in general decline of police prestige”. Internal analyses in Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Bengal, Delhi, etc, have come to the same conclusion over the years. A home ministry study in 1978 found: “People consider political interference with police as a greater evil than corruption.”

Yet, political interference with, and intimidation of, police have continued unabated. That’s because police represents corporeal power – the real deal, without which even courts are powerless. US president Andrew Jackson infamously defied his supreme court by saying, “(chief justice) John Marshall has made his decision, now let him enforce it.” The power to promote pliant officers, and transfer or suspend defiant ones, gives politicians the upper hand over police. While it is a democratic imperative, the want of safeguards to prevent abuse is the real problem. Political will to fix this is, unsurprisingly, lacking.

Labubus Vs Lafufus

Wow! Chinese govt is cracking down on a China-made fake

Pass the popcorn. There’s fun ahead as China meets China in the Labubu ‘collectible toy’ vs its knockoff Lafufu dolls clash. It’s The Original vs The Fake – both, quintessentially, at the core of Chinese manufacturing. For the uninitiated, classic marketing tactics transformed Labubu, a small vinyl doll, into a collectible. Chinese toymaker Pop Mart made its very purchase an experience. Buyers wouldn’t know what colour doll they’d get in the ‘blind box’. Limited editions and quirky versions hooked collectors. Manufactured scarcity grabbed global attention, drew in celebrities & fans. Demand and price soared – creating a secondary market of sales and auctions where an original Labubu could sell for over \$10k. People insure Labubus, crowdfund to buy a doll.

Where there’s a luxury brand, can a Chinese fake be far behind? Mass China obliged, markets were flooded with Lafufus – the legitimate ‘duplicate’ at a tenth of the original’s price. People loved it. Warnings have been sounded over choking hazards & harmful chemicals in Lafufus. As masters of luxury knockoffs – ‘genuine fakes’ – Lafufus had to happen. It was organic and at scale, second nature to the manufacturing beast. But if Labubu’s wild global acceptance has China strutting over it as an “original cultural export”, authorities are also going tut-tut over “rampant proliferation of fakes and copycats”. The irony writes itself. The crackdown on mass Lafufus in China to protect Labubu’s cult status is no child’s play. But it is game on.

Economics Ideas That Taste Really Good

Learning how the world works is like learning to cook

Per economist **Ha-Joon Chang**, America’s manufacturing decline is self-inflicted – it came via “empowering a capitalist class that prefers outsourcing and offshoring to investing productively.” Trump won’t succeed, though. As Ha-Joon says, Trump has no policy to revive manufacturing. It’s not easy to re-industrialise, but some countries have done it successfully using policy to increase the share of manufacturing in GDP.

Months before Trump’s second term was shaping into a distinct reality, Ha-Joon went farm to plate, sea to platter, to bring home these very concepts in **Edible Economics – The World in 17 Dishes/ A Hungry Economist Explains The World**. He talks economics via lineage, spread, geography, biases and prejudices around food.

De-industrialisation happens for two reasons. First, when improved productivity makes manufacturing cheaper, increases output but claims a smaller share of GDP. That’s positive de-industrialisation, like in Finland and Sweden. Second, what happened in Britain and US: a decline from lack of investment, inability to face competition etc. Can countries re-industrialise? Yes – Singapore has. Switzerland is the most industrialised nation in terms of manufacturing output per person. But US may be too far gone, said Ha-Joon in the interview, where manufacturing has slid from 60% of global output in 1950s to 16% in 2000s.

The book peels, fries, stews, roasts food & economic theories – countering popular perception: prawns and shrimps aren’t the same. Prawns have claws on three pairs of their legs, shrimps on two pairs. They’re distant cousins of insects. Prawns and shrimps are global favourites yet it’s been difficult to popularise insects as food. Starting with silkworm pupa as a once-popular Korean snack, Ha-Joon goes to Japan’s transformation from world’s top silk producer post-WWII to taking on US and Europe in steel,

shipbuilding, all advanced industries. Most rich countries, especially US and Britain, were highly protectionist in early stages of economic development, protecting immature producers till they could compete with labour markets’ adults’. Free trade came only after achieving industrial supremacy. But protection needs investment, upskilling and research. Success isn’t a given – excessive protection makes producers complacent. There’s no incentive to improve productivity.

Linking ‘noodle-obsessed’ Italy and South Korea via Hyundai’s Pony, the book shows how the ‘individualist’ vision of entrepreneurship and corporate success is but the ‘central myth’ in free-market economics. Modern corporate success – large-scale with complex tech and global markets – entails entrepreneurship as a collective task involving govt, policy-makers, even consumers.

Ha-Joon posits that while Bismarck’s known for development of German heavy industry, his bigger legacy was establishing the welfare state. Bismarck initiated welfare schemes that these days would be “considered ‘socialist’ in order to keep socialism at bay.” The German chancellor ‘married iron with rye’ – he ditched free trade supporting partners, got a politically powerful rye-producing party to accept tariff protection for heavy industry, and created a protectionist power bloc. And he was aware that “unless workers were protected against major shocks of life (industrial accidents, illnesses, old age, unemployment etc), they’d be attracted to socialism.” That’s common sense, right?

Much of economics is, writes Ha-Joon, and should be viewed in the same way the best cooks view food – source per budget, check provenance of ingredients, mix & match to come up with new ideas, drawing from various theories. “You don’t need other people to tell you how to learn, critically reflect upon, and use economics.”

That tastes good.

What Flooded Gurgaon Tells Us

India needs to build dozens of world-class cities or face utter urban nightmare. Investments, jobs and opportunities depend on this

Chetan Bhagat



Let’s face it. Gurugram – the city formerly (and still popularly) known as Gurgaon – should not exist in the form we see today. Gurgaon rose and thrived only because New Delhi failed spectacularly in its real estate policy. Outside of communist countries, New Delhi is perhaps the only major city in the world that allowed virtually no organised private real estate development for decades. Most of the land and housing was handled by Delhi Development Authority (DDA), which built flats, shopping centres, and commercial complexes.

These DDA projects were neither adequate in scale nor in quality to meet the demand of a liberalised, IT-driven India in the 1990s and 2000s. With an outdated land and real estate policy (still badly in need of reform), Delhi became unviable for anyone looking for Grade-A offices or better-planned, higher-quality housing. This vacuum led to the rise of Noida in UP and Gurgaon in Haryana – both hugging Delhi’s borders and feeding off its unmet needs.

Both Noida and Gurgaon took off, but Gurgaon surged ahead. Much of the credit goes to developer DLF, whose vision and planning were rarely seen in India. Gurgaon’s developments were Grade-A – something a DDA-flat-filled Delhi had never seen. While Delhi’s affluent could only hope for a “kothi” (small bungalow), Gurgaon offered golf courses, swimming pools, high-speed lifts, and central air-conditioning.

Initially, people moved to Gurgaon but commuted to Delhi for work. Then came the real game-changer: Grade-A office spaces – the kind north India, perhaps even all of India, had never seen. Unlike Mumbai, Delhi lacked anything like Nariman Point, Connaught Place, with its few outdated office blocks, was all Delhi had. Gurgaon, on the other hand, boasted gleaming offices, malls, and restaurants. This uniqueness drew in MNCs, startups, call centres, media houses, and a buzzing hive of commercial activity. Jobs and wealth followed, and demand exploded. Soon, Delhi residents were commuting to Gurgaon instead.

This was before the Delhi-Gurgaon highway even existed. Daily traffic jams were the norm. When the highway finally opened, Gurgaon’s growth was so

explosive that the highway itself is now perpetually choked. And if trains – like it does every monsoon – chaos reigns. Just last week, media and social media were flooded with drone footage of gridlocks stretching for miles. Some commuters reported being stranded for six hours. Roads were submerged, even in neighbourhoods with multi-million-dollar apartments housing senior management and business leaders. The city that symbolised India’s wealth creation suddenly looked no better than a third-world mess.

Gurgaon’s problem isn’t that it’s bad – it’s that it’s too good by Indian standards. India is so starved of



well-planned cities with decent housing, offices, jobs, and entertainment that when one Gurgaon emerges, the whole country piles onto it. It is one of perhaps only four or five cities in India where jobs paying more than ₹2L a month are plentiful. Step outside these five metros and incomes drop sharply – so do Grade-A buildings. Add to this the small-town suffocation that drives young people to bigger cities, and you have an irresistible pull towards Gurgaon.

Had Delhi formulated a sensible real estate policy in the 1990s, Gurgaon may never have happened. Had India planned its cities properly – sticking to master plans, incentivising corporations to move beyond Gurgaon, Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Chennai – these metros would not now be bursting at the seams.

Consider this: How many of India’s top 100 companies by market value have headquarters outside these five cities? Now compare that to US where corporate headquarters are spread across dozens of cities.

The long-term solution is clear: India needs many more Grade-A cities. If we have five such cities today, we need 50. Only then will Grade-A talent and Grade-A companies spread out instead of suffocating in a handful of metros.

But what about Gurgaon right now? Should we just accept the mess? Or should something urgent be done? Given Gurgaon’s importance to India’s economy, its global recognition, and its wealth-creation potential, the city needs rescuing.

The problem is that Gurgaon just happened to spring up in Haryana. Its needs are radically different from the rest of the state, which is mostly agrarian. Yet Gurgaon’s vote share is too small to influence state politics. Naturally, Haryana govt prefers to prioritise spending elsewhere, like on farmers. Fixing Gurgaon requires massive, expensive infra projects – something the state has little incentive to bankroll. That’s why drastic, unconventional solutions are required:

Merge Gurgaon into Delhi | If Delhi can somehow absorb Gurgaon – whether through a constitutional provision or emergency measure – things would improve. Of course, Delhi’s archaic land policies can’t apply here, but Gurgaon in Delhi makes far more sense than Gurgaon in Haryana.

Make Gurgaon a UT | The city generates tens of billions in economic value, with potential for much more. As a UT, Gurgaon could plan and govern itself, free from Haryana’s competing priorities.

Pass a Strategic Cities Act | Gurgaon’s problems are similar to Bangalore’s, where state govt lacks incentive to fix urban issues. Some cities are of strategic national importance and cannot be left to collapse. GOI could carve out special provisions, budgets, and policymaking powers for such cities.

Ghastly visuals from Gurgaon last week were not an aberration – they are India’s urban future if we don’t act. The city’s decline is both a national crisis and an international embarrassment. India must do two things urgently: create dozens more world-class cities, and rescue Gurgaon now through bold, unconventional measures.

ASL, LT/ST, NSA,Breadcrumbing, Situationship...

Internet birthed a vocabulary of amorous interactions, changing as new platforms popped up. But in this forest of initials & neologisms, words lost force or romance became a matter of words

Paromita Vohra



One of the great features of contemporary love is the ever-increasing vocabulary to describe amorous interactions. To track the development of this dating dictionary is to track the politics of romance in modern life – and the digital history of intimacy.

At first there was a gleeful acronym soup birthed in chatrooms. ASL – Age Sex Location – was the familiar overture here. A space of anonymity, the chatroom revelled in uncategorised encounters. It was understood that anonymity brought a certain sexual or emotional freedom. ASL established the bare conventions of match-fixing and identity and the rest of the interaction would determine if the relationship would transfer to being IRL – In Real Life.

The internet transformed the idea of searching for romance into a concrete and intentional activity, a kind of virtual cruising for all orientations, outside the confines of marriage or monogamy.

Acronyms emerged for the nature of search. LT and ST, looking for long-term or short-term relationship, because marriage was still seen as inevitable and sometimes separate from other diversion. ONS, One Night Stand, soon developed into NSA, No Strings Attached, a series of one-night stands if you will, where sex was physical and separate from any other interaction. FWB, Friends With Benefits, shrugged at that boundary, signifying a friendly sexual relationship, which included a little hanging out, but no romantic expectations.

Because it’s India there was also, crucially, GOP, Got Own Place? And eventually there was FBO, Facebook Official (now Insta Official), when you changed your relationship status from It’s Complicated to In a Relationship.

These frolicsome first-generation dating terms signalled a change in mainstream romantic culture, where non-marital sex need not be furtive. The digital had shuffled our mores. Dating was an all-you-can-eat buffet.

A new slang followed with the onset of dating apps in the early 2010s. There was Breadcrumbing, what would be called dana dena in Bambaiya, to throw romantic

crumbs your way and keep you hopeful, but never commit. Benching kept you on hold while dating others. An ex suddenly popping up was Paperclipping, named for the paperclip assistant on Microsoft Word. To be Friendzoned was the new version of the desi tradition of tying rakhi to a boy in school, thereby making him your Bhaifriend. Seenozoned appeared, to have your messages left on read, but not responded to.

It was a rom-com lexicon of sorts, but worldly, for it offered an insight into romantic behaviour that could only come from experience. The decade that followed, which has been dominated by social media and ruptured by a pandemic, has generated a less sunny vocabulary. It has two reigning words.

● Situationship – a relationship eternally open and undefined.

● Ghosting – a breakup also undefined, marked by a sudden ending of all communication as if through death (hence, to become a ghost).

But there are terms for every letter of the alphabet. Cushioning, to have a backup flirtation to cushion your hurt, in case a current relationship ends. Pocketing, keeping a relationship secret. Catch and Release, flirting till you’re hooked, then acting like nothing happened. Future Faking, speaking of things you will do together in the future, without actually committing to one. Cloaking, make a plan to meet, not show up, block the person on all channels.

Ghostlighting, a portmanteau of Ghosting and Gaslighting, to ghost someone, then reappear and act like you never did so, or worse, blame them. The only cheerful term in this galaxy is Zootie Call, a booty call on Zoom. It’s

a vocabulary rife with anxiety and suspicion.

We can ask, is any of this behavior actually new? Haven’t there always been, well, jerks, especially in romance? Perhaps it’s defining romance as a breaking of convention that does it a disservice. It becomes all about not being like the past but doesn’t necessarily dream up new terms of intimacy and affection or mutual pleasure. Casual relationships are defined by casual treatment of each other.

These words also reveal that where digital space was once seen as open-ness and possibility, it is now often a world of foreclosure, a kind of isolation, where distance

not only facilitates but also encourages poor behaviour; a place where intimacy must be marked with red flags and green flags and the appetite for

adventure becomes faint.

Poems, songs, movies, romance novels were previously our sources of romantic discussion. They were improbable and wild but they allowed for dreaming and privacy, even catharsis. There may have been disappointment in those narratives, but there was also excitement and anticipation. We knew both existed, even co-existed, and there was room for that best of wildcards – interpretation.

Now we learn so much about romance from the words on social media. This obsessive taxonomy expresses intimacy as an endless scroll with no foreseeable destination, no place of pause and attention. Words can be empowering, when they describe experience, but as they come to define it, they become a kind of proscription. And well, what’s love, if it’s only words?

The writer is founder, Agents of Ishq

Calvin & Hobbes



Onam, Vamana, And Divine Footsteps Of Grace

Shashank R Joshi and Shambo Samrat Samajdar

During Onam, homes are decorated with pookalam flower carpets, families gather over feasts, and joy fills the air. Yet beyond the outward celebration lies a spiritual story that continues to echo through centuries – the story of Mahabali and the Vamana avatar of Vishnu.

This is not just a tale of gods and kings. It is a reminder for every seeker who wonders why suffering persists, why fortune fades, and why the divine often seems silent in the face of human sorrow. Mahabali, the great Asur king, was known for his generosity, justice, and devotion. His reign was so prosperous that it rivalled heaven. Yet, hidden beneath that grandeur was the subtle seed of pride. The devas, feeling threatened, turned to Vishnu for balance. Vishnu

visited not in splendour, but as Vaman, a humble brahmachari dwarf. With a gentle request, He asked the mighty king for just three paces of land. Amused by the simplicity, Bali agreed. But in an instant, the dwarf grew into Trivikrama, the cosmic form of Vishnu. With one stride He spanned the heavens, with the second He covered the earth. For the third, Bali offered his own head.

At that moment, the proud king became the humble devotee. By surrendering all, Bali found something eternal – union with the Lord.

Every human heart carries the same question Bali faced: Why do we suffer even when we live righteously? Why does the divine not always intervene to shield us from loss? We pray, chant, surrender, and still pain pierces our lives – through illness, separation, or the cruel march of time.

At such moments, faith wavers. We feel abandoned, as though truth drowns in an ocean of falsehood, and injustice dances in victory.

Yet God’s silence is not absence. His grace often works through what seems like loss, shaping us for something higher.

When Vishnu placed His foot on Bali’s head, it was not an act of punishment but of liberation. The king lost his throne yet gained what no wealth can buy – freedom from ego and closeness to the Divine. This is the hidden message of Onam: suffering is not meaningless; it is the chiselling of the soul.

Loss may be the opening of a greater gift. In surrender, man becomes more than man – he becomes one with Narayan.

The tale also reminds us that fortune is never fixed. Even Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, is depicted as moving from

place to place, sometimes even in disguise as a beggar. Worldly prosperity is transient, but divine grace is constant. What appears to be a decline may be a doorway to inner abundance.

Onam is not only about the harvest of fields but also about the harvest of the heart. It teaches us: Ego builds empires, but surrender enables union till eternity; suffering is not abandonment, but an invitation to union; the Lord often arrives quietly – in humble forms, in moments of loss, in whispers of the heart.

When we let go of bargaining with the Divine and learn to offer our lives without expectation, His presence transforms pain into prayer. Onam’s true celebration is not in feasts or flowers, but in the inner step of surrender. The same step Bali took when he bowed his head, the step we are invited to take – away from ego, into grace. In that step, boundaries of sorrow dissolve.

Sacred space



Leaders possess numerous powers, but this should not make them adamant and inflexible. They should have the humility to listen to and accept other opinions whenever appropriate. ‘Vinayaka’ also indicates one who has vinaya – humility.

Swami Swaroopananda

DECCAN Chronicle

6 SEPTEMBER 2025

Peace hopes in Manipur as Kuki-Zo, Centre reach deal

The merest signs of peace have been spotted in the Centre coaxing two Kuki-Zo insurgent groups — Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF) — to sign a tripartite agreement with the Manipur government and the Centre. The impending visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the area, beginning with Mizoram, and his plans to hold a couple of public meetings in the strife-torn state of Manipur might have pushed New Delhi and Imphal into belated action to bring people roiled by ethnic violence to clear the path to peace.

If the PM's first visit to Manipur since violence broke out in May 2023 is to bear fruit, he may have to admit that he appeared to look at it as a local problem that would sort itself out with time. His presence, after too long a hiatus for the leader of the nation, will be more than symbolic to a people who have been involved in senseless violence even if there were triggers like discriminatory treatment that saw the bigger group of people in Meiteis being favoured over the Kuki-Zo tribals.

What has been promised to make the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the Kuki-Zo possible must have been significant because they have agreed to open the national highway for free movement of people, especially the Meiteis, and goods thus breaking a virtual partition of the state with buffer zones run by the security agencies to bring down the extensive killings that saw the rest of India weary of ever being able to see peace reigning again in Manipur.

The response to the pact has not been universally popular in the state with the Meiteis said to be sceptical. Pacts had been signed before, the first as early as 2008 and which was renewed annually. But then they are the majority group living in the valley of the capital and who were even promised SC-ST quotas in a court ruling that was one of the first triggers of an ugly conflict that saw a series of inhuman events in Manipur as the groups clashed much like in a war of guns and arson.

Going forward, the Centre would have to admit that enormous political and security mistakes were committed, especially in relying on a divisive chief minister in N. Biren Singh who thought nothing of being seen as biased in favour of the Meiteis in everything he did and who annulled the pact that had run for 15 years. By the time his resignation came about in February and Central rule was brought in, matters had worsened long after weapons from the armoury were freely captured by the militants.

A negotiated solution to bring lasting stability to Manipur is one of the stated intentions of the new pact. The Centre must approach negotiations with a fresh outlook that allows none of the shenanigans of the partisan administration that had ruined the scene and led to large scale displacement of the people. In return, the insurgents must also stick to the pact, abjure violence, return government arms and enable peace to return, so normal life becomes possible for all.

For too long the Manipur situation festered despite the Union home ministry's efforts, but then it has not been long since the ruling BJP abandoned Biren Singh in the hunt for a more acceptable face. The state and its people are in no condition to allow hostilities to resume and ruin the life for all communities. They must seize this opportunity to enjoy normalcy.

Farewell Armani: End of an era

The death of fashion czar Giorgio Armani marks the end of a chapter in understated fashion, defined by restraint, refinement and resolute independence. He rediscovered fashion unfettered by legacy and created the modern minimalist style that wooed CEOs to Hollywood celebrities.

Armani, a window dresser for the Milanese department store La Rinascente with an eye for style, founded his own company in 1975. In the late 1970s, he introduced an unlined jacket and soft tailoring that moved away from ostentation and toward effortless grace — an aesthetic that thrust Italian ready-to-wear into global prominence.

By the 1980s, he reintroduced new suits for men by removing shoulder pads and canvas linings. The new design, which revealed the contours of the body inside, soon became a fashion statement for elites. The combination of grey and beige became his signature and redefined the glamour of the star. The easy and almost louche sensuality of his suits also found favour among his female clientele.

By 1990, the camera-shy man, who would have become a movie director, if not a fashion stylist, became an undeclared czar of the fashion world. What set him apart was not just his creative brilliance but his unwavering independence and his desire to have control over everything that he created.

He resisted offers from fashion conglomerates and retained full ownership of the empire he built, which includes clothing lines, fragrances, homes, restaurants, and hotels, among others. When he missed his couture show in July this year — the only one that he ever missed — because of his health issues, the Italian fashion guru declared through an email that everything that was at the show was overseen and approved by him.

Armani's rise as a global brand is a testament that one man's quiet conviction can reshape how the world dresses, moves and remembers style. In the future, the world may shift to some other style, which could be different from his, but he will be remembered as the person whose resolute independence gave freedom for upcoming fashion designers to reinvent.

Subhani



Clear message to Jarange: Don't mess with Mumbai



Shobhaa's Take

Now that the Marathas have quietly left the metropolis after what was disingenuously claimed as a "victory" by their leader, one thing became clear to Mumbai: No matter who, no matter what, Mumbai comes first. What Manoj Jarange attempted — and failed at — was to bring the city to its knees and accede to his demands. The thing about the average and exceedingly hard-working Mumbaier is that he/she does not care what anybody's agenda/demands are. Fight for them constitutionally, not at the cost of other people's rights. We want to get on with the business of life. To survive, and with any luck thrive, in India's biggest and busiest city.

Till Jarange pitched his tent, announced a hunger-strike while his loyal army took over tracts of South Mumbai, paralysing daily life, not many people had heard of the 43-year-old school dropout, the Maratha activist from Beed. Not many people knew or cared about his chequered political history either. But they sure as hell objected to their city being converted into the largest public latrine in the country, with thousands of Jarange supporters bathing and defecating brazenly at historic landmarks, often barring citizens from exiting or accessing their homes and workplaces.

The mayhem, obstruction and destruction caused by drunken youth attempting to enter private clubs, hotels and stores has been widely documented and commented on. What Mumbaiers are irate about is not just the major disruption caused to commuters, senior citizens, children, shop owners and daily wage labourers, but the deliberate apathy of the administration. It's signifi-

cant that the delayed stop-gap solution to a potentially incendiary situation finally came from the courts! Imagine — the situation in South Mumbai was so bad that an exasperated high court judge finally reprimanded Jarange when he was forced to walk to the court, while the Marathas danced in the streets. "The HC was virtually under siege", said the judge, as the entry gates for judges and lawyers were blocked.

The absence of the political leadership during the crisis was alarming — whether by design or default — who's to ask? But questions will be asked and answers demanded. Which Nero fiddled while Mumbai sank and stank? Who had deliberately dawdled and why? The provocations were escalating as gleeful volunteers took over Marine Drive and used expensive bottled water to bathe and wash clothes. Azad Maidan was turned into a kho kho/kabaddi/wrestling arena, with thousands of spectators cheering half-naked men clad in underwear during raucous matches. Meanwhile, Mumbai's beleaguered police and security forces, already on high alert, were deployed to protect one man: Amit Shah. India's home minister was visiting Mumbai's most loved deity — the majestic Lalbagh Chha Raja. Clogged roads were shut to the public and *darshan* denied to devotees, who had camped out for days in the rain to be allowed inside the pandal.

Will he or won't he, wondered political watchers as Jarange's supporters waited in vain for a visit from Number 2. Sensibly, Amit Shah left the city, ignoring Jarange. Maharashtra's chief minister Devendra Fadnavis, who'd accompanied Amit Shah to the pandal, also sat tight while the city was falling apart. Po-

Uddhav Thackeray said: 'Marathas are not terrorists.' Hello! Nobody had called them that. So, why use such a word? Was it to add more fuel to the fire and provoke opponents?

werful and prominent Marathas in the Fadnavis team (Ashok Chavan, Ashish Shelar, Narayan Rane, Chandrakant Patil) were nowhere on the scene. Was it to downsize the importance of Jarange or to further embarrass a certain someone? For four days straight, Jarange held sway, as 22 million Mumbaiers fumed but could do nothing. This is unprecedented. Mumbai has seen countless protests over decades. But none as brazen or anarchic.

It's a bit late in the day to talk about an intel deficit and point out that not enough information was conveyed to the police or state government about 35,000 protestors camping out in South Mumbai for four days. The permission was for 5,000. No high-level meetings, no SOP. Despite this lapse (or was it a deliberate attempt to misguide/sabotage?), dedicated cops soldered on (12 DCPs, 14 ACPs, 52 police inspectors, 250 APIs and PSIs, 6 SRPF teams, along with the CISF and Rapid Action Force contingents from Gujarat and Delhi), going without sleep, to keep the city relatively calm by keeping their own cool. Kudos to additional municipal commissioner Ashwini Joshi for handling such a monumental task without too much collateral damage. Frankly, Jarange's supporters should have volunteered to clean up the mess they had created. They might have earned a few brownie points.

Mumbai bounced back and regained its buoyancy quickly, I noted happily, seeing Fashion Street crowded and members of Bombay Gymkhana gratefully entering the club, which had temporarily closed.

I received my "quota" of online hate and threats from Jarange supporters, accusing me of being an elitist "stooge". Better than being an aggressive, inconsiderate and self-centred activist brazenly trampling on the rights of citizens and holding a city to ransom.

The big question then is: Who was behind Jarange's audacious protest? Clearly, big money was backing the caravan of over one lakh Marathas pouring into the city from across the state, ready to camp out indefinitely, for as long as it took to succeed in their mission.

Uddhav Thackeray said: "Marathas are not terrorists." Hello! Nobody had called them that. So, why use such a word? Was it to add more fuel to the fire and provoke opponents? Who stood to gain the most from these protests, besides Jarange and his followers? Jarange finally admitted that his followers "overdid a few things", but rationalised it was "only because they had suffered for decades". He found several sympathisers. But, are Marathas the only ones singled out for discrimination? There's no justification for the wanton and unlawful desecration of public places, especially in the middle of the city's most popular festival, which attracts tourists from across the world.

Who did Jarange want to shame/embarrass? Some say the protests were designed to discredit the CM, who has become "too big for his boots". Whatever the truth in this theory, one thing's for sure, had it not been for our civic staff and cops (with little support from the top), who worked in three shifts and co-ordinated every effort to contain the menace, Mumbai would have sunk under a mountain of garbage and human waste — more than 101 tonnes of it! Dirty politics? You bet.

So... who should get the credit for saving Mumbai? Ganpati Bappa, of course. He is not "Vignaharta, the Remover of Obstacles" for nothing. *Morya re!!!*

Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe: Twitter handle @DeShobhaa

LETTERS

PAY MORE FOR DOSAS, LESS FOR ROTIS!

The recent GST reforms have thrown up a curious anomaly: while rotis and parathas enjoy exemption, South Indian staples like idli, dosa, puttu and idiyappam remain taxable. For crores of people, these are not restaurant indulgences but everyday meals. Should GST really discriminate between wheat and rice plates? Equally baffling is the levy of 18% GST on food served in hotels with tariffs above Rs 7,500. A diner walking in just for a meal is penalised for a room he never occupied. This illogical linkage needs urgent de-linking.

Adding to the woes, the plea to cut GST on commercial cooking gas has been ignored. Without relief, restaurants will continue to reel under soaring input costs, and consumers will ultimately foot the bill.

Gopalaswamy J
Chennai

SPARE IDLIS & DOSAS TOO

This refers to the request of our Union Minister, Piyush Chawla, to the Industrialists to rework the prices of their items and pass on every rupee saved to the buyers. A similar assurance was given by Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, during the GST Council Press Meet. However, we are not confident that all these MNCs would abide by their requests and may try to pocket maximum profits. Chennai hoteliers are irked by the relief in roti while idli and dosa are taxed. We feel it is the duty of the Central Government to ensure that all these companies, hoteliers, etc. pass on the benefits to the consumers and not to their bank accounts.

N. Mahadevan
Chennai

COMPENSATE STATES

Tax cuts mean greater affordability and enhance purchasing power. The changes in the GST regime will give a fillip to consumer demand and help the economy become buoyant. It is hoped that the tax cuts will act as a buffer against the challenges on the exports front. However, impoverished people would still find many goods and services unaffordable with their meagre incomes. A lot more needs to be done to enhance the purchasing power of the majority of the people in the country. The revenue loss that the states are bound to incur because of the rate reduction and rationalisation must be compensated as they cannot afford to reduce their spending on education, health care and welfare schemes.

G. David Milton
Maruthancode

Mail your letters to chennai@deccanmail.com

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



Why are peaceful protesters over Palestine 'justice' being held in UK?

"I was in love with Tom and his Dick Until Harry came along. I realise it may sound sick To include all three in this song But truth to tell, I've changed each name Now I'm married to quite another — Are the dispositions of all males to blame Or did I learn to skip men from my mother?" — From Kabhi Kabhi Meray Gharmer Polees Aa Jaathaa Hein, by Bachchoo

John Farley is a retired head teacher from Leeds. A fortnight ago, he joined a demonstration in favour of justice for Palestine, which supports an immediate ceasefire, an end to starvation and genocidal bombing and a recognition of the Palestinian state. Mr Farley carried a placard with a satirical prose poster from the magazine Private Eye. The placard said: "PALESTINE ACTION EXPLAINED X Unacceptable Palestine Action Spraying military planes with paint ■ Acceptable Palestine Action Shooting Palestinians queuing for food." Farley was arrested at the scene, thrown into a van and taken to a police cell. He was subsequently released without bail and no charges were brought. What crime had he committed? He was arrested under the Terrorism Act, which makes it a crime to support any group designated "terrorist". A group called Palestine Action has been declared

"terrorist" by the present Labour government after two of its activists broke into a Royal Air Force military base at Brize Norton, near Oxford. They rode scooters towards two Voyager aircraft, avoiding apprehension, and sprayed the planes with red paint.

To be fair to the Keir Starmer government, the activists didn't just spray the outsiders of the planes but sprayed their jet engines causing, according to government claims, £7 million worth of damage.

It is also true that the Voyager aircraft have not been involved in the Israeli attacks on Palestine but were certainly deployed in the Middle East against the Islamic State (ISIS) and against the Houthis rebels.

So, the paint incident had them classified as "terrorists", which classifies anyone supporting them and using the name Palestine Action, while promoting protests against arms sales to Israel, as "criminals" liable to arrest.

The protest of demonstrators supporting Palestine Action in peaceful parades and gatherings, including some like John Farley carrying placards and others carrying Palestine flags, began in earnest in mid-July and have continued in very many cities in Britain through August and into the first week of September.

A total of 512 people were arrested in London in mid-August. The total number of arrests is now thought to exceed 800. These arrestees have been released and sent their notices of criminal charges

under the Anti-Terrorism Act by post.

Their trials, it is expected, with the UK criminal justice system and courts under heavy pressure from real crime rather than this proscription of peaceful "free speech", will take place in October.

As with John Farley, even if the accused and charged are acquitted without fines or sentences, the fact that they were charged under a criminal law will affect their lives, for instance in assessments of travel and insurance.

It may be understandable that damaging the country's military equipment calls for some severe action, but arresting hundreds of people for simple peaceful protests which were not calling for damage to more military equipment but for an end to genocide and starvation doesn't seem fair.

Which of course raises questions about "freedom of thought and speech", which Britain finds so close to its tradition and heart. Indeed, a character called Toby Young has appointed himself the chair of some "Free Speech Union", which campaigns for people to say what they like, however offensive to others. He recently led a campaign to prohibit a local council from banning swear words in public. Fair enough. But did Toby Young raise even a squeak about the arrest of peaceful supporters of Palestine Action expressing their opinion through demonstrating? Is the Pope a devout Muslim?

Come on Toby, the English word for you starts with the syllable that sounds like "hippo" and it doesn't end with "potamus" or "drome".

A central political irritant in today's Britain is the question of hundreds, if not thousands of asylum seekers coming across the English Channel from France in dodgy rubber dinghies. Once here, they are treated with a vestige of decency by being housed in hostel and hotels till their applications for asylum are processed.

It is undoubtedly a cost to the British taxpayer and at some of these asylum-seeker residences crowds have gathered to protest against their presence. Some of these crowds are ordinary citizens protesting against what they see as a cultural erosion of Britain or burden on the state. Others are plain extreme right-wing racist thugs.

Counter-demonstrations of anti-racists gather at the same venues to protest against them. The police arrested several of the thugs when they've turned violent. Five of them, wearing masks and carrying instruments to break the surrounding barriers, invaded one of these hotels last week and were arrested.

The freedom-of-speech *wallas* wrote fervent articles and posts calling these arrests "two-tier policing" as none of the anti-racists, who did nothing provocative or illegal, were arrested.

Even Elon Musk, now the Lone Musketeer, has joined the boobies with messages on X saying that Britain has a "two-tier" policing system.

Not a murmur from these same free-speechers about the arrest of Palestine supporters. "Two-tier freedom of opinion" indeed!

Karnataka's move to use ballot paper for local body polls, contentious

LEGALLY, the action is clear and above reproach. The recent cabinet decision of the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government in Karnataka to replace EVMs with ballot paper for local body elections is well within acceptable parameters of functioning. Yet, given the massive trust deficit between the warring Opposition group – BJP, JD(S) combine – and that of the GOP, this move has at once raised a lot of questions, invited controversies and brought the impartial role of Election Commission into focus.

The alacrity with which the State Election Commissioner welcomed the Cabinet decision and assured the government of having to face no legal obstacle in this regard means that the existing government wants to check out two things: the political mood at the ground level after the ruling party has witnessed a series of domain warfare and group politics, not to speak of the Dharmasthala debacle and an assorted set of unresolved problems at every level.

Secondly, it wants to show to the country that polls can be held in a 'fair and free' manner using the erstwhile method of paper ballots, despite the complaint of malpractices plaguing it over the decades the EVMs replaced this method.

The consensual, even pliant tone of the local election official G S Sangreshi reveals it all. "If the state government brings an enactment legally and guidelines are framed, we will have to implement it. Whether it is justifiable or not has been decided by them. They have considered public opinion and held discussions on the matter. Hence, there will be no hindrance to using ballot papers," Sangreshi has said. Of course, the combative Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar used the opportunity rather expectedly to taunt the BJP and ask them why are they worried if ballot papers are used. The Law Minister explained the reasoning behind the move to state that there was an 'erosion of credibility and public confidence in EVMs' in line with the national campaign unleashed by their leader Rahul Gandhi who has kept on the 'vote chori' chant to cast a web of suspicion on the entire electoral process undertaken in recent elections in India. With the south-western state eager to be in the good

books of the party High Command as ever, it is very likely that the reversal to the previous mode of polling for the local body polls, which is a state government prerogative, will be implemented.

BJP, using historical data to bring in the infamous moves of Indira Gandhi after she lost the polls and imposed Emergency in the 1970s, stuck to its narrative of accusing the Congress of wanting to facilitate 'booth violence and fraudulent voting' and at the same time insulating technology when the whole world was embracing it. Rather interestingly, Sangreshi had also helpfully added that the paper ballot usage during the local body polls will be welcome as the villagers are used to it during panchayat polls.

LETTERS

GST rate cuts: A show of economic nationalism

AFTER the 56th meeting of the GST council has given approval to the revised two-tier tax structure, the GST rate cuts is welcomed by one and all as they would ease the burden on them. In short, hitherto multiple slabs and complex compliance been rationalised with two slabs simpler and easier compliance for traders by the Centre has not only eased the burden on the small business houses but also would ensure stronger purchasing power for the middle class which in turn will propel increased spendings. In reality, lower taxes spur consumption, expand compliance and widen the tax base. This is indeed a larger context of GST reform.

Further, while empowering its citizens and protecting domestic industries from predatory global corporations, the NDA government has shown that economic nationalism is the best shield against foreign coercion. By and large, the GST reforms are part of a bigger doctrine that makes life easier for the people and to shield itself from economic blackmail. The message is this abundantly clear that India would engage with the world on equal terms and not be dictated by the West anymore.

At the same time, since a large part of the burden would fall on the states, the onus is on the centre to address the legitimate concerns of the states over the potential revenue losses by evolving a proper mechanism to protect adverse impact of the GST reforms. All in all, more than anything, the GST cuts assert that growth will be people-centric and not dependent on foreign nations.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad

II

GST 2.0 is a welcome measure that is sure to boost consumption and help businesses too. The complexity of rates is gone, with introduction of two-tier rate of five and 18 per cent. The sin and luxury goods at 40% is again a well-conceived move. However, what yet remains to be done is to include petrol, diesel and liquor in the GST fold. These commodities are the core revenue generators as well they affect the common man. However, the 'one nation one tax' is still a distant dream

P R Ravinder, Hyderabad

Kerala govt hospital sets an example

DOCTORS in Thiruvananthapuram Medical College Hospital in Kerala successfully treated a 17-year-old suffering from dual and extremely rare amoebic and fungal brain infections, slated to be the first instance of treating such simultaneous infections globally. This proves that public healthcare sector has the wherewithal to break new frontiers in healthcare dispensation. Given better government funding, it could definitely be a world-beater, and more importantly place quality healthcare within the reach of the nation's not so well-off.

Dr George Jacob, Kochi

Teachers in the era of AI

I am a Teacher and an Educator with more than 20 Years of Teaching Experience. I am writing this article on Teachers Day to express my concern over the use of Artificial Intelligence in Teaching and I am of the opinion that AI can never replace a teacher .

Today's era is by dominated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) with machines and robots replacing the Teachers . The role of teachers has never been more important than today . While AI certainly helps in providing personalized learning experiences and automated grading, it simply falls short in many areas and in multiple ways .

Teachers understand the stress and anxiety that the students go through which a machine will never be able to do . Teaching means creating opportunities for students where they are able to think critically, analyse by themselves and Question what is being taught.

This fosters the development of creativity and a balanced approach towards facing the highly competitive World outside. Teachers are also mentors and role models who help in character building of the students and nurture them with their love, attention and care giving .

Parimala G Tadas, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

NGT takes suo motu cognisance of textile waste crisis in Bengaluru

NEW DELHI: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken suo motu cognisance of a media report highlighting the growing textile waste problem in Bengaluru, the 'garment capital' of India. A Bench headed by Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava registered an original application suo moto (on its own motion) following a news item titled 'Bengaluru's garment boom leaves a toxic trail'.

Referring to the news report, the Bench, also comprising expert members Dr. A. Senthil Vel, Sudhir Kumar Chaturvedi, and Dr. Sujit Kumar Bajpayee, noted that the city generates nearly 5,000 tonnes of fabric waste every year.

A recent study by the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) found that while large export-oriented factories manage their waste responsibly, smaller units and tailoring shops dispose of fabric scraps along with household garbage, worsening the crisis.

In its order, the green tribunal observed that only about 40 per cent of the city's textile waste is sent to Tiruppur and Panipat for recycling, and another 20 per cent is downcycled into low-grade products like mattresses and dolls. These recycled products, however, have a short life cycle of 8-10 years before ending up in landfills or being incinerated. Hazardous cotton waste is often mixed with regular trash, increasing pollution risks, while workers remain exposed to unsafe working conditions without proper safety gear or social protection.

"The issues highlighted in the news item indicate violation of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981," observed the NGT in its order passed on September 2.

Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

GST 2.0 AND BEYOND

Can India seize the repositioning moment?



WE stand at a rare historical juncture. The old certainties of globalisation are gone, but the new order is not yet born. The United States is reinventing industrial policy, China is hedging against isolation, Europe is betting on green standards, and emerging economies are jockeying for new roles. The global economy is no longer defined by one dominant centre but by many competing hubs of power and production.

Repositioning, therefore, is not a temporary adjustment—it is the defining economic project of our times. Nations that adapt with foresight, invest in technology and skills, and balance national interest with global cooperation will emerge stronger. Those that cling to outdated models' risk being marginalised in the new economic cartography.

The key question is not whether nations are repositioning, but whether they are making the right choices. The world has been in flux ever since Donald Trump launched his "America First" campaign of tariffs and bullying diplomacy against India, China, Japan, Russia and others. That moment marked the beginning of a tectonic shift.

For nearly three decades after the Cold War, globalisation produced a unipolar economic model. Supply chains stretched across continents, with China as the factory floor, America as the consumer of last resort, and Europe as the regulator-in-chief. Capital, goods and

ADAPT OR BE LEFT BEHIND

people moved more freely than ever before. Growth was fuelled by efficiency and specialisation.

But this golden age of globalisation was also fragile. The pandemic exposed the dangers of overdependence on far-flung supply chains. The Ukraine war weaponised energy and food trade, turning pipelines and grain shipments into instruments of coercion. And U.S.-China rivalry has moved well beyond tariffs into a battle for technological supremacy. Restrictions on semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and 5G are now the frontlines of the new Cold War.

The result is fragmentation. Nations from Vietnam to Mexico, from India to Indonesia, are seeking to position themselves as alternative hubs of supply and production. In this scramble, geopolitics and economics are intertwined. Friendshoring, de-risking, selective protectionism—once taboo words—have now become central to the vocabulary of global trade.

The United States is re-treating its industrial policy. Washington is offering billions in subsidies for semiconductors and green energy, even as it presses allies to limit exposure to China. "Globalisation" is giving way to "strategic globalisation"—a web of trusted partnerships rather than universal integration.

India has been carefully recalibrating its own strategy. Though Trump has stated India and China and Russia have drifted from US and have gone closer to China and felt that this friendship may last long, the Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal expressed optimism saying that a bilateral trade



Globalisation's golden age is over; the world is redrawing its economic map. The U.S. is reviving industrial policy, China is turning inward, Europe is betting on green rules, and emerging powers are racing to fill the gaps. India, too, is recalibrating—pushing GST 2.0 reforms, negotiating trade deals, and positioning itself as a trusted supply hub. Yet challenges remain—petroleum, stamp duty, and electricity duty lie outside GST, and execution risks loom large. Policy agility will determine whether India becomes a key node in the new global order or misses the opportunity. The question is simple: who will adapt, and who will be left behind? Nations that embrace reform, resilience, and foresight will shape the future.

agreement with US is not ruled out.

He said, with five rounds completed since March a deal is expected by November. If concluded, it would mark a significant step in India's repositioning—balancing protection of domestic interests with integration into new supply networks.

China, meanwhile, is engaged in its most profound economic shift in decades. For forty years, its model was simple: attract foreign capital, manufacture for the world, and reinvest surpluses in infrastructure. That engine is slowing.

Rising wages, demographic decline, and geopolitical pushback are forcing Beijing to pivot. President Xi

Jinping's call for "dual circulation"—reducing reliance on exports while strengthening domestic consumption and indigenous innovation—is emblematic of this transition. The question is whether China can transform its growth model quickly enough to avoid stagnation.

The geopolitical dimension of repositioning was also visible at the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a notably warm welcome, and India's call for stronger action against cross-border terrorism found resonance. Pakistan, in contrast, was left isolated, symbolically

Teaching then and now: A saga of ever-evolving learning experiences

DR HYMA MOORTY

AS September arrives, I am catapulted back in time at least seven decades, to a bygone era. I find myself transformed into a 4-year-old girl, sitting in the 'Infant' class, with Mrs Solomon, my teacher, standing right in front of me. Her warm smile, affectionate gaze, and petite face with a neat bun at the back of her head are etched vividly in my memory.

I recall her elegant attire—a light coloured, starched cotton saree with a thin border, a classic style that exuded simplicity and grace. Her image remains fresh and indelible in my mind. I cannot forget the impact of my English teacher, Mrs. Philips, who played a significant role in shaping my language skills, and my mathematics teacher, Mrs Augustine, who helped me develop my ability to calculate and memorise numbers with ease.

"TEACHING is a very noble profession that shapes the character, calibre and future of an individual. If people remember me as a good teacher, that will be the biggest honour for me."

-Dr A P J Abdul Kalam

Their influence has had a lasting impact on my life. Such type of teachers, belong to yesteryears.

As we celebrate Teachers' Day on September 5 in honour of Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, India's second President and a dedicated teacher and philosopher, we thank and salute the mentors, who inspire, guide and shape the minds of future generations. Whether they are teachers of yesterday or today, they create personalized learning experiences, encouraging students to take the ownership of their education. But with technological developments teachers and teaching meth-



ods have changed. The way we learnt has undergone a significant transformation over the years.

Gone were the days of traditional blackboard teaching, where teachers would scribble notes, diagrams, and formulae on the blackboard and the students would feverishly, copied them down. Quite often the black board looked a whiteboard, with no space left to write any more. It was never rubbed off till the last student 'photocopied' it down.

Sometimes the teacher would leave the classroom to the next class dusting the white chalk powder that settled on her face and hair.

This method of teaching relied heavily on the teacher's potential to convey information clearly and the student's ability to absorb and retain it. While this approach had its limitations, it also had its advantages. Students developed strong note-taking skills, and teachers could gauge student understanding through class discussions and written as-

signments.

Fast-forward to the present, and we have whiteboards, which offer a cleaner, more efficient alternative to blackboards. White boards allow teachers to use markers, diagrams, and multimedia resources to engage students and convey complex concepts. Digital whiteboards take a step further, enabling teachers to incorporate videos, animations, and interactive simulations that make learning more immersive and fun.

Today's teachers are no longer purveyors of knowledge, they are facilitators, mentors and coaches. The 21st century teachers and class rooms have a dynamic ever evolving environment. Teachers are ever ready and alert to experiment, innovate and adapt to new technological methodologies and needs of students. By accepting quick changes, the educators

are creating a more inclusive, student-centered learning environment that fosters creativity, critical thinking, analyzing and collaboration.

The influence of teachers on students' lives extends to far beyond the classroom. They inspire, motivate, and empower students to pursue their passion and interests. They ignite the love for learning, boost their morale, instill confidence and help students develop essential skills.

As we celebrate Teachers' Day, let's acknowledge the tireless efforts of pedagogues who work behind the scenes to shape the minds of future generations. Let us recognize the dedication, passion and commitment of these unsung heroes who make a difference in the lives of their students. We should all admit the exceptional qualities the teachers possess: - the ability to connect with students' lives, the passion for teaching, the commitment to the students, the mastery in the subject matter, and the willingness to accommodate every student under his or her umbrella. Let us all acknowledge the vital role played by every teacher in shaping the future of every student.

CAN'T SWERVE AWAY FROM COMPLAINTS OVER E20 ROLLOUT

THE GST Council's 56th goal of greater sustainability is admirable; lining the long road to it with confusing policy pointers is not. India's biofuel mission started almost a quarter century ago with a pilot programme. Soon after, a target for introducing a 20 percent ethanol blend (E20) in diesel by 2011-12 was declared. Revisions in 2009 and 2018 kept pushing back the deadline. In 2022, the government changed the 2018 policy to advance the year of full-scale E20 introduction by four years to 2025-26. Today, almost all of the country's 90,000-odd petrol stations are pumping only E20 fuel, making drivers irate at the lack of choice and worried at the possible damage to their cars.

The technology speaks for itself. The energy outputs of blends such as E10, E20 and E27 differ, offering lower mileage and brake power than unblended fuel. There are also worries about metal corrosion, deteriorating rubber components, clogged injectors, and water absorption—adding up to shortened lives for car systems not built for such blends. What makes matters costlier for owners is that the insurance industry has not yet taken cognisance of the new damage threats, which need to be factored in and paid for. The government has brushed aside the complaints, pointing to the greater good in reducing air pollution and the nation's substantial fuel import bill. The Supreme Court also recently dismissed a plea to reconsider the rollout and offer other fuel options.

A disruption was inevitable given the yawning distance between the off-now-on-again policy and public apathy for it. What's questionable is the manner of the rollout—without working with the industry and consumers to phase it in. In contrast, Brazil, which pioneered ethanol blending in the 1970s, pushed the policy with price incentives, tax breaks and communication campaigns that made the switch economically attractive and easily understandable. The other legitimate question is over price. In December 2017, the transport minister had promised that fuel would be much cheaper when blended. Well, the benchmark crude price today is hovering at about the same level as when he made the claim; yet, retail fuel is about a fifth costlier. Surely something has got to give. The government cannot force down a bitter pill without clearly explaining why it's required, administering it slowly, and keeping the promise to sweeten it—even if it's for the greater good.

CLIMATE-RESILIENT PLAN MUST FOR BHUBANESWAR

A new study has rather alarming projections for Bhubaneswar. An integrated heat and cooling action plan developed for the Odisha capital estimates that, by 2050, 'normal' hot days might turn out to be as bad as heat-wave events. While rising heat projections are a global phenomenon, Bhubaneswar is likely to witness the summer maximum temperature soar by 1.5 °C, with heat stress extending to 7-9 hours daily, posing significant health risks and productivity loss. The report also found a peculiar trend of low mortalities during summer (March-July), but higher numbers during August-October when humidity levels jump. While the report by think tank iForest suggests an integrated action plan, what Bhubaneswar actually needs is an urban development rethink. What must agitate the state government is the fact that the capital—now with a population of about 1 million—witnessed unbridled construction activity in the last two decades. In the six years between 2018 and 2024, the city's built-up area grew by almost a quarter and, at the same time, the vegetation cover plunged by a tenth. More importantly, a whopping three-fourths of water bodies vanished. These factors have contributed to the 'heat island' effect, turning the capital into a boiling cauldron.

Bhubaneswar is among the most liveable cities in the country, but the tag may not remain for long unless urban planning factors in decisive climate action. Located not far from the coast, Bhubaneswar has borne the brunt of natural calamities. Some of the worst cyclones to hit the state have not only dealt severe blows to the city's infrastructure, but these hazards have also caused significant loss of the green cover.

At the core of Bhubaneswar's problems is the regional disparity the state has witnessed in the last several decades. As the biggest urban centre, spread now over 180 sq km, it has seen continuous migration, heaping pressure on housing resources, which in turn attracted huge real estate investments and consequent unplanned, skewed growth. Much of the damage can be contained if the government revisits the city's comprehensive development plan. The change in land use pattern must be carefully monitored, and no-go areas identified and strictly adhered to. The capital of a coastal state requires climate-resilient infrastructure, not just housing projects dotting the cityscape. The focus should be on sustainable growth.

QUICK TAKE

WORDS FOR FOREVER LEADERS

A hot mic recently caught two 72-year-olds discussing how death can put off indefinitely by replacing organs. It could have been brushed aside a macabre-but-unironic banter had the duo not been Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping walking to a military parade showing off some of the deadliest weapons on the planet. When asked later to elaborate, Putin revealed that the idea obsessed Silvio Berlusconi, who died at 86 two years ago. Perhaps leaders in such mortal fear can take succour from literature: John Keats' counsel to his nightingale against "easeful death", or Aurobindo's Savitri, who retrieved her husband from the jaws of death. Words can be a more powerful elixir for those who project power.

THE spotlight is on the RSS because it has completed a century of existence. Also because many believe it is controlling the BJP and micro-managing its affairs. The recent interactive session RSS sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat held in the national capital cleared many doubts; but it disappointed those who were expecting the RSS to explode a bombshell.

The RSS is not used to rattling the cart. It works quietly, patiently and persistently, committed to its ideology and style of work. It is this perseverance and relentless resilience that has made the RSS the unique organisation it is.

The Sangh parivar's detractors have been impatiently waiting for any opportunity to unsettle Prime Minister Narendra Modi's continuance in office. As he could not be democratically defeated, his opponents expected that the so-called imaginary age bar the Sangh was supposed to impose on its pracharaks would open a Pandora's box. But the Sangh doesn't interfere in the day-to-day affairs of its affiliates. It plays a guiding, motherly role. That is why, at this stage, Bhagwat spoke more about social harmony and unity than about a Hindu rashtra.

After Bhagwat's three-day session, the speculation on Modi's continuance as prime minister is over and, understandably, the opposition is upset. He explained that at no point was there a decision to retire at the age of 75. He buttressed the point by affirming that he himself is not planning to step down in September when he completes 75.

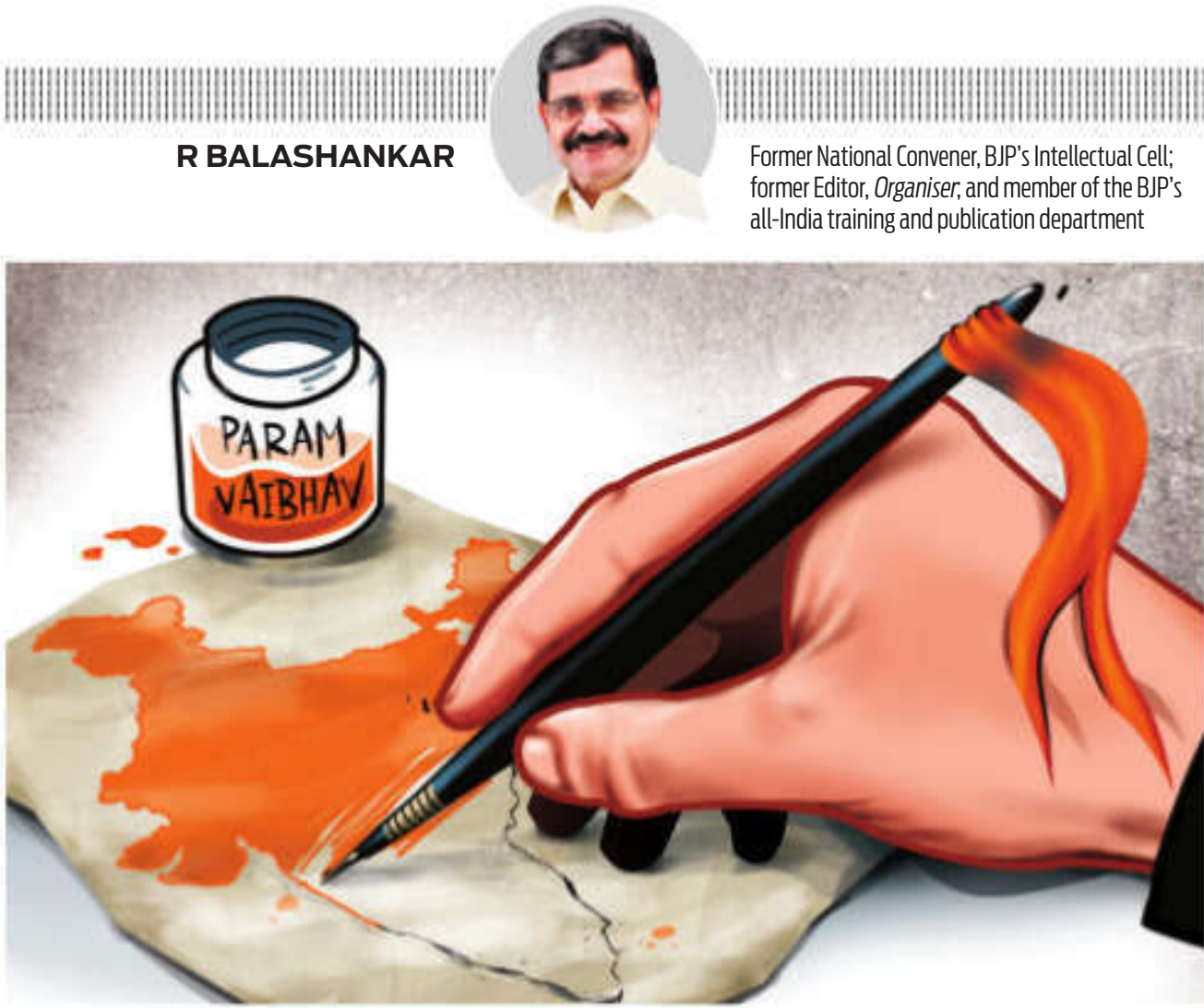
He also made it clear that the Sangh would strive for national integration, uphold the values of the Constitution, and that the vision of a united, developed India was primarily the core idea of the Sangh family.

On many occasions, Sangh leaders have proved prophetic. Many years ago, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh founder and RSS ideologue Dattopant Thengadi had told me that the Sangh would attain its pinnacle of glory when Bhagwat becomes sarsanghchalak. At that time, Bhagwat was nowhere in the Sangh's national hierarchy. The fifth sarsanghchalak, K S Sudarshan, had on many occasions predicted the rise of India after 2012. At that point, the UPA was in power at the Centre and there was no sign of Modi emerging as a saviour on the national stage.

The RSS's declared goal is '*param vaibhav*' (ultimate glory of India). Critics asked why Bhagwat did not speak about Hindu rashtra during his stay in

To appreciate RSS's contributions over 100 years, one has to only imagine an India without it. While supporting societal reforms, it has steadfastly insisted on the nation's glory

REIMAGINING INDIA'S SCRIPT OVER A CENTURY



R BALASHANKAR

Former National Convener, BJP's Intellectual Cell; former Editor, *Organiser*; and member of the BJP's all-India training and publication department

Delhi. Has the RSS moved away from its basic goal? Or why did the sarsanghchalak not take a hard position on the liberation of Hindu temples across the country, limiting himself to Kashi and Mathura? What these critics have not realised is that the Sangh does not act on the script dictated by its adversaries.

The organisation has expanded phenomenally and come to occupy the centre-stage of Indian political debate. Its influence has increased and it has come to influence the course of history in the 21st century. Thanks to the Sangh's nation-building activities over the last 10 decades, its approach is being keenly watched by the world community today.

The Sangh has been a reformative and innovative power in Indian society. It has been progressive in its approach to reforms, new technology and modern

gadgets. The Left has fallen by the way-side of history, opposing India's one culture, the Quit India movement, the Constitution, even computerisation, the space mission, private capital, and the opening up of the economy. Its thinkers and historians carried colonial baggage and tried to undermine the civilisational strength of India.

The RSS, on the other hand, took every opportunity to reach out to new areas and adopt new workstyles. It has been unhesitating in adopting new technology, and even changed its uniform—from khaki shorts it changed to full pants, military-style boots were replaced by more convenient modern shoes. Its physical exercise regimen also underwent changes suitable for the modern times.

It has no hesitation in supporting reforms in Hindu society, fighting caste and

THIS IS MORE LIKE GST 1.2 THAN 2.0

THE 56th GST Council meeting unveiled goods and services tax reforms labelled 'GST 2.0'. Listening to the longstanding demand of consumers, the changes collapse the multi-tier tax structure into a dual-slab model of 5 percent for essentials, 18 percent for most other goods and services, and a 40 percent rate targeting 'sin goods'. As the GST system was flawed, any change to simplify and rationalise it is a welcome step. But the question to ask here is: is it sufficient?

India expects a 7.8 percent real GDP growth in the first quarter of 2025-26, painting an optimistic picture. But it masks deep economic challenges as GDP as a metric fails to capture rising inequality, weak consumer demand and high unemployment.

For nearly a decade, sluggish consumer demand has plagued India. This is evident in the some of the latest numbers available for a few bellwether industries—urban consumer goods growth slowed to 2.6 percent during January-March 2025, passenger car sales slumped 1.4 percent in the next quarter, and two-wheeler sales shrank 6.48 percent in July, over comparable periods in 2024.

One of the major reasons for low consumption is increased inequality, as it reduces money in the hands of the far more populous poor and transfers it to the tiny group of the super-rich. A 2024 Oxfam report claimed that the richest 21 people in India held as much wealth as the bottom 70 crore people put together.

As Adam Smith identified many centuries earlier, one of the major reasons for high inequality is taxation policy. Indirect taxes like GST and excise—that are levied on the rich and poor alike—comprise about half the revenues in India, much higher than in richer countries. For example, the Indian poor spend about a fifth of their income on cooking fuel—the highest share globally—due to 300 percent excise duty hikes since 2014. The new GST reforms, with a dual-slab model, offer some relief, but fail to address the fuel duties.

This regressive taxation stems from offsetting the earlier corporate tax cuts—35 percent to 22 percent, costing ₹2 lakh crore—which failed to boost investment, with private gross fixed capital formation at an 11-year low of 32.4 percent in 2023-24, down from 40 percent in 2015-16.

To revive demand, the government must reduce fuel excise duties and reconsider

the corporate tax cuts, as lower oil prices would ease costs across goods, spurring consumption and economic recovery.

Though the latest changes are hailed as a revolutionary reform, several anomalies remain in the GST rates, revealing inequity and irrationality. Ultra-luxury items like polished diamonds enjoy nil tax under some schemes, while some processed agricultural products—crucial for reducing produce waste worth more than ₹90,000 crore a year—face 18 percent, stifling 70 lakh farmers in Tamil Nadu. Zero-rating these could boost farmer incomes by 20-25 percent, per an Indian Council of Agricultural Research report.

The latest reforms also failed to democratise the GST Council, where the Centre holds 33 percent of the total votes and each state, irrespective of their size or economic output, has 2 percent. With each resolution requiring 75 percent votes to pass, getting things done without the Union government's consensus has become impossible. Only four states—Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Maharashtra—contribute almost half the total GST collections, but have only 8 percent of the council votes; they cannot, therefore, pass any resolution on their own.

A lack of consultation can also be evinced. The states were not assured about the resulting loss of revenue and how it would be offset. The ideal step would have been for the Union government to work on a financial model to see the range of revenue losses for each state and discuss it with them.

In order to compensate for the sudden revenue loss for states, the Union government should consider extending the compensatory cess that can partially undo the loss. Though the Finance Commission has recommended 42 percent of revenues to be divided among the states, only 31 percent is devolved—because of the high share non-divisible cess.

The Union government should consider reducing the non-divisible pool and extend the divisible one. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act's debt cap of 25 percent of gross state domestic products, with a 3 percent fiscal deficit target (extendable to 3.5 percent), constrains Tamil Nadu. Relaxing the cap to 30 percent would help ensure fiscal autonomy and drive growth.

The intent to simplify taxation is welcome and will ease some burden off the common man. But reforms without robust safeguards for state federalism and finances risk reducing states to municipalities. States need fiscal autonomy to provide basic infrastructure—such as education and healthcare—and welfare schemes. Only if individual states grow can the country grow as a whole.

(Views are personal; a longer version of this article is on our website)



The latest GST reforms reverse some of the rate irrationality that bedevils the system, but not all. They ease a bit of the burden on the poor, but cooking fuel remains a major expense. Fiscal federalism has been dealt a blow

The textile sector, employing 4.5 crore nationally and 1 crore in Tamil Nadu, faces 18 percent on garments above ₹2,500, undermining competitiveness amid 50 percent US tariffs and a 10 percent export decline in 2023-24.

While 33 lifesaving drugs are now exempt, diagnostic kits and medical devices, at 5 and 18 percent, burden Tamil Nadu's healthcare system that serves 7.8 crore people, hampering affordability and access. These disparities highlight the reforms' failure to support critical sectors and state economies.

child marriage, or supporting reservation and the Mandal Commission report. When the Mandal report was introduced by the V P Singh government, the Sangh and the BJP supported it, while Rajiv Gandhi, then the leader of the opposition, vehemently opposed it. Arun Jaitley used to say that the Congress committed a fatal blunder by opposing backward class reservation in the early 1990s and never recovered its old glory in the heartland.

The RSS propounded Atmanirbhar Bharat. It even started cyber shakhas connecting cadres across the globe. Through cyber shakhas the RSS has been leveraging the Indian diaspora, which is a huge force multiplier in geopolitical manoeuvres.

To appreciate the value of the RSS, one has to only imagine an India without it. The country that attained independence 78 years ago has grown, stood democratic and united because of this huge network of the RSS, and the historic and cultural values it propagated. The RSS is the only organisation that has been insisting on the great civilisational influence of India and emphasising how India is destined to play a leadership role on the world stage. It is this training the Sangh inculcated that made great leaders like Vajpayee and Modi, who worked to realise the dream of India as a superpower.

The RSS does not play the role of an establishment. It does not behave as if it is in power. Power has not changed lifestyles, facilities or habits of the sangh pracharaks. The story of the RSS's work can be etched in granite and attributed for future history texts because it has the foresight, devotion and commitment that many other organisations lack.

Like in the matter of *swadeshi*, the RSS had forewarned India about the danger of population control and a strategic demographic conspiracy of enemies. Today, India is proud of its huge youthful workforce, which is a major growth driver. It is because the RSS so heavily invested in India's demographic dividend.

It was the tenacity and insistence of the RSS that built a great wall of self-defence, cultural nationalism and historic perspective that today leads the nation. At all levels, the RSS has a trained leadership. It is the inspirational strength the RSS provided to its political wing. There are dozens of organisations working in different areas like campuses, workplaces or religious gatherings.

The Sangh is reimagining, rebuilding, and rewriting an entirely new script for India.

(Views are personal; a longer version of this article is on our website)

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WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Financial fallout

Ref: *Firms should pass on GST cut benefits, states need clarity on losses* (Sep 5). The rationalisation of GST tax slabs comes as a major breather to consumers as well as businesses. However, the fallout is dwindling revenue and the central government rightly compensates the state governments, especially at a time when many states are grappling with financial woes.
Aanya Singhal, Noida

Disabled realities

Ref: *Take holistic view while recognising disabilities* (Sep 5). The rejection of nine medical conditions from the law reflects a narrow, rigid approach that ignores lived realities. Millions facing severe challenges remain excluded from essential support and opportunities. Disability policy must shift from criteria-driven definitions to rights-based one.
Abbharna Barathi, Chennai

India's edge

Ref: *N-equaliser aside, how close is Pak military to India's?* (Sep 5). The author's view underplays India's decisive edge. India's superior economy, technology and growing global alliances ensure lasting dominance despite Pakistan's asymmetric tactics.
K Sakunthala, Coimbatore

Transformative classrooms

Ref: *Planting the seed of curiosity* (Sep 5). Classrooms are the best places for lively discussions, duly transforming information into knowledge, imbibing curiosity and zeal to assimilate the knowledge derived from meaningful lectures and healthy debates over the subjects which is an amiss in otherwise continuous absence.
Ramalingeswara Rao, email

Surveillance optics

Ref: *Country of broken cameras* (Sep 5). While interrogation rooms may soon have cameras, our streets are full of silent, broken watchers. Surveillance without functionality is mere optics, justice shouldn't depend on faulty wires. After all, a camera is only useful if it actually records.
Babu Krishna, Bengaluru

Productive ties

Ref: *Why the glass from Tianjin is half-full* (Sep 5). The strong condemnation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) ends the long, deafening silence against the monstrous and ghastly Pahalgam terror attack and massacre carried out by Pak-based terrorists in J&K. The move itself speaks volumes of nurturing relations.
R Sampath, email

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The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Manipur challenge

Sustained efforts needed to restore peace

THE Suspension of Operations agreement, signed by the Centre and two prominent Kuki-Zo groups on Thursday, is expected to spur efforts for restoring peace and normalcy in strife-torn Manipur. The development is also significant for another reason: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit the north-eastern state next week — for the first time since ethnic violence broke out between Meiteis and Kukis in May 2023. The PM's prolonged absence has been a rallying point for the Opposition, which has repeatedly accused him of leaving Manipur in the lurch.

The state has been at the receiving end of misgovernance by a double-engine government. The ruling BJP stubbornly persisted with N Biren Singh as chief minister despite his rank failure to stabilise the situation; what's worse, he was accused of partisanship and incitement to violence. He finally resigned in February this year, and since then the state has been under President's rule. The relative calm in recent months is largely attributed to the fact that many militants have returned some of the looted firearms to law enforcement agencies in response to appeals from the authorities.

The latest agreement is a welcome step, but there are some knotty issues yet to be resolved. Various stakeholders need to be taken on board. An influential civil society group, the Kuki-Zo Council, has clarified that it is not in favour of unrestricted or free movement across the buffer zones between Meitei and Kuki-Zo areas. The apex body of Manipur's Nagas has threatened to enforce a 'trade embargo' in all areas inhabited by the community in the state in protest against the scrapping of the Free Movement Regime and fencing of the India-Myanmar border. The root cause of the ethnic conflict — the tussle over the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status — must be addressed on priority to regain the trust of Kukis and Nagas. The Modi government has no time to lose — Manipuris have already waited too long for the healing touch.

Jobs, skills, security

The only way to harness demographics

INDIA has crossed a historic threshold: its birth and death rates have halved in 40 years, according to government data for 2023. The crude birth rate has fallen from 36.9 per 1,000 in 1971 to 17.2 in 2023, while the crude death rate has dropped from 14.9 to 6.4. Infant mortality has declined from a staggering 129 per 1,000 live births in the early 1970s to 22 today, while the maternal mortality ratio has fallen to 97 per 1,00,000. These are victories of better healthcare, family planning and social well-being.

But this achievement also carries a stark warning. India's total fertility rate (TFR) has fallen to 1.9 — below the replacement level of 2.1 in many states. Rural fertility now stands at 2.1, while urban fertility has plunged to 1.6. The much-celebrated demographic dividend — India's vast working-age population, about 65 per cent of the total — will not last forever. Without urgent reforms, India risks replicating the fate of ageing societies like Japan, where shrinking workforces stalled growth and strained welfare systems. The challenge is no longer numbers — it is opportunity. Over 42 per cent of the youth are neither in formal jobs nor pursuing higher education. The female labour force participation rate is just 37 per cent, far below global averages. Social security remains limited, raising the risk of elderly poverty as life expectancy rises beyond 70 years. Disturbingly, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh lag behind, with higher fertility and mortality pulling down national averages.

A falling birth rate should be a blessing, not a curse. But for that, India must create jobs, transform education into employability, ensure women's participation and build social safety nets. The demographic dividend is fleeting. Squander it — and it will swiftly turn into a burden.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1925

Kudos to the Council of State

THE Council of State has justified its existence. It was brought into being with the sole object of thwarting the people's House in all those matters in which the views and wishes of the people are opposed to those of the bureaucracy. During the five years of its first term, it has seldom missed an opportunity of fulfilling this object of its founders. Therejection by it, at its meeting on Thursday, of the Repressive Laws Bill which was passed by the Assembly in March, and more particularly the overwhelming majority by which the measure was rejected, may well be described as its crowning achievement from the point of view of the bureaucracy, and its parting kick from the point of view of the people. In a House consisting at the time of about 40 members, only nine could be found to support the motion for the consideration of the Bill. All honour to these nine, and especially to those of them who did not record a silent vote on the subject, but of the House itself there is only one thing to say. To say that it is utterly unrepresentative of Indian opinion is to utter a commonplace. In the present conditions and with its present composition, it is a menace to the people's rights and liberties, as real and as grave a menace as the extraordinary powers vested in the head of the Government. Unless at the forthcoming election the constituencies will make a point of unseating all or most of those members who have consistently voted against popular measures and in favour of the Government, the country must definitely make up its mind to mend or end this glorified District Board.

Water will find a way, in India & Pak

The Indus treaty held because it had rules about treating the waters of Punjab's rivers



THE GREAT GAME
JYOTI MALHOTRA

WATER, water everywhere, said the poet, a line that is really a drumbeat in your brain as you look around the Mand area in Sultanpur Lodhi, where the Beas has burst its banks and flooded the paddy crop — a story *The Tribune* is also following, on the loss and devastation of one half of its two-crop agricultural cycle.

Watching Punjab's rivers rise these past few weeks has been a lesson in both History and Geography. We know that the confluence of two Persian words, Panj and Aab, gave rise to the portmanteau word 'Panjab', meaning "the land of the five waters"; it is attributed to Ibn Battuta, the traveller from Tangiers who is believed to have roamed this region in the 14th century.

But here's the irony: Prior to Battuta, Punjab was known as Panchnad, a Sanskrit word that means the "land of the five rivers" — a word that dates from the time of the Mahabharata, and which, even today, is the name of the river in Pakistan into which all five rivers of undivided Punjab — the Jhelum, Chenab, Sutlej, Beas and Ravi — fall, before the one mighty portmanteau river pours itself into the Arabian Sea.

Note, then, how Nature (with a capital N) abhors small men-made divisions and partitions, either during 1947 — when blood ran like water — or after, as recently as April 2025, when in the wake of the horror of the Pahalagam massacre, a furious India put the circa 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in abeyance. The IWT had held, despite two



AFLOAT: As far as the eye can see, water and land have merged with the horizon. It's as if Geography is taking its revenge on History. TRIBUNE PHOTO

wars and one limited conflict, because it had rules about treating the waters of Punjab's rivers.

On the eve of Operation Sindoor, India shut down the sluice gates of the Baglihar dam on the Chenab in Jammu and announced that not a "single drop of water" would be allowed to flow into Pakistan in retaliation for Pahalagam. For the first time in decades, Jammu folks flocked to walk the dry Chenab bed and post Instagram pictures. Pakistani authorities reacted nervously, fearing the worst for their crops and human habitat.

Three months later, it is Geography's turn to turn the tide on geopolitics. As Himachal Pradesh and Punjab experience their strongest monsoon in decades, the reservoirs in the Bhakra, Ranjit Sagar and Pong dams — that give life-sustaining water to all of north India all year round — have filled to capacity, forcing officials to release water into Punjab's three eastern rivers in order to keep the structure of the dam safe. But that's not all. Questions on both sides of the border are now being raised — for example, should officials have not released water from these North Indian dams,

The big story is that the Bhakra dam has never been desilted since it was built in 1963.

which has contributed to flooding on both sides of the border?

Ajnala. Kapurthala. Sultanpur Lodhi. Ferozepur. Kartarpur Sahib. The rollcall of Punjab's towns that seem to be floating these days is giving rise to several memes — among them, "bheegta Punjab," a take-off on "udta Punjab." Flooding is so widespread in the Ferozepur region that it has obliterated familiar markers on the Radcliffe Line. Parts of the border fencing that divides India from

Pakistan has been submerged. As far as the eye can see, water and land have merged with the horizon. It's as if Geography is taking its revenge on History.

Meanwhile, common sense is replacing fury. India may have suspended the IWT, but it has been sending water data to Pakistan via its high commission in Islamabad. That's because India understands its responsibility as an upper riparian state — imagine what would happen if China, the upper riparian in the case of the Brahmaputra, which begins as the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, refused to send water data to lower riparian India? Shudder at the thought.

In any case, so much water flows down the Chenab and the Jhelum in Jammu & Kashmir, especially during the monsoon, as much as 136.2 million acre feet (MAF) annually, that the run-of-the-river Baglihar and Kishanganga dams have no option but to allow the water to flow into Pakistan. That is why suspending or holding the IWT in abeyance doesn't mean much on the ground — the water, as is its wont, will flow from the hills to the sea. The hills, in this case, happen to be the Himalayas and the sea, the Arabian Sea. Water

disdains maps and treaties and pacts. It will find a way.

Larger question, however, has insinuated itself into the big picture, that of dam storage, rights and responsibilities. Udhampur MP and the influential junior central minister Jitendra Singh has blamed the IWT for denying India permission to desilt its dams on the western rivers (Chenab, Jhelum). But read the IWT carefully — Singh's contention is only partially correct, as the IWT only prohibits desilting during the monsoons; India is free to desilt at any other time. Moreover, the IWT is silent on desilting dams on the eastern rivers (Sutlej, Ravi and Beas), and as my colleague Lalit Mohan reports from Ropar on the news pages of *The Tribune*, the Bhakra Nangal dam's carrying capacity has been reduced by 19 per cent because of the accumulation of silt over the decades. In fact, the big story is that the Bhakra dam has never been desilted since it was built in 1963.

If this is true about the Bhakra Nangal on the Sutlej, could it also be true about the Pong and the Ranjit Sagar dams, on the Beas and Ravi rivers, respectively? And if this is true for all three, does it follow that dam officials had to release water from these dams this monsoon — which caused the flooding in Punjab — because they were concerned about protecting the integrity of the dam structure?

Let's ask the forbidden question: If these dams had been desilted over the years, would they have been capable of carrying much more water, especially at a time of extraordinary rain as has occurred this monsoon? Meaning, would Punjab's extraordinarily resilient villagers have remained home and dry?

Perhaps it's time to put people front and centre, to treat Nature tenderly, with kid gloves, to separate her from Politics. The rise and fall of dynasties and empires, shape-shifting maps — Nature follows her own rules. Let us respect them.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Water will be more important than oil this century. —Boutros Boutros-Ghali

Spirit of resilience in flood-hit Punjab

SIMARJIT SIDHU

PUNJAB is reeling under the most devastating floods in recent memory. The fury of swollen rivers has left behind scenes of ruin and despair. Every day, newspapers and social media confront us with stories of loss and displacement. Yet amid the countless reports, sometimes a single image speaks louder than a thousand words.

One such image appeared on the back page of *The Tribune* (September 1). It showed an elderly woman, silver-haired, sitting alone on a cot in her flood-soaked home in Hoshiarpur. The room was half-submerged, her cot damp from the waters rising beneath it. Around her, there was nothing but water, silence and an air of abandonment. It was a photograph that demanded not just attention, but also reflection. That frail figure seemed to embody a thousand questions. How long had she gone without sleep, unable to lie down on her wet cot? How many meals had she missed because there was no place to cook? How did she keep herself warm without blankets or woollens, when fever or pneumonia could strike her at any moment? And most basic of all: in those waters, where could she even attend to nature's call? Old age brings with it a frailty that requires constant care, yet here was a woman left to face life-threatening conditions all by herself.

Perhaps once she had a bustling home. Children who grew up and left for distant cities, a husband who may no longer be alive, neighbours now scattered by the floodwaters. The image of her blank stare towards the doorway seemed less about fear and more about waiting; waiting for someone, anyone, to arrive and rescue her.

And yet, strikingly, her face bore no panic. There was no wild cry for help, no gesture of despair. Instead, there was calmness, almost dignity, in her expression. It was as though she had lived through the storms of life, far harsher than this one, and had learnt the art of endurance. Perhaps she had understood that even the darkest hour too eventually passes. Her silence reflected resilience that was both heartbreaking and inspiring.

This woman is a symbol of Punjab's spirit. The floods have stripped lakhs of people of food and shelter but not of courage. In her composure lies a message that survival is not only about food and shelter, but also about faith and willpower.

As Punjab begins the long road to recovery, that haunting photograph must not fade away from our memories. It should remind us that behind every headline are countless lives at stake. Relief must not stop at short-term aid but our policies must ensure that no one is ever left so vulnerable again.

The woman on the cot is not just a flood victim. She is a mother, a survivor and a quiet symbol of fortitude. In her silence, she speaks for lakhs of Punjabis.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

When liberty becomes conditional

The Umar Khalid case is not merely about one individual or a group; it is about the principles that define our democracy. When a peaceful protest is framed as a crime, and dissenting voices are silenced through prolonged incarceration, the message is unmistakable — liberty becomes conditional and justice negotiable. The success of a democracy is measured not by how it treats the powerful, but by how it protects the weak, the marginalised and the dissenters. If India is to remain a democracy in both letter and spirit, it must reaffirm that dissent is not treason, that protest is not terrorism, and that liberty cannot be sacrificed at the altar of convenience.

GAURAV BADHWAR, ROHTAK

UAPA must target real threats

Refer to 'Burying justice in the Umar Khalid trial'; the article exposes a deep faultline in our justice delivery system. When a person spends five years in jail without a trial, suspicion itself turns into punishment and the presumption of innocence is quietly reversed. Laws like the UAPA must target real threats, not dissent. Bail should be routine, delay should not decide the fate of the accused. A democracy earns its strength by protecting even its loudest critics. Courts must act swiftly, guard liberty and remind the state that trials, not time, decide guilt. Justice delayed is not just denied; it is destroyed.

VIKRANT, PATHANKOT

Implementation crucial

Apropos of 'A leaner GST'; the measure aims to reduce classification disputes and augment compliance levels. However, it would require transparent, predictable tax administration in respect of how industries pass on tax reduction. Lasting economic benefits will be a result of effective transparent implementation. Also, for maintaining healthy cooperative federalism, the Centre's promise of compensation must be credible to avoid any Centre-state friction. Also, for augmenting reforms, tax administration needs technological support and proper vigilance for curbing leakage of revenue from bogus entities and fraudulent billing by tax evaders.

GURPREET SINGH, MOHALI

MSMEs need help

Apropos of 'A leaner GST'; this step can be used as an opportunity to boost manufacturing by reducing GST on iron fabrication work by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to 5 per cent. Thousands of small manufacturing units are engaged in metal fabrication as third-party contract manufacturers for larger companies. For such units registered on Udyam portal, perhaps a GST refund can be considered for a specific period. Operating on slim profit margins, these small units face a squeeze on profits hampering their growth. They have been requesting tax incentives similar to the ones offered to exporters. Though potentially burdensome on the fiscal front, such measures may give reprieve to MSMEs affected adversely by geopolitical tensions.

CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA, JALANDHAR

GST 2.0, a political gimmick

Refer to 'A leaner GST'; the government has not given details of the likely loss to the exchequer and the measures adopted to recover or compensate without compromising on the share of state revenues. GST 2.0, a populist move, appears to be a political gimmick to woo voters at public cost. If the government is in a position to bear such a big revenue loss, the money should have been invested in improving and streamlining basic infrastructure across the country.

JAGDISH CHANDER, JALANDHAR

Critical thinking necessary

Apropos of 'Equip students with ability to question power'; questioning is the very essence of learning. When students ask questions, they do not merely seek answers; they open doors to inquiry, critical thinking and deeper understanding. Teachers must create an environment where every child feels free to ask 'why' and 'how'. Questions not only clarify concepts but also challenge existing ideas, making learning interactive and dynamic. Questioning also equips students to examine social issues closely and think beyond textbooks, encouraging them to grow into active participants in democratic processes.

ASHOK SINGH GULERIA, HAMIRPUR