

The economy, its math and politics



OFF THE RECORD
BY P. VAIDYANATHAN IYER

THE GOVERNMENT machinery was on an overdrive the last few days responding to one former bureaucrat who wrongly debunked the robust growth estimates for April-June 2026. The bureaucrat, Subhash Chandra Gang, was the Economic Affairs Secretary in the Ministry of Finance for over two years from June 2017 to July 2019, and was designated the Finance Secretary in his last four months in the ministry. The Finance Secretary is the 'first among equals' in the Ministry which has six secretaries now, each heading one of the six departments — Expenditure, Revenue, Economic Affairs, Financial Services, Investment and Public Assets, Management, and Public Enterprises.

The government was spooked after Gang claimed in an interview to a television channel (NDTV) and later wrote in a piece for an online site (thehindu.com) that the nominal GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth rate in the first quarter of 2026-27

was a 'lowly' 2.6 per cent, and not 10.3 per cent as estimated by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Adjusted for 2-2.5 per cent inflation, he claimed the real growth rate will be zero and not the 'designer number' 7.8 per cent estimated by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

In doing so, Gang did something egregious. He definitely knows better than this, having played a key role in pushing through some of the most controversial agendas in the first term of the Narendra Modi government such as electoral bonds for political funding, and higher surplus transfers from RBI to the Centre. He elaborates on both these issues in his book *We Also Make Policy*.

Everybody got Gang's wrong maths, but what also matters in the street is perception. Gang's claims, though misleading, resonated with some coming as they did in the backdrop of the Jantar Mantar protests, an education system that admittedly does not leave its graduates 'job ready', and a demography which pushes more than a crore youth into the job market every year.

Not surprising then, the Congress and some of its leaders pounced on this and amplified it. But what is surprising is that Rahul Gandhi, who is a strong critic of the economic policies of the Narendra Modi government, chose prudently not to comment on Gang's claims. His silence was loud and meant wrong maths can't be defended.

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Rajya Sabha member Praveen Chakravarty, hit out at the government's economic management, but said in a piece for *The New Indian Express* that "there is a lot that is wrong with India's economy...but the sheer math behind the 7.8 per cent real GDP growth is not one of them, contrary to what a former government bureaucrat has claimed".

But Subhash Gang did leave the government firefighting much of the week after the GDP estimates were released. To reject what he said, it is key to understand two concepts: i) why is a base year needed while calculating GDP growth rate, and ii) why is the base year changed once in every 5-6 years, and when this is done, how is GDP calculated.

CONCEPT 1: Need for a base year. Simply put, a base year is needed to understand if the economy or the GDP has indeed grown, adjusting for the impact of price rise. For example, let's assume Country X produces only crude oil, so the market value of its crude oil becomes its GDP. Say, in year 1, it produces 10 million barrels of crude oil and sells it for \$10 a barrel; its GDP will be \$100 million (10 million barrels X \$10/barrel). In year 2, it produces only 5 million barrels, and oil prices have risen to \$30 a barrel. So, its GDP will be \$150 million (5 million barrels X \$30/barrel). So, even though the country has produced less oil, its GDP has risen 50 per cent from \$100 million to \$150 million. A base year helps tell the real GDP growth by removing the impact of prices.

If year 1 is taken as the base year, the oil price of that year becomes the reference for the following years. So, the real GDP of year 2 will be \$50 million (5 million barrels X \$10 a barrel, which is the price of crude oil per barrel in the base year). So, in this example, the GDP has shrunk by 50% to \$50 million from \$100 million.

CONCEPT 2: Why the base year is changed. Products and services on which people spend money today, be it food and clothes or travel and entertainment, has changed significantly from a decade ago. As years roll by, the market value of products and services change. So does technology and methodology, that enable a more precise and fast capture of output and prices. The base year is changed to account for all these. And when the base year changes, the GDP values naturally change, and growth is calculated by considering the new GDP values of two comparable periods.

When MoSPI changed the base year from 2011-12 to 2022-23 in February this year, the GDP values changed for all years from 2011-12 till date. Gang took the GDP value of April-June 2026 calculated using the 2011-12 base year and the GDP value of April-June 2026 calculated using the 2022-23 base year, to calculate the first quarter GDP growth rate for this year. Using numbers from two different series is patently wrong.

The writer is Managing Editor, The Indian Express. Off the Record is a fortnightly column

Signs of political change



FIFTH COLUMN
BY TAVLEEN SINGH

THERE IS a new political mood in Delhi. It is complex and hard to define but I shall give it my best shot. In this past week of grey skies and muggy, rainy days, I have wandered about talking to friends who have been in politics for long enough to have reliable opinions. Some are close friends to whom I turn when I am not sure whether I am reading the mood right or not. I went to meet them and said that I detected that something fundamental had changed in recent weeks. They agreed and said that the most crucial thing that had changed was that people seemed no longer scared.

Here I need to give you some context. I have never denied that when Narendra Modi first became prime minister, I was one of his most devoted devotees. But allow me to tell you why. My childhood and most of my growing years were spent in that 'socialist' India that was defined by shortages of everything from sugar and spice to bread and milk. I remember queuing at ration shops of people waiting for sugar. It always disappeared just before festivals like Janmassami and Diwali. As for things like cooking gas or a telephone, you needed political connections to get these.

Modi arrived on the national political stage saying he believed in free markets and that it was the business of government to do business. Words that were music to my ears since it is my considered opinion that India would have been a rich country had our economic policymakers not been 'socialist'. In the name of socialism, they built a huge, unwieldy, mostly unprofitable public sector instead of building schools and hospitals. When Modi took the same economic road, I was disappointed.

What disappointed me more was that he became a prime minister of the strongman kind and installed fear into the polluted air we breathe. Almost the first victim of his strongman policies was the media. When people speak contemptuously of the 'Godi Media', they need to understand that it has been dangerous to displease the government. Delhi which has a tradition of people speaking about politics raucously in restaurants and cafes became, till just the other day, a city in which people looked nervously around before saying anything critical of government policies in a public place.

The Coochack Janta Party may achieve nothing in the future, but it has already achieved a great deal by taking fear out of the Delhi air and kicking it into the dustbin. This has encouraged others to do the same. Last week two Muslim women journalists who were badly treated by the Delhi Police refused to accept this lying down and made videos of their injuries to put on social media.

When a Hinduva thug came forward to boast on camera that he was responsible for causing serious head injuries to a Jantar Mantar protester's father, he was quickly forced to backpedal. He had boasted that it was his connection to important BJP leaders that acted as his shield and kept him from being arrested. Then he quickly retracted this statement and made it more ambiguous. The cockroaches were by then back in protest mode marching to Parliament Street police station to force the Delhi Police to do its job and charge this Hinduva thug with attempted murder.

These may seem like small things. They are not. From the time that Modi became prime minister for a second term he has consciously cultivated the image of a strongman who tolerates neither dissent nor disagreement. Elderly Maoists ended up in jail for being 'urban Naxals'. Some were treated so badly that they died. The message went home swiftly to future dissidents and most of them either retired into the shadows or learned to watch what they said. In Bollywood those who made films that seemed not to be patriotic enough also retired into the shadows. The fear that spread was not imaginary. It was backed up by the weaponisation of state agencies.

The prime minister on his foreign travels assures democratic leaders and his devotees in the diaspora that India is the 'mother of democracy' and so democratic practices came naturally to Indians. International democracy watchdogs were not convinced. Freedom House moved India from 'free' to 'partly free' five years ago and that is where we remain. Other watchdogs like Sweden's V-Dem put India among ten countries in which liberal democracy has declined fastest in the past decade.

For someone like me who has seen Delhi change because of this diminishment of liberal democracy it has been depressing to see the city change. This is why it cheered me up enormously to discover last week from my conversations with old political friends that they agreed that something vital has begun to change. The Prime Minister himself has changed his mode of public discourse. When he first changed his platform to Instagram, he posted a reel in which he 'forgave' the young women who he said had insulted him and his late mother from Jantar Mantar.

He appeared soon to notice that this approach was not working. His recent reels have taken a more conciliatory tone. Does this mean that he has decided to ditch being a strongman and act more like an elected leader, a humble servant of the people? Perhaps not. But something does seem to have changed.

India held together by making room for linguistic identity



INSIDE TRACK | BY COOMMI KAPOOR

OUTSIDERS UNWELCOME

Diplomatic insiders in both Delhi and Bangladesh see a powerful lobby in the external affairs ministry playing a part in thwarting efforts to bring about a rapprochement in Indo-Bangladesh ties. The MEA is perhaps upset over Modi's appointment of a non-IFS officer, politician Dinsh Trivedi, as India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh. In a meeting with Indian envoys earlier this year, Modi hinted at more non-IFS ambassadorial appointments in our neighbourhood. Trivedi's efforts at bridging the growing gulf between the neighbours, even persuading Bangladesh PM Tarique Rahman to agree to dates for a visit to India, was not appreciated by all. After the dates leaked, the MEA acted as a spoiler. Ignoring conventional foreign policy protocol, it permitted Sheikh Hasina to hold a virtual press conference at Delhi's Foreign Correspondents Club, where she attacked her country's government. (It is pertinent to note that a year ago, the MEA stymied a proposed Hasina press conference at the Delhi Press Club and in 2018, denied permission to a British emissary to speak on behalf of late Khaleida Zia, then jailed in Bangladesh. Belatedly, two weeks after a Hasina press conference, when the FCC tried to organise a foreign policy seminar which had speakers with alleged Awami League links, the government ordered its cancellation and some 50 policemen descended on the club premises.)

Incidentally, the MEA's non-conciliatory tone is echoed by some former Indian diplomats in articles, suggesting Rahman's visit was in fact called off because of internal differences within Bangladesh over its foreign policy direction towards India. Embittered feelings on both sides indicate Rahman is unlikely to attend the BRICS summit in Delhi.

DIVISIONS AT HOME

The Home Ministry is on the backfoot after the police overreach towards GJP student protesters. However, just a month after the much-criticised July police crackdown, Cabinet Secretary Dr T V Somanathan and Home Secretary Govind Mohan, who were both due to retire this month, were given a year's extension. The extensions are believed to reflect the PM's appreciation of the two senior officials' mature decision to refuse to succumb to political pressure that called for more stringent action during the Jantar Mantar agitation. The Home Secretary reportedly helped salvage the situation by halting the firing of pellets, a draconian measure which backfired badly. He was backed by the Cabinet Secretary. The Delhi Police's harsh methods were adopted within three days of the abrupt transfer of commissioner Satish Golcha, who was replaced by Anurag Kumar, the Intelligence Bureau special director, in the belief that his background would help in dispersing the restive students. In fact, the reverse happened, the confrontation escalated. A fallout of the Jantar Mantar debacle is that officials are increasingly requesting for written ministerial orders.

UNFAIR CLUBBING TOGETHER

BJP MPs who decry what they term as Delhi's Lutyens culture have little sympathy for the government's eviction notice to the Gymkhana Club. They think club culture is perpetuated to make those excluded feel less mortals. A minister recalls when he came to Delhi years ago as a visitor in connection with a case in the Supreme Court, he was taken by his lawyers to the Indian International Centre for tea. He was made to feel like an outsider and suspected it was because he did not speak in English. His prejudice against the IIC may be misconceived, and the comparison unfair. The IIC membership criteria is based on a prospective candidate's professional accomplishments and an interest in foreign affairs, while the complaint against the Gymkhana is its entrenched hereditary membership and elitism.

NON-PARISIS' EXCLUSION

There was an interesting subplot in the tussle for control of the Tata empire. Some months ago, when trustee Mehli Mistri raised the issue of the 1923 deed of the Bai Hiranbai Tata Charitable Foundation, which stipulates that all trustees should be Parsis, the assumption was that he was merely targeting the two non-Parsi trustees, Veni Srinivasan and Vijay Singh. But some Parsis suspected he might also be targeting Noel Tata. As Naval Tata's son, Noel's Parsi credentials should be impeccable, but a few old-timers quibbled that Noel's late mother, nee Simone Dunoyer, was a Christian. They could not recall a young Noel's *navjote* ceremony, the initiation rite for being inducted into the faith. In fact, there is no ambiguity about Noel's standing as a Parsi. Before his marriage to tycoon Shapoorji Pallonji Mistri's daughter, Alo, the conservative and deeply religious Shapoorji insisted that his prospective son-in-law go through the *navjote* ritual before the wedding.



HISTORY HEADLINE
BY SHUBHAM KUMAR

BY DECEMBER 3, 1952, the telegrams reaching Jawaharlal Nehru had become frantic. Potti Sriramulu was on the 46th day of a fast unto death. He wanted a state for the Telugu-speaking districts of Madras. Nehru told Chief Minister Rajagopalachari that he was 'totally unmoved' and would ignore the fast. The telegrams kept coming. Madras Governor Sri Prakasa warned of the consequences if Sriramulu died. Union Labour Minister V V Giri said delays would deepen bitterness in Andhra. Nehru's own words soon revealed his unease: the Andhra dispute had become a 'festering sore'.

On December 9, Nehru told the Council of States that the government was prepared to create Andhra from the uncontested Telugu-speaking areas, excluding Madras city. Six days later, Sriramulu died on the 58th day of his fast. Hailstorms and violence followed. Nehru recorded disturbances at Vijayawada railway station; Parliament received notices of damage to railway property, disrupted communications and some police action. In a letter to Rajaji the day after, Nehru maintained that the proposed step followed his December 9 statement and was not prompted by the death. Speaking in Parliament, however, he recognised what the country had seen: the Andhra question had become 'entangled with the self-sacrifice' of Sriramulu. By December 20, the hesitation in his letters had given way to haste. The government had taken its first definite step towards Andhra, he told Rajaji, and the sooner it was completed, the better.

In 17 days, Nehru's refusal to be spurred by the fast had become an insistence on speed. The Union government was forced to face a question it had postponed since Independence. Would states built around language pull India apart, or would the refusal to create them provoke greater unrest? The Congress had not always feared the answer. In Nagpur in 1920, it reorganised its provincial committees along linguistic lines. Campaigning in languages people spoke helped it become a mass movement. Gandhi



Jawaharlal Nehru with C Rajagopalachari. NEHRU ARCHIVE

supported linguistic provinces, though he warned against weakening Indian unity. Then came Partition. Princely States had only been integrated. The government feared that a province with a dominant language might begin to see itself as a nation. In 1948, the Linguistic Provinces Commission, led by Justice SK Datta, advised against reorganising provinces primarily by language. A year later, the JVP Committee of Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pantabhisitaramay recommended postponement, while accepting that insistent public sentiment might prevail. The Constituent Assembly had already ensured that India's internal borders would not be permanent. Members debated whether Parliament should need a state's consent before changing its name, area or boundary. Article 3 required the state legislature to be consulted but gave it no veto. Parliament had the power to redraw the map.

Once Andhra state was created on October 1, 1953, demands from Marathi, Kannada and Malayalam speakers could no longer be dismissed. Nehru asked Justice Fazl Ali to chair the States Reorganisation Commission. The assignment, he wrote, might involve 'the drawing up of a new map of India'. HN Kunzru and KM Panikkar joined Fazl Ali. The three commissioners spent two years listening to competing versions of the map. Even after the deadline, memoranda, resolutions and telegrams kept arriving. The Commission received 1,52,250 documents, travelled over 38,000 miles and interviewed over 9,000 people.

Their report explained why language could no longer be ignored. Universal adult franchise required the government to work in languages voters understood. In multilingual provinces, communities also suspected one another of monopolising public jobs, development funds and political power. The

commissioners stopped short of treating language as the only test. A new state also needed revenue, administrative capacity and safeguards for minorities. They warned that if a linguistic state were created as the exclusive homeland of its largest community, people speaking other languages could be reduced to 'alien settlers'. A state could conduct business in the regional languages without treating some residents as guests.

Bombay showed how difficult that balance would be. In his 1948 memorandum, Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province, BR Ambedkar supported a united Maharashtra with Bombay as its capital. On the city's Gujarati commercial interests, he borrowed Lord Birkenhead's reply to Irish leader John Redmond: there was no such thing as 'a minority is a majority'. By 1955, however, Ambedkar had changed his proposal — he now favoured several Marathi-speaking states and a separate city-state centred on Bombay.

The quarrel split out of the meeting rooms into the streets. The Samyukta Maharashtra movement called Bombay for Maharashtra; the Mahagujarat movement pressed the Gujarati claim. CD Deshmukh resigned as Nehru's Finance Minister over provisions concerning Bombay in the States Reorganisation Bill. By February 1956, even Nehru's language had changed. He wrote of Bombay 'wounding itself'. The question was no longer simply where the city would fall on the map, but whether its people could live together after the line had been drawn.

When the States Reorganisation Act and the Constitution's Seventh Amendment came into force on November 1, 1956, India had 14 states and six UTs. Marathi- and Gujarati-speaking regions were placed together in an enlarged bilingual Bombay state. The arrangement was soon tested. After the 1957 election, Nehru told Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit that Congress had been 'very badly beaten' in Maharashtra proper and much of Gujarat. The leadership had believed that the bilingual state was broadly acceptable. The results in Maharashtra and much of Gujarat showed otherwise. In 1960, Parliament returned the matter, creating Maharashtra and Gujarat. This August 31 marked 70 years since the Act received presidential assent.

Sriramulu did not live to see Andhra appear on the map. The Parliament would draw some lines drawn in 1956 again. India's leaders had feared that linguistic states would pull the country apart. Instead, the map gave its diversity room to breathe.

The writer is a constitutional lawyer

We are like this only



ON THE LOOSE
BY LEHER KALA

talking (bless her), and learning to queue up. These are lessons that should be inculcated at home, except, sadly, in our dog-eat-dog world, Indians see education as a race to excel in Maths and Physics, not integrity or consideration for others.

There seems to be an inbuilt insecurity — probably the legacy of scarcity — that if we don't grab and seize the benefits meant for everyone, we'll fall by the wayside. It's not entirely untrue. Fifteen lakh students compete for 18,000 undergraduate seats at IIT. The scene is no different for government jobs, Bollywood, law, art and pretty much every career one can think of. Making it involves a clever mix of talent, luck, effort and, more often than not, unscrupulous rule breaking.

This bitter knowledge percolates into all aspects of our lives. Most of us have come to the conclusion the benefits accrued by shoving and pushing our way to the front, out-

weighs the costs. So, if some passengers are affronted by the aromas of chutneys and traditional snacks on a plane, who cares? It's not like they can do anything about it. In the same vein, we honk away and jump red lights with impunity, or other drivers honk back, feeling entitled to break into the garb on a German metro. Repeated studies have shown, as the stakes go up, so does the rate of transgressions. For example, doping prevalence is way higher at the Olympics than at the Commonwealth Games. Modern thinking cynically goes, when faced with a difficult situation, one must do the right thing for oneself.

In the age of AI, it is a depressing reality that the bar for unethical practices has been dramatically lowered. Students don't see using ChatGPT to submit assignments as fundamentally wrong. The excuses are everyone else is doing it, so we don't have a choice. Perhaps, we need to acknowledge that circumstances play a role in behaviour

too. Life is too much of a struggle to expect students to be good on an ordinary grade. If perception is, there are no rewards for being average but honest, how should we live? The only way to get people to think beyond their own selfish ambitions is to develop a moral compass at the school level itself. In the conventional I attended till I was 10, Moral Science was a daily story from *The Bible* and the *Mahabharata* demonstrated lessons of perseverance and bravery and subtly built perspective among awestruck children. We developed a set of values and a respect for rules. The personal glories and mistakes of, say, Yudhishtira, depicted universal human experiences across generations, providing a blueprint for a life well lived. Others' trials and travails carried a precious truth, that we are all the same; we don't, necessarily, need to trample on anyone to get ahead.

The writer is director, Hutyak Films

NUMBER OF INVESTORS ROSE TO 8,467 IN Q1FY27, FROM 3,483

GIFT City sees retail rush as Indians seek global investments

Akash Mandal
Mumbai, September 5

AS INDIAN markets have increasingly been outpaced by their global peers, more Indians are now investing in international markets through the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), data from the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) showed.

The number of investors in such retail schemes rose to 8,467 in the April-June quarter, up from 3,483 in the previous quarter. This was also the first time when the retail audience played the biggest piece of the pie in GIFT City's fund management ecosystem, constituting over 52% of the total investors putting money into such international funds.

For context, GIFT City in Gujarat's Gandhinagar is an IFSC hub that provides tax benefits, reduced regulatory compliance, and other incentives to attract international players. It also offers high-net-worth individuals, NRIs, and retail audiences an avenue to invest in foreign markets in foreign currencies through GIFT City IFSC funds.

Meanwhile, alternative investment funds totalled 7,683 investors in the latest quarter, up 26% quarter-on-quarter, with their share in the hub's fund management ecosystem dropping from nearly 64% in the previous quarter.

Global markets have done exceedingly well compared to Indian markets and Indian investors have understood the importance of global diversification, and hence partici-

•GIFT City's IFSC: Surge in retail investors



QUARTER	RETAIL SCHEMES	CATEGORY I AIFS	CATEGORY II AIFS	CATEGORY III AIFS
Q1FY27	8,467	853	1,655	5,175
Q4FY26	3,438	772	1,611	3,773
Q3FY26	1,239	722	1,503	3,257
Q2FY26	255	646	1,273	2,559
Q1FY26	0	526	1,100	1,957

SOURCE: IFSCA

tion from retail investors has increased," said Vaibhav Shah, head of products, business strategy, and international business at Mirae Asset Mutual Fund.

Shweta Rajani, head of retail funds at Anand Rathi Wealth, attributed this retail momentum to "improving access to global investments from within India, along with greater clarity around the taxation of retail schemes and ETFS."

All fund houses that typically run overseas fund-of-funds stopped fresh intake into their overseas schemes between July and early August due to the industry hitting its overseas investment limit. Thus, these fund houses cannot accept fresh sub-

scriptions in such schemes despite demand remaining high as most major global markets continue to outpace India.

For context, the benchmark Nifty 50 and Sensex indices are down around 8-10% so far this year. Stock markets in the US, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan have grown 10-50% in that time.

"Of course, when the domestic stock market is underperforming, many in the retail section who have the money will also chase growth in other markets. So this pent-up demand is materialising through GIFT City as access improves and funds launch new IFSC funds," a fund manager said.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

NSE IPO: India's biggest issue faces key questions ahead of its listing

Akash Mandal
Mumbai, September 5

WITH REGULATORY hurdles finally cleared after a nearly decade-long wait, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) looks set to complete its IPO and list publicly by the end of this month.

The estimated Rs 30,000 crore public issue — the largest in India's IPO history so far — has drawn significant attention from both institutional investors and retail audiences. But some questions remain unanswered, like if NSE's shares will be permitted to trade on its own exchange.

What regulations say

Under current regulations, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) prohibits stock exchange from listing on its own platform. Stock exchanges act as the first-level regulator in the listed space, overseeing compliance for the entities that trade on their platform. Thus, an exchange being listed on its own platform becomes a conflict of interest, as it would have to regulate itself.

However, there is a potential solution to this for the NSE — the permitted-to-trade (PTT) route, which allows an exchange to trade its shares on its own platform without getting listed. This would allow NSE to shift the compliance burden onto the ex-

change the stock is primarily listed on — BSE in this case — while allowing traders on NSE to trade these shares too.

For that, NSE shares will first be listed on the BSE. NSE's board will then discuss and come up with a detailed proposal for the SEBI on how the exchange will avoid conflict of interest if its shares are allowed to trade on its own platform. The proposal also includes the standard operating procedure for NSE shares in case of day-to-day functions like price bands and surveillance.

If the SEBI accepts NSE's proposal, the shares will then be allowed to trade on its own exchange via the PTT route.

What BSE says

As NSE's presence on a particular stock exchange does not just provide visibility. In NSE's case, its shares would benefit from the exchange's dominance in terms of liquidity, cash market volumes, and derivatives volumes.

For context, the NSE currently commands around 93% of India's cash market turnover, nearly the entirety of the futures premium, and around 75% of the options premium, according to Geojit Financial Services.

It would also allow NSE shares to be included in the ex-

change's widely tracked indices, such as the Nifty 500 and the Nifty Financial Services, which would in turn boost passive mutual fund flows into the stock. Currently, around 250 stocks aren't listed on the NSE but are allowed to trade on the exchange through this route.

On this topic, SEBI Chair Tuhin Kanta Pandey late last month said the regulator has not yet discussed the matter and that the matter is currently "too far". For example, Mumbai-based Kanhar Electricals is aiming to raise around Rs 1,056 crore through its IPO opening on Tuesday. Mumbai-based specialty chemicals manufacturer Praxair Chemicals aims to raise Rs 500 crore. However, this concentration of public issues is unlikely to impact NSE's issue due to the sheer size, scale, anticipation, and brand value behind its IPO.

Brokers like Deven Choksey and Kotak expect NSE's issue to garner a price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio between 35 and 49 times its FY26 earnings. This depends on the price band, which is expected to be announced around September 15, according to a Reuters report.

The P/E ratio indicates a stock's valuation. A lower valuation means investors can potentially earn more returns from the stock in the longer run.

IPO valuation, timing

The public issue comes at a time when the Indian IPO mar-

ket is gathering pace following months of slowdown due to the West Asia war and the AI wave. The months of July and August accounted for around 73% of the funds raised through market IPOs in 2026, and the Indian market also recovered bit after being among the biggest underperformers this year among major global markets.

It also comes at a time when five big-ticket issues are either open or scheduled to open next week. For example, Mumbai-based Kanhar Electricals is aiming to raise around Rs 1,056 crore through its IPO opening on Tuesday. Mumbai-based specialty chemicals manufacturer Praxair Chemicals aims to raise Rs 500 crore. However, this concentration of public issues is unlikely to impact NSE's issue due to the sheer size, scale, anticipation, and brand value behind its IPO.

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FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

LIC gets RBI nod to raise ICICI Bank stake to 9.99%

ENS Economic Bureau
Chennai, September 5

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) has given its nod to Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) to acquire an aggregate holding of up to 9.99% of the paid-up share capital or voting rights in ICICI Bank, giving the state-owned insurer headroom to more than double its existing stake in the private lender.

The approval is valid for one year from the date of the RBI's approval letter, failing which it will stand cancelled. ICICI Bank said in a regulatory filing on Saturday. The approval is subject to compliance with applicable statutory and regulatory provisions. As of the June 2026 quarter, mutual funds held 29.60% of ICICI Bank, while insurance companies owned 8.24%. LIC's stake in the lender stood at 4.35%.

The RBI approval is an enabling provision and does not mean LIC will immediately raise its holding to 9.99%.

Any increase in its stake will remain subject to applicable regulatory requirements and LIC's investment decisions.

The approval comes weeks after LIC received the central bank's clearance to increase its stake in HDFC Bank to up to 9.99%. As of August 14, LIC held 4.11% of HDFC Bank's total share capital. FE

TCS to set up Rs 70K-cr data centre in Hyderabad

Urvil Malvania
Mumbai, September 5

HYPERVAULT AI Data Center, a subsidiary of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), has secured 264 acres in Hyderabad to develop a large-scale artificial intelligence data centre campus with capacity of up to 1 gigawatt.

When fully built, the campus is expected to rank amongst the most advanced and largest AI infrastructure

campuses in India.

HyperVault and its partners are expected to invest up to Rs 70,000 crore to build and manage the campus, which will be purpose-built to serve front-line AI companies and hyperscalers, supporting high-density GPU deployments for AI training, inference and advanced computing workloads. The development will be carried out in phases, depending on customer demand and technology requirements.

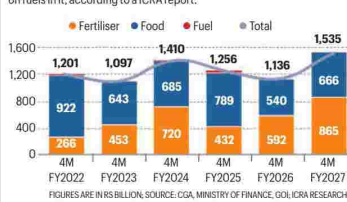
TCS' chief executive officer (CEO) and managing director K. Rithivasan framed the project as part of the company's infrastructure-to-intelligence strategy.

"HyperVault advances TCS' strategy by bringing together AI-ready infrastructure with our cloud, engineering, enterprise transformation and AI capabilities. Hyderabad offers the scale, talent and ecosystem to serve global customers," Rithivasan said. FE

•INDIA'S RISING SUBSIDY BILL



India's subsidy bill rose by 35% in the first four months of the ongoing financial year (AMFY27) against the same period last year (AMFY26). It was led by the fertiliser subsidy bill, which shot up by 46.2% amid the ongoing war in West Asia, followed by food subsidies at 23%. The total subsidy bill came in at Rs 1,535 billion, with a minuscule share of subsidy on fuels in it, according to an ICRA report.



FIGURES ARE IN RS BILLION. SOURCE: ICRA, MINISTRY OF FINANCE, ICRA RESEARCH

•BRIEFLY

NCLT halts disposal of Byju's K3-linked assets, flags valuation

New Delhi: The insolvency tribunal NCLT has ordered a status quo on the assets sold by the resolution professional of Think and Learn Private Limited, the parent entity of ed-tech rider edutech firm Byju's, in one of its subsidiaries. The Bengaluru-based bench of the NCLT has put a hold on any further disposal of Byju's K3 Education's assets till the next hearing on September 21 amid allegations that assets worth around Rs 150 crore were sold for just about Rs 16 crore. PTI

Auto component suppliers sitting on Rs 98,000-cr inventory: Report

New Delhi: The automotive component industry has around Rs 98,000 crore locked in inventory, of which Rs 29,000-39,000 crore could potentially be released by improving inventory management, according to a Vector Consulting Group report. The report said the potential working-capital release could include Rs 4,000-5,600 crore within the MSME ecosystem, around 80% of auto component manufacturers. PTI

Tata Motors launches tender offer for Iveco

New Delhi: Tata Motors launched an all-cash voluntary tender offer to acquire all common shares of Iveco Group for EUR 14.10 per share, valuing the Italian commercial vehicle maker at approximately EUR 8.3 billion. The offer is being made through TML CV Holdings BV, and the acceptance period will run from September 7 to October 26, 2026, according to a joint announcement by Tata Motors and Iveco Group on Friday. PTI

Maruti Suzuki official: Premium hatchback space to keep growing

New Delhi: The premium hatchback segment is anticipated to grow in the Indian passenger vehicle market, even as SUVs remain the dominant choice among customers, a senior executive of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd said on Saturday. The company, which has introduced the new version of its premium hatchback Baleno with special festive prices starting at Rs 6.09 lakh (ex-showroom Bengaluru), believes that when the overall passenger vehicle sales is expected to reach the size of 63 lakh units annually, PTI

Foxconn says Q3 to outperform expectations on AI strength

Reuters
Taipei, September 5

FOXCONN'S THIRD-quarter performance is expected to outperform market expectations given strong AI-related demand. The Taiwanese contract electronics maker said on Saturday, though it offered caution about "volatile" global politics.

Foxconn, Nvidia's biggest server maker and a major Apple supplier, has been a big beneficiary of the trend towards AI, reporting last month a 35% rise in second-quarter profit that beat analyst forecasts.

"In the third quarter, as AI demand continues to grow, and ICT products also enter the peak season of the second half of the year, operations are expected to gradually gain momentum," it said in a statement, referring to information and communication technology.

Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited

(CIN: U40109KA1999SGC025521)
No. CEE/ET&P/SE-2/2026-27/5973-85 Dated: 04.09.2026

BRIEF TENDER NOTIFICATION

(Through kptcl portal Mode Only)
KPTCL invites Bids on electronic mode for the following works against following enquiry numbers on Partial Turnkey basis.

Sl. No.	Enquiry No. & Name of the work
1.	KPTCL/2026/27/SS/WORK/INDENT/4148
	Establishing of following sub-stations along with construction of associated transmission lines (Stage-1) including design of line towers:
	a) Establishing 2x200MVA, 220/110 kV and 1x200MVA, 110/11 kV sub-station at PM Mitra Textile Park, Kalaburagi along with construction of associated transmission line for a distance of 1.985km and construction of 2 nos. of 220 kV terminal bays at 400/220 kV Ferozabad (Kalaburagi) sub-station.
	b) Establishing 2x200MVA, 110/33 kV and 2x200MVA, 110/11 kV sub-station (Station-1) at PM Mitra Textile Park at Keeranagi Village along with construction of associated transmission line for a distance of 1.811km in Kalaburagi Taluk and District.
	c) Establishing 2x200MVA, 110/33 kV and 2x200MVA, 110/11 kV sub-station (Station-2) at PM Mitra Textile Park at Keeranagi Village along with construction of associated transmission line for a distance of 1.114km in Kalaburagi Taluk and District.

The bids will be received through electronic tendering mode only. The details regarding participation in the e-tendering process can be obtained by logging on to KPTCL website <https://kptcl.karnataka.gov.in> with hyperlink "E Procurement KPTCL" or <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> on or after 18.09.2026 at 15:00hrs. Last date & time for receipt of Bids and any extension of Due date for Bid submission will be intimated in the Karnataka Public Procurement portal. Any details required in this regard can also be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours.

All Corrigendum/Addendums shall be noticed by the bidders before the last date of submission of the Bids.
Sd/-, Chief Engineer, (Electy).
Tendering & Procurement, KPTCL, 9th Floor,
Indhane Bhavana, A. R. Circle, Bengaluru-560009.

HFCL LIMITED

CIN: L6420HR1987PL148699
Regd. Office: Plot No. 38, Institutional Area, Sector 32, Gurugram - 122 001 (Haryana)
Website: www.hfcl.com Email: secretarial@hfcl.com Tel: 91-124-4310000; Fax No: 91-124-4310050

NOTICE OF 39th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ("AGM") E-VOTING, REMOTE E-VOTING AND RECORD DATE (THIS IS FURTHER TO OUR EARLIER NOTICE PUBLISHED ON SEPTEMBER 03, 2026 REGARDING AGM)

NOTICE is hereby given that:

- The 39th Annual General Meeting of HFCL Limited (the "Company") is scheduled to be held on Tuesday, 29th September, 2026 at 11:00 a.m. (IST) through Video Conferencing ("VC")/Other Audio Visual Means ("OAVM"), to transact the Ordinary and Special Business, as set out in the Notice dated September 03, 2026 convening the AGM, in compliance with the applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 ("Act") and the Rules made thereunder, and the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosures Requirements) Regulations, 2015 ("SEBI Listing Regulations") read with the General Circulars numbered 14/2020, 17/2020, 20/2020, 02/2021, 19/2021, 21/2021, 02/2022, 10/2022, 05/2024 and 03/2025, dated April 08, 2020, April 13, 2020, May 05, 2020, September 25, 2020, December 08, 2020, December 14, 2021, May 05, 2022, December 28, 2022, September 25, 2023, September 19, 2024 and September 22, 2025, respectively of Corporate Affairs ("MCA Circulars").
- In compliance of the provisions of Sections 101 and 136 of the Act read with Rule 18 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 as amended, the Notice setting out the business to be transacted at the AGM along with the Statement and the Annual Report of the Company for the financial year 2025-26 have been sent through electronic mode only to the members whose e-mail IDs are registered with the Depositories/ the Depository Participants (the "Company's Register and Share Transfer Agent" ("RTA"), whose names appear in the Company's Register of Members/ Beneficial Owners maintained by the Depositories, as on Friday, August 28, 2026. Further in terms of Regulations 36(1)(b) of SEBI Listing Regulations, the Company has also sent a letter containing the link and QR Code (including the exact path) to access the complete Annual Report to those shareholders who have not registered their email addresses with the Depositories/ the Depository Participants (the "Company's RTA"). The Annual Report including the Notice of AGM is also available on the Company's website www.hfcl.com, website of the stock exchanges i.e. the BSE Limited at www.bseindia.com and the National Stock Exchange of India Limited at www.nseindia.com and also on the website of NSDL at www.evoting.nsdl.com.

The Director's Notice of AGM through e-mail has been sent on September 05, 2026.

Remote Voting through Electronic Mode ("Remote e-Voting") and e-Voting during AGM Pursuant to Section 108 of the Act read with Rule 20 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014, as amended and Regulation 44 of the SEBI Listing Regulations and the Secretarial Standard on General Meetings ("SS-2"), Members holding either physical form or dematerialized form, are provided with the facility to cast their vote on all the resolutions set forth in Notice of AGM using electronic voting system from a place other than the venue of AGM ("Remote e-Voting"), provided by the National Securities Depository Limited ("NSDL"). All the Members are informed that:

- The Business as set forth in the Notice of AGM shall be transacted through voting by electronic means.
- The Remote e-Voting shall commence on Saturday, September 28, 2026 (9.00 a.m. IST) and shall not be allowed beyond this time.
- The Remote e-Voting shall end on Monday, September 28, 2026 (5.00 p.m. IST) and shall not be allowed beyond this time.
- The Cut-off date for determining the eligibility to vote by Remote e-Voting and/or e-Voting during AGM is Tuesday, September 22, 2026. The voting rights shall be in proportion with the paid-up value of their share in the Equity Share Capital of the Company as on Cut-off date i.e. Tuesday, September 22, 2026.
- Any person, who becomes the member of the Company after dispatch of the Notice of the AGM and holding shares as on the Cut-off date i.e. Tuesday, September 22, 2026, may obtain the user ID and Password by sending a request at evoting@nsdl.com or to the RTA at MCA-Securities and Exchange Board of India ("SEBI") at evoting@nsdl.com or to the Company's Registrar and Share Transfer Agent Limited (UCL Limited) at evoting@nsdl.com mentioning their User ID/ID and Client ID. However, if a member is already registered with NSDL for Remote e-Voting, the member can use the existing user ID and Password for casting his/her vote through Remote e-Voting or e-Voting during AGM.
- The Members may note that:
 - once the vote on a resolution is cast by the member, the member shall not be allowed to change it subsequently;
 - the facility for e-Voting on NSDL platform shall also be available at the AGM;
 - the members who have exercised their vote by Remote e-Voting may also attend the AGM but shall not be entitled to cast their vote again at the AGM;
 - a person whose name is recorded in the register of members or in the register of beneficial owners maintained by the depositories as on the Cut-off date, Tuesday, September 22, 2026, shall be entitled to avail facility of Remote e-Voting as well as e-Voting at the AGM;
 - a person who is not a member as on the Cut-off date should treat this Notice for information purpose only.
- The detailed procedure and instructions for Remote e-Voting or e-Voting are provided in the Notice of the AGM and e-mail sent to each shareholder.
- In case of any queries or grievances connected with facility for Remote e-Voting, members may refer to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Members and Remote e-Voting User Manual for Members available at the Downloads section on www.evoting.nsdl.com or call on 022-4886 7000 or contact Mr. Palavi Mhatre, Assistant Vice President, NSDL, at the designated e-mail address: evoting@nsdl.com.
- The Board of Director of the Company has recommended by a resolution in the aforesaid AGM to be paid within 30 days after the AGM. Further, please refer to our e-mail communication dated July 15, 2025, to the shareholders in respect of Deduction of Tax at Source on Dividend under relevant provisions of the Income Tax Act, 1962.
- The Company has fixed Tuesday, September 22, 2026 as the record date for determining the entitlement of members for final dividend for the financial year ended March 31, 2026. If approved at the AGM.
- Mr. Baldev Singh Kashyap (FCS-3616 & COP No. 3169), Practising Company Secretary, has been appointed as the Scrutinizer by the Board of Directors of the Company, to scrutinize the entire Remote e-Voting process and e-Voting during AGM, in a fair and transparent manner.
- Pursuant to the provisions of the Act, a member entitled to attend and vote at AGM is entitled to appoint a proxy to attend and vote on his/her behalf and the proxy need not be a member of the Company. Since, the AGM is being held pursuant to the MCA Circulars and the various circulars issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India ("SEBI") from time to time through VCI OAVM, the requirement of physical attendance of members has been dispensed with. Accordingly, in terms of the MCA Circulars and the circulars issued by the SEBI, the facility for appointment of proxies by the members will not be available for this AGM and hence the proxy form, attendance slip and route map are not annexed to the Notice. However, corporate members intending to appoint their authorised representatives pursuant to Section 113 of the Act, in the case may be, to attend the AGM through VCI OAVM or to vote through Remote e-Voting or e-Voting during AGM, are requested to send a certified true copy of the board resolution to the Scrutinizer by e-mail at scrutinizer@nsdl.com with a copy marked to NSDL at evoting@nsdl.com and to the Company at secretarial@hfcl.com.
- Shareholders holding shares in physical mode and have not registered/updated/completed their e-mail addresses/KYC details with the Company, may get registered/updated/completed the same, by sending in duly filled and signed Form ISR-1 (Form for registering PAN, KYC details or changes/updated thereof) which is available on the website of the Company at www.hfcl.com or the Company's RTA at admin@registrars.com or to the Secretarial Department of the Company at e-mail address secretarial@hfcl.com. Shareholders holding shares in dematerialized mode may also get registered with their Depository Participants to register/updated/completed their e-mail address/KYC details. This would help the shareholders to avoid transferring their shares/unpaid dividend into Investor Education and Protection Fund account.

Voting Results

The voting results along with the Consolidated Report of the Scrutinizer shall be placed on the Company's website at www.hfcl.com, NSDL website www.evoting.nsdl.com and also on the web-site of Stock Exchange of India, the National Stock Exchange of India Limited (NSE) at www.nseindia.com and the BSE Limited (BSE) at www.bseindia.com, within 2 working days of the conclusion of the meeting, after declaration of the voting results by the Chairman or a person authorized by him in writing. Subject to receipt of requisite number of votes, the Resolutions shall be deemed to be passed on the date of the 39th Annual General Meeting is September 29, 2026.

Place : New Delhi
Date : September 05, 2026

For HFCL Limited
(Manoj) Sidi
President & Company Secretary

THE WORD
THIS WEEK

How to read Gloria Steinem

GLORIA STEINEM, who passed away in New York at the age of 92, was a journalist, a social movement organiser, co-founder of Ms. magazine, and one of feminism's most recognisable voices internationally. But, she was, first and last, a writer, and it is through her prose, witty and unflinching, that her particular brand of activism endures while offering insight into her self-imagining brand of feminism. Those seeking to understand the woman behind the aviators should check out these five works.

Outrageous Acts and
Unlikely Rebellions

STEINEM HAD the unique ability to be furious and funny at the same time. This collection of essays opens with her account of going undercover as a Playboy bunny, documenting the humiliating uniforms, petty fines and sexual surveillance that passed for glamour. For the uninitiated, this is the place to start, a primer in Steinem's blend of reportage and memoir, and polemic.

Revolution from Within: A
Book of Self-Esteem

SHE CALLED this her most misunderstood work. It's easy to see why. In an era of street-level protest, a book about self-esteem seemed a retreat into therapy. However, Steinem postulates that external liberation without internal healing is hollow. Drawing on psychology and her own memories, she traces how low self-worth is a cage of its own. She reframed self-worth as a collective resource rather than an exercise in narcissism.



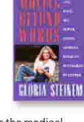
My Life on the Road

THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY-cum-travelogue is anchored by anecdotes from her two years in India and her later return to meet the freedom fighter Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Interspersed are also tales of bad diner coffee and lost luggage, small moments that humanise the icon and reveal a woman of endless curiosity. It is a reminder that Steinem's feminism was on the road, in conversation with strangers, as opposed to the seminar room.



Moving Beyond Words

IN THIS essay collection, Steinem plays the role of an intellectual provocateur. She imagines a 'conference' where women run the global economy; she scrutinises the medical establishment's dismissal of female pain; she eviscerates the beauty industry as a trillion-dollar confidence trick. Though written in the 1990s, its critiques of corporate feminism and performative inclusion remain prescient.



Doing Sixty and Seventy

PUBLISHED IN 2006 as two linked essays, this slim volume tackles what Steinem called the last great feminist taboo: old age. She dismisses the 'invisibility' trope, arguing instead that post-menopausal women are society's most liberated cohort — free, at last, from the male gaze and finally permitted to speak their minds.



AISHWARYA KHOSLA

QUICK VERDICT

HIT

Border Lands

ANTARA MUKHERJEE'S debut novel, *Beyond our Births*, comes with strong socio-political commentary on how the circumstances of birth shape the trajectory of one's life. The Kolkata-born writer sets her novel in the '90s, when Nimki, an orphan abandoned at the India-Bangladesh border as a five-year-old, finds refuge with the Senguptas in Kolkata. But finding refuge does not mean belonging. Nimki is treated as the domestic help. She yearns for love from the family matriarch Bina Ma, who works with an NGO for displaced women and children. Juxtaposed against Nimki's struggles is the life of Ira, the Senguptas' daughter. After Ira becomes the target of sexual assault, the family decides to move out of the country for a fresh start. The novel deals with identity. Nimki discovers that she is not only Muslim but that she was abandoned by her birth family in Bangladesh. Her journey takes off when she leaves India to seek them. Read against the backdrop of the recent SIR in West Bengal, where more than 90 lakh names were deleted from the rolls, much of them Muslim, *Beyond our Births* is a poignant first book.

REVA THAKKAR

MISS

Same Old, Same Old

IN A market glutted with Japanese and Korean 'healing fiction', Satoshi Yagisawa's *More Days at the Torunka Cafe*, newly translated by Eric Ozawa, is a sleep-inducing, inert placebo. The novel follows the same tired recipe: World-weary customers, each nursing some private wound, serendipitously drift into a humble cafe that dispenses epiphany with a side of coffee. Where Toshikazu Kawachi's *Before the Coffee Cakes* Guts allowed readers to reckon with their regrets through a time-travelling cafe and Hiro Arikawa's *The Travelling Cat Chronicles* had readers sobbing over the loyalty of its feline narrator, Yagisawa's story is an anaemic, formulaic sequel lacking heart, written only to tap into the popularity of its predecessors. The stories drag, and the dialogue is utterly bland. It fails to replicate the quaint charm of his *Morisaki* series, which offered a certain emotional resonance. Those expecting a balm for the agitated soul or a rendezvous with their inner selves through the book will be disappointed.

AISHWARYA KHOSLA

HIT

The Ghosts We Inherit

MISHU GREW up in her grandmother's story-filled presence. As an adult, with her New York life unraveling, she returns home to Kolkata, when her grandmother, Niyoti, slips into a coma. Set in Calcutta, London and New York, Pia Ghosh-Roy's debut novel *And I Am the Arrow* follows three generations of women from the Chatterjee family — Mishu, her mother Ira, and her paternal grandmother Niyoti — and their servant Bani as they navigate their complex relationships, even as they find themselves interacting with the spirit of a dead man, who refuses to be called a ghost. The novel reflects on the intergenerational trauma passed down, intentionally or unintentionally, and the scars left behind by the people one loves. It uses multiple points of view to unfold the narrative, giving a glimpse into the minds of each character as they keep the story engaging. These are women who are flawed, and make hasty life-altering decisions, just like any of us. A recommended read to explore not just the Chatterjee women's family dynamics, but also to introspect your own.

ANUSREE K C

AND I AM THE
ARROWBY PIA GHOSH-ROY
Pan Macmillan
200 pages
₹599

Murari Tripathi

HISTORY CAN be cruel to the historian himself. For decades, Eric Hobsbawm was the undisputed titan of Marxist historiography, translating the mechanics of global capitalism into a gripping prose. Yet, the great champion of the marginalised was a man of bourgeois contradictions: a lifelong communist enjoying the comforts of the British academic establishment, and an anti-imperialist funding his research projects through US capitalism. In his 2002 memoir, *Interesting Times*, Hobsbawm curated a meticulous image. An intellectual forged in the anti-fascist street battles of 1930s Berlin. In his biography, *The Age of Hobsbawm*, Emile Chabal uses the very tools Hobsbawm worshipped, the archives, to dismantle this mythology. Chabal poses a question: If Hobsbawm wrote a memoir, why did we need this biography? He argues that Hobsbawm was emotionally incapable of telling the whole truth about his adult life.

To grasp his enduring global grip, one must understand how he wrote. Championing 'history from below', he rejected the heavy and neutral tone of the academy. He explicitly declared his bias, arguing that true intellectual honesty meant putting your convictions on the table. This unapologetic stance produced his famous *Age series*, a four-volume history of the 19th and 20th centuries. His immense popularity was secured by the mechanics of the publishing industry. Armed with a massive distribution deal, his paperbacks and translated editions sold like those of a pop star. However, his ideological devotion exacted a heavy toll. When Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary in 1956, shattering the moral compass of the global Left, Hobsbawm defended the brutal military invasion as a 'tragic necessity'. While peers found it indefensible and left, Hobsbawm remained a 'loyal communist'. As his political survival in Britain became difficult, he found respite in the intellectually vibrant networks of Italian Eurocommunism, which helped salvage his academic momentum.

Yet, the champion of the working masses harboured a disdain for the actual culture those masses consumed. Inhabiting the centres of British academia while insisting on his marginality, he was an 'insider-outsider'. He later dismissed the Beatles as a fad

of 'haircuts', loathed Bob Dylan as a product of mass civilisation, and sneered at identity politics. He loved the proletariat in the abstract but recoiled from its modern realities.

This ideological safari was absurd in Latin America. Bankrolled by Rockefeller, he parachuted into Peru and Colombia for three-week excursions. He championed a Peruvian military dictatorship simply because it promised land reform, brushing off polite rebukes of local intellectuals, who suggested the professor prioritised fantasies over reality. Chabal provides a haunting coda: the very haciendas Hobsbawm

THE AGE OF
HOBSBAWM:
THE LIFE OF A
REVOLUTIONARY
HISTORIAN
BY EMILE CHABAL
Beknup Pr
480 pages
₹3,600

Despite being a champion of the working masses, Hobsbawm harboured a disdain for the actual culture those masses consumed

ILLUSTRATION: SUJAY DEY

romanticised as harbours of noble 'primitive rebels' were soon burned to the ground by a Maoist insurgency his framework failed to anticipate.

History repeatedly outran the historian, nowhere more distinctly than in India. Hobsbawm instrumentalised Antonio Gramsci's subaltern politics globally, but remained deeply cautious of its application outside Europe. Introduced to the subcontinent via elite Cambridge networks, his Eurocentric theories of the 'pre-political' peasant were swiftly dismantled by Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies school. The In-

dian subaltern critique took Gramsci's ideas further than Hobsbawm ever dared, proving that colonial India's marginalised were political actors.

Yet these criticisms, including Irfan Habib's on the transition debate, proved no barrier to institutional hegemony. Long after the vanguard moved on, Hobsbawm became the immovable god of the Delhi University and JNU syllabi. A fixture of postcolonial statecraft, his influence culminated in a 2004 hero's welcome and breakfast with then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He did not understand India, but he undeniably conquered its classrooms. Back in Britain, he inadvertently birthed his own nemesis. By warning that the working class was fracturing in a prophetic 1978 lecture, the lifelong Communist unwittingly provided the intellectual toolkit for Tony Blair's New Labour, accidentally engineering the political centre he had spent his life trying to overthrow.

Chabal also charts his evolving view of nationalism: viewing it first as a middle-class illusion, then diagnosing it as a dangerous modern religion, and finally warning the Left that it was a toxic force they could never control. Utilising his identity as a Jewish refugee who fled the Nazis, he attacked the foundations of Zionism, proving that for him, nationalism was a trap no matter who sprang it.

Chabal's biography ends on a note of profound melancholy. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Hobsbawm could not bring himself to face this heartbreak, retreating instead into whataboutism. Privately, he confessed to an old comrade they were 'prehistoric survivors... like the lung fish'. Chabal uncovers a staggering psychological book. The great historian actively avoided researching the Holocaust because, as a Jewish refugee who lost his family, it was 'too difficult to face emotionally'. His celebrated final works, including *The Age of Extremes*, were not objective history, but acts of therapy. Ultimately, Chabal captures the tragedy of a historian incapable of confronting his own. Meticulously researched, this brilliant biography will undoubtedly tempt you to read Hobsbawm for yourself.

In Other Tongues, Other Wonders

Vivek Shanbhag's translation venture aims to bring India's many literary traditions into conversation with one another, and with the wider world

Paromita Chakrabarti

VIVEK SHANBHAG has a suggestion on how translations ought to be read — simply as literature. "We read Russian or Latin American literature as literature, even though much of it reaches us in translation," he says. "We should do the same with writing from Indian languages."

The Kannada novelist and playwright has some authority on the subject. His 2013 Kannada novella *Ghachar Ghachar*, translated into English by Srinath Penu in 2015, travelled far beyond the language in which it was written, finding readers who countered it as a work of literature in its own right. The book was longlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award in 2017, was a finalist for the LA Times Book Prize the same year, and won the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize for Kannada in 2020. Now Shanbhag, 64, wants to make that journey possible for more writers. His answer is *Hyphen*: a literary journal, publishing house and digital platform rolled into one that intends to bring Indian languages writing into a wider conversation.

Shanbhag insists that *Hyphen* did not arrive as a sudden inspiration, that it grew out of conversations that his team had been having with "literary friends in Kannada and other Indian languages." *Hyphen* was not an epiphany, "It is an idea that has grown over decades, born out of a need to understand how writers in Indian languages are responding to the political, social and economic changes, larger concerns and conflicts of our times."

Much of *Hyphen's* DNA can be traced to

Shanbhag's seven years editing *Desha Kaala*, the Kannada literary magazine that introduced readers to Tamil, Hindi, Bengali and Marathi writers, including Jayamohan, Uday Prakash and Meena Kandasamy. That editorship, he says, "made me realise two things. First, the diversity of styles and traditions across Indian languages is extraordinarily rich and distinctive. Second, discovering these writers is difficult when one cannot encounter their work first-hand." The process of scouting new work for the magazine was always "a long and pleasurable journey" — the team "invariably discovered unexpected gems along the way." But it was not without its share of frustrations. Some of the writers *Desha Kaala* championed took decades to reach English-language readers. "Imagine how much richer our literary conversations would have been if these works were available in English 20 years ago, when they first appeared in *Desha Kaala*," says Shanbhag. *Hyphen*, in effect, runs the same experiment in the opposite direction — except its target language is not Kannada but English, and its intended audience is not one linguistic community but the larger world. "As direct translations between Indian languages have steadily declined, English has become the most effective way to access the literature of other Indian languages," he says.

The scale of the ambition explains why *Hyphen* exists as three institutions rather than one, all housed under the Bahuvachana Trust. "*Hyphen's* objective is to offer a fuller literary experience through these distinct ways of engaging with readers,"

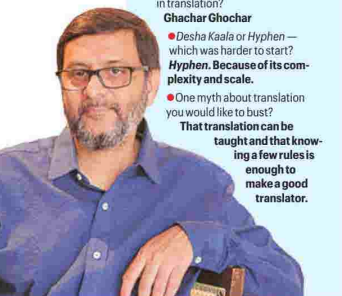
says Shanbhag. The print journal, he explains, brings together "a rich diversity of writing, allowing readers to explore and reflect at their own pace," while the website adds articles, book reviews, poetry, fiction, plays and interviews through the week. The publishing house, meanwhile, takes on the longer, slower work of bringing full-length books into English and "places them within a larger publishing ecosystem." "No previous initiative has attempted to bring India's diverse literary traditions together on this scale and place them within a shared global conversation," says Shanbhag.

Hyphen launches amid unusual global attention to Indian-language writing — Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, translated into English by Daisy Rockwell, won the International Booker Prize in 2022, the first novel translated from Hindi to do so; Banu Mustha's *Heart Lamp*, translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhushni, won it in 2025. But Shanbhag is wary of mistaking a prize cycle for lasting change. Awards illuminate their winners, he says, but that attention becomes durable only when readers have access to a range of writers; when it enables Indian-language authors to enter literary conversations on their own terms, rather than being wheeled out periodically as translation's success stories. There are, he insists, "many world-class writers working in Indian languages who deserve to be read" for their ideas, worldview and craft. *Hyphen's* task is to make sure readers finally get the chance.

Cover of *Hyphen*:
Vivek Shanbhag

A QUICK WORD

- One Indian-language book you wish more people had read in translation?
- **Marali Mannige**, a Kannada novel by Shivaram Karanth
- A language you would love to see more translated into, not just from?
- **Bengali**
- Translator or author — whose name should appear bigger on the cover?
- **Both names in equal size**
- The hardest word or phrase you have ever had to go to of in translation?
- **Ghachar Ghachar**
- **Desha Kaala** or *Hyphen* — which was harder to start?
- **Hyphen**. Because of its complexity and scale.
- One myth about translation you wish like to bust?
- **That translation can be taught and that knowing a few rules is enough to make a good translator.**



SCIENCE

Striped hyenas help keep India clean, but remain misunderstood

Prarthana Sen

Thanks to its unusual appearance, preference for decaying meat, and nocturnal activities, the Indian striped hyena is a tragically misunderstood animal. Estimates suggest there are around 5,000 to 14,000 striped hyenas worldwide, of which some 1,000 to 3,000 are in India – possibly one of the largest groups in any country. These estimates are a benchmark for research

since data on striped hyenas is otherwise scarce. India itself lacks an official census for the animal. According to the non-profit Wildlife SOS, hyenas are the mounts of witches in the folklore of certain cultures, and these beliefs hamper efforts to conserve the striped hyena.

Despite India's hyenas enjoying the highest level of legal protection under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, there is no proper unified action plan to con-

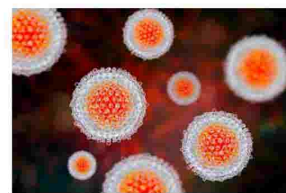
serve them. There are only a few fragmented regional initiatives. In West Bengal, for instance, the Wildlife Information and Nature Guide Society has been running awareness drives to dispel negative beliefs under a Wildlife Trust of India-funded project. The Tamil Nadu government has allocated Rs 14 lakh to conserve striped hyenas as part of a larger package to protect less-known endangered wildlife. A National Action Plan that can unite

the financial and logistical capacities of such State-level programmes can help protect the animals across borders more efficiently. However, inadequate data is a major roadblock. Sans a proper population estimate, its geographic distribution will remain unclear, and without this detail it is impossible to establish safe havens. The striped hyena's shy, elusive nature also makes mapping its population an arduous challenge, although

a sliver of hope remains in India's proven ability to estimate the nationwide population of the snow leopard. Increasing awareness of the ecological value of striped hyenas will help mitigate the cultural beliefs keeping striped hyenas on the brink. For one, it is unreasonable that they are disparaged for feeding on carrion when just that activity ensures clean landscapes and water sources. Given that decaying meat is a hotbed of

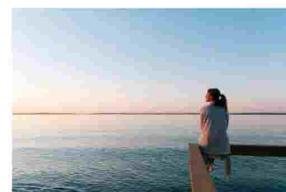
pathogens, their role as natural public health scavengers is crucial. If these scavengers disappear, ecosystems will destabilise. Reframing cultural narratives in superstitious communities without hurting people's sentiments is not easy, but community engagement can help spread change. India needs striped hyenas far more than it realises. Prarthana Sen is an independent researcher and writer.

SNAPSHOTS



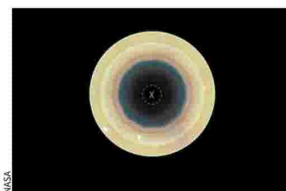
New way to spot Zika, hep C viruses in whole blood

Researchers have developed a way to detect Zika and hepatitis C viruses in whole blood. Blood has enzymes that quickly destroy RNA, so testing it for RNA requires pricey equipment to purify samples first. In the study, the team used a new blood-drying protocol it developed to 'trap' and shield RNA, using only a heater and a low-cost sensor, and then find the viruses in two hours, with accuracy comparable to that of top labs.



Scans reveal how brain allows humans to speak silently

Inner speech involves the words we 'speak' silently in our minds. Using magnetoencephalography, scientists have found that the brain's motor regions first encode how the mouth should move for a sound, right after, the auditory regions activate to represent the predicted sound of the syllables. Remarkably, the brain was found to organise these vowels based on their acoustic properties even though no sound is made, suggesting inner speech is a motor simulation rather than just abstract thought.



Ten-sided wave undulates around Saturn's south pole

Saturn's north pole is famous for its long-lasting hexagonal wave; now, scientists have, for the first time, found a decagonal wave around its south pole. Using images from space and ground telescopes in 2023-2025, they found the wave slowly moving eastward. The decagon's vertices move back and forth every 32 days. Researchers believe the wave is a vertical structure extending into the atmosphere, and perhaps formed due to unstable winds or due to an anticyclone nearby.

BODH is training scientists to become better lab leaders

The initiative was born when four researchers found the research ecosystem was not preparing scientists for institutional responsibilities; a 30-member BODH session costs ₹3,000-5,000 per participant, although the team does not charge a fee

Biju Dharmapalan

India's laboratories are expanding, research funding is growing, start-ups are emerging, and Indian researchers are increasingly contributing to scientific knowledge. Amid this expansion, who is preparing scientists to become leaders?

A researcher may spend years mastering experimental techniques, analysing data, publishing papers, and writing research proposals. But when that researcher becomes a principal investigator, a faculty member or a laboratory head, their expertise alone will not suffice. It is this oft-overlooked dimension of capacity building that four researchers have sought to address through a programme called 'Building Opportunities & Driving Hope' (BODH).

The initiative was born in September 2025 from the shared experiences of Veda Krishnan of the ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi; Sriparna Chatterjee of CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology, Bhubaneswar; Chandra Shekhar Sharma of IIT-Hyderabad; and Pooja Devi of CSIR-Central Scientific Instruments Organisation, Chandigarh, while working with the Indian National Young Academy of Sciences.

Researchers from diverse disciplines found that the Indian research ecosystem prepared scientists for scientific work but less so for the institutional

The other excellence

BODH addresses a range of needs, from dealing with failure to building professional networks

The BODH team (L-R): Veda Krishnan, Chandra Shekhar Sharma, Pooja Devi, and Sriparna Chatterjee. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

- The expanding research ecosystem in India often prepares scientists for technical work but overlooks leadership skills
- The BODH programme seeks to address this gap by training researchers in mentoring, effective communication, and managing collaborations
- Specific modules in BODH help young scientists navigate career pathways while managing stress, professional networking, and personal mental health
- By using experiential methods, the programme teaches researchers how to handle failure, rejection, and complex professional challenges
- BODH has already reached over 300 participants from 70 diverse Indian scientific and academic institutions
- Scientific leadership requires investing in people who can lead teams and shape healthy institutional cultures

responsibilities they would face. To that end, BODH has multiple capacity-building modules, catering to diverse stages and dimensions of researchers' professional needs.

For example, one, called 'PRABODH', is designed to help PhD scholars communicate their knowledge to various audiences, develop professional networks and collaborations, and explore alternative career pathways across academia, research organisations, industry, policy, scientific publishing, and communication.

Dr. Krishnan said the team does not charge for conducting BODH sessions. Instead, the host institution is expected to cover speakers' travel and boarding expenses.

Altogether, she estimated, a 30-member session

usually costs around ₹3,000-5,000 per participant.

A smart scientist may know how to formulate a hypothesis or design an experiment but managing a laboratory involves a different set of competencies. They need to figure out how best to mentor a doctoral scholar who is struggling, how to handle disagreements in a research group, how a principal investigator should build a collaboration, how to communicate a difficult decision without damaging morale, and so on.

The founders of BODH recognised this gap through their own experiences. Their association with the Indian National Young Academy of Science and, for three of them, the Global Young Academy, exposed them to different approaches to leadership and

mentoring. The experiences strengthened their conviction that India needed a leadership framework designed by scientists, for scientists.

To achieve its goals, BODH uses an activity-based approach. Participants debate, collaborate, communicate, solve problems, and reflect through situations inspired by real encounters in laboratories and universities. The objectives include teaching participants what good leadership looks like and encouraging them to examine their own behaviour and understand how their actions affect others. They are also taken through ways to tackle uncertainty, failure, rejection, and other challenges that arise in a complex research environment, including collaborations. In fact, much of contemporary science is

increasingly collaborative. Large research projects involve multidisciplinary teams, institutions, industry partners, and international members. The ability to communicate and empathise across disciplines is thus as important as technical expertise for India's scientific leadership.

Within its first year, BODH conducted 10 leadership workshops. Its programmes have reached faculty members, scientists, and research scholars at IIT-Hyderabad; IIT-Kharagpur; Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Thiruvananthapuram; the Indian National Science Academy; ICAR-IARI; ICAR-National Institute for Plant Biotechnology, New Delhi; National Institute of Technology Raipur; Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad; and Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore.

The team is seeking institutional diversity as India's scientific ecosystem is expanding, even if slowly, beyond a handful of premier institutions.

In future, the team also envisages digital learning resources, facilitator manuals, leadership fellowships, scholarships for young researchers, women-in-STEM leadership programmes, and a national mentorship network.

(Biju Dharmapalan is an adjunct faculty member at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, IISc campus, Bengaluru, and dean, Academic Affairs, Garden City University, Bengaluru)

Dragonflies are bellwethers of earth's ecosystems



D. Balasubramanian

In the imagination of children, flying holds a special place. Folded pieces of paper become aeroplanes ready to be launched, eagles, and dragonflies are the helicopters of their fantasies.

Dragonflies (called *sitara* in Hindi) are indeed wonders of flight. These insects belong to a lineage whose members were among the planet's first flying organisms. About 300 million years ago, their ancient kin had the same aerodynamic features, but with a wingspan that extended to 72 cm. The spectacle of these giant ancestors of dragonflies would have left any modern ob-

server spellbound.

India is home to around 600 species in the order *Odonata*, which includes dragonflies and the slender damselflies. The pages of *The Hindu* sometimes feature colourful pictures of newly discovered Indian species, usually in either the Northeastern States or in the Western Ghats where Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu meet. But alas, ecological surveys increasingly report missing dragonfly species and shrinking populations. In a world where public attention is fixated on large mammals, why do these ancient insects merit so much thought?

One notable trait of the *Odonata* is that they split their life cycle, being aquatic in the early stages and terrestrial and aerial as adults. Nymphs, as their larvae are called, live in water – be it in wetlands, ponds or in flowing



A blue hawklet in Silent Valley National Park, Kerala, August 2016. JEE & RANI NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY (CC BY-SA)

streams. The adults hover, accelerate, and swoop on four independently articulated wings. But in all phases, dragonflies are the dominant insect predators. The nymphs feed on the larvae and pupae of mosquitoes and other insects. One growing dragonfly nymph can finish off a hundred mosquito larvae in a day. In flooded paddy fields, nymphs feed on the aquatic stages of crop pests, while dragonflies prey on leahoppers and

other damage-causing insects.

That said, dragonflies are sometimes also the prey.

The *Odonata* are themselves susceptible to the actions of pesticides, particularly systemic pesticides such as fipronil. These chemical compounds are absorbed by plants and make the whole plant toxic to insects. So over time, excessive pesticide levels lead to a decline in dragonfly numbers.

Conversely, the presence of a healthy population of dragonflies and their nymphs in agricultural zones is a sign of well-managed farming without excessive pesticide use.

Away from human-dominated landscapes as well, dragonfly populations are affected by a changing planet. Some species in the Western Ghats have evolved to flourish in forests where water seeps from wet, marshy soil into mountain streams. In more recent years, cycles of drought and excessive rainfall have not been kind to several endemic Indian species, such as the blue hawklet (*Hyalethys apicalis*), a strikingly colored dragonfly with blue-green eyes, but which is very rarely seen these days.

While looking to dragonflies and damselflies as the bellwethers of our ecosystems, we also continue to unearth new facets of

what makes them unique. Recent research on the eyes that provide 360-degree vision to dragonflies has shown that there are 16 or more genes that code for visual opsins, the proteins that detect colour and light. We humans make do with just four visual opsins: one each for the red, green, and blue colours in our cone cells and a fourth for low-light vision by the rod cells. The molecular abundance gives dragonflies a very sensitive visual system that even perceives ultraviolet light (PNAS 112 (11) E1247-E1256).

Even as their numbers dwindle, these fascinating creatures continue to provide us with new insights. The article was coauthored with Sushil Chandani, who works in molecular modelling.

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Question Corner

Odd expressions

Why do people make odd facial expressions when self-administering eye drops?

— Akarsh

People often make oddly tense facial expressions when putting eye drops in their own eyes because the activity significantly tasks the nervous system. To place a drop in your eye, you need to control yourself while something approaches a sensitive part of your face. People instinctively tense their facial muscles and may open their mouths as part of this effort. This is similar to the involuntary grimaces people make when doing something requiring fine motor

control. The brain doesn't always activate only those muscles needed for an activity. When you focus on a difficult movement, other muscles can also become activated unnecessarily. Facial muscles are particularly prone to this. Next, the eye blinks reflexively when the dropper approaches it, so you need to deliberately suppress blinking while also keeping your eye open and aiming accurately, creating tension around the eyes, forehead, and the mouth.

Readers may send their questions/answers to science@thehindu.co.in

What is 'One Nation, One Time'?

What is the need for a common time reference? How will it work? What do the latest Rules say?

Debayan Tewari

The story so far:

In August 27, the Centre notified the Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2026, making the Indian Standard Time (IST) the single reference for legal, administrative, commercial, and other official purposes across the country.

"The Rules will come into force 180 days from the date of their publication in the Official Gazette... The 180-day period will allow government departments, businesses, institutions and other organisations to make the required changes to their systems before the Rules come into force," the government said in a statement on August 30.

Why does India need a common time reference?

The government said the need for a common time reference has increased with the growing use of digital and technology-based systems. Banking and digital payments, telecommunications, railways, power systems, computer networks, and government records depend on accurate time and time stamps. "Differences between time sources can affect the coordination and recording of such activities. The Rules are aimed at ensuring that important systems across the country use accurate and consistent Indian Standard Time," it said.

The common time reference is expected to support accurate time-stamping of banking and digital payment transactions, coordination among railways, airports, and other transport systems, reliable functioning of telecommunication and internet networks, precise time-keeping in power systems, upkeep of government and legal records, and coordination of emergency services.

How did the push for a common time begin?

On January 27, 2025, the Department of Consumer Affairs had notified the Draft Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2025, proposing to synchronise time across India. It had teamed up with National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and India Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to "disseminate IST with millisecond to microsecond accuracy" from the five legal metrology laboratories.

IST, according to the government, is based on "Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) with a +5:30-hour offset (and) is maintained by the CSIR-National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL)." The government said that despite its importance, IST was not mandatorily adopted by all telecom service providers and internet service providers. It said many of them continued to rely on foreign time sources such as GPS. "Synchronising all networks and systems to IST is essential for national security, real-time applications and the smooth operation of critical infrastructure," it had said last year.

The government constituted a high-power inter-ministerial committee to formulate a policy framework, regulation, and legislation for the adoption of IST under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009. Helmed by the Secretary (Consumer Affairs), the committee had representatives from NPL, ISRO, IIT Kanpur, the National Informatics Centre, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the railways and telecom departments, among others.

What do the latest Rules mean?

According to the CSIR-NPL, the trademark for "IST" had been registered in 2024 but the time was not "legalised" in India. "IST is generated using advanced atomic clocks and satellite links to ensure that it is traceable to Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), the international reference time, with an uncertainty of less than 3 nanoseconds. The IST is widely disseminated with millisecond accuracy with NTP (Network Protocol Service) servers at CSIR-NPL," the CSIR-NPL says on its website.

The CSIR-NPL says ISRO has been "given traceability to IST, with nanosecond accuracy" through satellite links to NavIC, India's independent satellite navigation system.

The Rules emphasise reducing dependence on foreign satellite-based time sources. The Rules enable the use of NavIC, along with other approved Indian timing sources, for secure and reliable time dissemination.

As part of the 'One Nation, One Time' initiative, the government in July 2026 commissioned a White Rabbit Technology-based IST Dissemination Demonstration Network at the Regional Reference Standard Laboratory in Bengaluru. It said the new system "upholds the sovereignty of the nation's digital infrastructure by eliminating India's reliance on foreign time sources like GPS. This would provide critical sectors "maximum protection" against cyber-attacks and data manipulation. The Bengaluru pilot demonstrated how IST could be disseminated across sectors.

(With inputs from PTT)

Why is BRICS exploring cross-border payments?

How do cross-border payments work? What are the instructions between banks and costs involved in each step? How have transaction times reduced? Why does BRICS want to change the system? What alternatives are being explored? What does India propose?

Srinivasan Ramani

The story so far:

The 18th BRICS summit in New Delhi to be held in September, with India as the Chair, is expected to push for mechanisms to facilitate cross-border payments between members, including links between digital payment systems and central bank digital currencies (CBDCs). According to a report in *The Hindu BusinessLine*, ahead of the summit, finance ministries' and central bank representatives from BRICS countries met in Jaipur on August 12-13 to discuss financial cooperation, payments, and the wider use of national currencies in settling trade between members.

How do current cross-border payments work?

Sending money from one country to another requires a chain of transactions. Let's say, an importer in Cape Town is buying passenger cars from an exporter in Chennai. The payment does not travel directly from the South African bank to the Indian one. It travels via a series of intermediaries called correspondent banks that hold accounts with each other. Since the South African bank does not hold an account with the Indian one (and vice versa), the payment is routed through a larger international bank that deals with both and is typically headquartered in London or New York. Because very few banks hold both rupees and rand, the payment involves converting rand to dollars and dollars to rupees where, in essence, the dollar acts like a vehicle currency, even though no American is involved in the trade.

What is SWIFT?

Now, apart from the money, there are also instructions that travel between the banks. This is handled by SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication), which

The 2024 BRICS report under Russia's chairmanship argued that this part of the financial system is monopolised by a single institution, raising transaction costs

is a Belgium-based cooperative and overseen by the National Bank of Belgium along with the G-10 central banks, including the U.S. Federal Reserve. SWIFT is a messaging network, like a secure post-office. It enables institutions to exchange payment instructions through it and settle amounts separately. It is used directly by more than 11,000 institutions in over 200 countries. Smaller banks reach it indirectly through larger banks that are part of the SWIFT network, which is why it has become crucial and hard to displace.

What are the costs involved in each step?

Every intermediary charges a fee and the currencies are converted twice (rand to dollar and dollar to rupees). So the foreign exchange margins are paid twice. A 2019 BRICS survey of cross-border payment systems, conducted by Brazil, found that Brazilian respondents reported foreign exchange margins of 2.5% with the figure rising to 8.5% for payments in Africa and, in some cases, as high as 20%.

While speed of transactions used to be a major issue, SWIFT claims that its SWIFT Global Payments Innovation has helped reduce transaction times significantly. Some structural delays remain even as the transaction chain has also become thinner. The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) found that active correspondent banking relationships fell by 20% between 2011 and 2018 with regional declines varying from 12% to 30% and Latin America being the worst affected. The reasons for this decline were largely commercial. Payment volumes kept growing during this period, even as they travelled through a smaller network.

Why does BRICS want to change this system?

For developing economies, though, payments in a handful of dominant currencies such as the U.S. dollar, the euro and the Japanese yen expose countries to the monetary policies of the countries that issue them. The 2024 BRICS report under Russia's chairmanship argued that this part of the financial system is monopolised by a single institution, raising transaction costs. Alternatives to the system suffer from the fact that they have to convince a large number of banks and regulators to join before being useful. A bank that uses an alternative system to deal with sanctioned entities – several Russian banks were cut off from SWIFT in 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine – also risks sanctions, which deters others from joining. A sanctions-hit Russia has pushed hardest for an alternative and is also the reason why others are wary of joining one.

What changes can be envisaged in the BRICS discussions?

The idea being explored is a payment system where, instead of payments moving through several correspondent banks with dollar conversions, national payment systems would connect to each other directly. This could be done in pairs as India and Singapore have already done for remittances by linking the former's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and the latter's PayNow systems. But building bilateral systems individually will not scale appropriately.

An alternative could be via a shared hub that each country joins. One such effort is Project Nexus, designed by the BIS and handed over to a company set up by six central banks, including India's Reserve Bank of India. It is set to go live only in 2027. Notably, it is not a BRICS initiative.

The BRICS discussions would extend this idea to the use of central bank digital currencies. Here, central banks issue digital versions of their currencies for use between banks – a settlement asset, not the retail digital rupee held by individuals – and exchange them on a common platform. Both legs of a currency swap would occur at the same instant or not at all, removing the risk of paying out before the other side pays, which speeds up settlement and reduces the capital banks must set aside against such transactions.

The 2024 BRICS report claims transactions settled this way would yield significant cost savings. Only one such platform runs today – mBridge, built by the BIS with the central banks of China, Thailand, Hong Kong, and the UAE, which the BIS handed to its participants and left in October 2024. Over 95% of its settlement volume is in China's digital yuan, according to People's Bank of China figures reported by Reuters.

The Kazan declaration of BRICS in 2024 agreed to "discuss and study the feasibility" of an independent settlement system called BRICS Clear, but the Rio declaration the following year did not mention it.

What is India's position?

India's own proposal, reported in January, is that members link their CBDCs for trade and tourism payments. Indian officials have been careful to frame the payment systems as a means of cutting transaction costs and speeding up settlement rather than as initiatives to displace the dollar – even as Russian proposals, and those of some Brazilian economists, have gone further, towards alternative financial systems that would reduce dependence on the dollar.

U.S. President Donald Trump, in November 2024, had threatened to impose 100% tariffs on BRICS countries if they moved away from the dollar and a further 10% tariff on countries aligning with vaguely defined "anti-American" BRICS policies during last year's Rio summit. The threats were not carried out. But even though they were not targeted at payment systems, this could perhaps be a reason why Indian officials have framed discussions only as a matter of reducing transaction costs.

Why is the Centre opposed to totalisers?

What are totalisers and how do they prevent candidates from determining the voting pattern of individual polling booths? What has been the Centre's position? What does the Election Commission of India believe? What has the Supreme Court said?

Sreeparna Chakrabarty

The story so far:

In September 1, a Supreme Court Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Jyotsna Bagchi and V. Mohana asked the Central government to examine the possibility of introducing totaliser machines for counting votes recorded in Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) in order to protect the secrecy of booth-wise voting patterns and prevent elections at individual booths from being identified and potentially victimised.

The case dates back to 2014, when two individuals, Yogesh Gupta and Imran Khan, moved a public interest petition (PIL) seeking a direction to the poll panel to mix votes cast at various polling stations in a constituency to prevent candidates from intimidating voters in places that had rebuffed them.

What is a totaliser?

A totaliser is a proposed aimed at preventing candidates from determining the voting pattern of individual polling booths. A totaliser allows the votes cast in about 14 polling booths to be

The Centre has argued that knowledge of booth-wise vote shares allowed the candidates to work harder in areas where support for them was low

counted together. At present, the votes are tallied booth by booth. It was developed by Bharat Electronics Limited, Bengaluru, and Electronics Corporation of India Limited, Hyderabad.

A totaliser is an interface connected to the main control unit of a cluster of 14 EVMs. Pressing the result button on the totaliser gives the consolidated votes polled by each candidate across the 14 EVMs, without revealing the voting pattern of individual polling areas.

Why was the petition seeking totalisers filed in the Supreme Court?

In 2018, Additional Solicitor General Maninder Singh told the Bench, which was led by then CJI Dipak Misra, that installing a totaliser could lead to data breach even before vote counting began.

More recently, the Centre again raised the same apprehension. This prompted the Court to give the Election Commission two weeks to respond to this fear.

A Law Ministry affidavit told the Court that a group of ministers headed by the then Home Minister Rajnath Singh had decided last September that "intimidation/victimisation of voters as apprehended may not occur on a larger scale in this era of media activism".

What has been the Election Commission's stand?

The Election Commission has been consistently supportive of introducing totalisers. It first suggested the measure to the United Progressive Alliance government in 2008. In a 2018 submission before the Supreme Court, the poll body stated that "a time has come for introduction of totaliser for counting of the votes." That support has continued into the current round of hearings. The poll body informed the Court that it had earlier recommended the totaliser system to the Union government. The senior advocate representing the Election Commission backed the goal of protecting voter anonymity, while also flagging some practical and legal challenges in actually implementing the proposal, including concerns around booth-wise verification and VVPAT.

identifying booth-wise voting patterns did not lead to voter intimidation and that there was no need to stop the disclosure of booth-wise results. It argued that knowledge of booth-wise vote shares allowed the candidates to work harder in areas where support for them was low, thus producing better results for everyone involved.

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What has the Supreme Court said now?

The Supreme Court asked the Central government to state its position on introducing a totaliser system for counting votes recorded through EVMs. The Court specifically sought to know if there are any impediments to introducing such a mechanism and if there would be any negative impact because of it. The Election Commission has also been asked to submit its proposal to the government.



File photo of women waiting in queue to exercise their franchise for the local body election at a polling booth in Erode, Tamil Nadu. M. GOVARTHAN

PROFILES

The house of multilaterals

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

At the Bishkek Summit, member countries, including India, have condemned the military strikes on Iran, reaffirmed 'support for its sovereignty and territorial integrity', and criticised the U.S. and Israel for violating the principles of international law and the UN Charter

Kallol Bhattacharjee

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) held its 26th summit at Kyrgyz Republic's capital Bishkek on August 31-September 1, which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian and other leaders of the member countries. The summit marked the completion of 25 years of the organisation that was launched on June 15, 2001 with China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan – the Shanghai five – as its founding members. India and Pakistan joined the group in 2017.

The Bishkek meet was the first summit of the grouping since the U.S. and Israel started their war on Iran on February 28, 2026, killing the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and a host of other senior officials. The Bishkek Declaration expressed "deep concern", and condemned military strikes on Iran, reaffirmed "support for its sovereignty and territorial integrity", and criticised the U.S. and Israel for violating the principles of international law and the UN Charter.

They also condemned the assassination of Ali Khamenei and welcomed the peace process that is being supported and mediated by multiple countries, including SCO member Pakistan. In an indirect support for Iran in its nuclear negotiations with the U.S., the SCO summit advocated "inalienable right" of the member countries to "develop" "atomic energy for peaceful purposes".

The declaration also asserted that the only way to ensure lasting stability in the West Asian region is through a just settlement of the Palestine question. Member states maintained silence on Russia's role in the Ukraine war and added that "unilateral and unlimited build-up of global missile defence systems by groups of states" has a "negative impact on international security and stability".

The declaration also mentioned that "unauthorised satellite Internet



services on the territory of Member States" is a violation of international law – an obvious reference to entrepreneur Elon Musk's Starlink providing Internet services in parts of Eastern Ukraine and Iran.

Indian delegation

Prime Minister Modi led the Indian delegation at the summit where he spoke about ensuring that there is "no double standards" in fighting terrorism and called for peace and stability in Afghanistan. He highlighted India's role in ensuring supply of relief materials to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan over the years, and spoke in favour of greater connectivity between the markets of the SCO members while respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states.

The declaration also called on Afghanistan to form an "inclusive government". Mr. Modi's mention of connectivity while respecting territorial integrity is an apparent reference to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that has been a target of India's criticism over the years. This factor indicated a bit of dissonance within the grouping as India stayed away from endorsing the

China-led BRI but other member states expressed support and also advocated alignment between the BRI and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Mr. Modi's focus on terrorism at the Bishkek summit highlighted an uncomfortable issue India will have to deal with over the next year. With the conclusion of the summit, Pakistan has assumed the chair of the SCO, and the group's next summit will be held in that country.

The Ministry of External Affairs has not yet clarified whether Mr. Modi will travel to Pakistan to attend the SCO summit next year. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had visited Islamabad in 2024 to attend the 23rd meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government. The Pahalgam terror attack of April 22, 2025, the subsequent Operation Sindoor, and India's decision to place the Indus Waters Treaty 'in abeyance' have further complicated India-Pakistan relations. These developments will be a factor in New Delhi's decision on the level at which the government sends representatives to next year's summit in Pakistan.

The Bishkek Declaration included strong language on the trioka of

challenges – "terrorism, separatism and extremism" – and "strongly condemned" terrorism, reflecting India's concerns as well as those of other members.

The SCO, which includes both Russia and Iran as members, provides a unique platform for the two countries to articulate their positions on the wars. It allows the primary actors in these conflicts to explain their objectives and positions in a multilateral setting. The SCO also gives the world an opportunity to engage China multilaterally, particularly on issues such as freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

A platform for engagement

It also provides India and Pakistan with a platform for sustained engagement within a broader multilateral framework. Such engagement is important for regional stability and can help prevent bilateral hostilities from spilling over. The SCO does not have a collective defence component and several of its members have differences and disputes with one another – for example, India-Pakistan tensions and India-China border problem – yet, the grouping has

managed to survive for 25 years.

The grouping has 29 charter bodies like the Council of Heads of State, the Council of Heads of Government, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, meetings of heads of ministries and/or agencies, the Council of National Coordinators, as well as over 40 working mechanisms of interaction in various fields.

These charter bodies meet throughout the year and serve as formal channels of communication on issues of concern to member states. In the event of a sudden conflict or a cross-border natural calamity, such frequent consultations can serve a practical purpose. The SCO also exerts some pressure on the Trump-era world order. Its leaders have periodically called for greater use of local currencies in trade, a practice viewed with scepticism in the West, particularly by the current U.S. leadership. The announcement of the establishment of an SCO Development Bank is another step in this direction.

Diplomatic objectives

India has used the SCO to advance its diplomatic objectives on multiple occasions since joining the grouping in 2017. Two relevant examples are the 2025 Tianjin Summit and the 2024 Kazan Summit. Seeking to rebuild ties after the setback at Galwan, India and China began to reengage at the Kazan Summit in Russia, where Mr. Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping.

This was followed by another meeting between the two leaders in Tianjin where they agreed on an 'Early Harvest' proposal on boundary delimitation and resumption of border trade through three points. The Tianjin meeting demonstrated that the two sides retained the political will to meet despite the strain in ties following Operation Sindoor in May 2025, when China provided support to Pakistan as India targeted terror camps in Pakistani territory.

It also showed that, amid an uncertain phase in India-U.S. relations, with President Donald Trump imposing punitive tariffs on Indian goods, New Delhi could engage all major stakeholders and maintain necessary diplomatic dialogue.

THE GIST

▼ The Bishkek Summit marked the completion of 25 years of the SCO that was launched on June 15, 2001 with China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan – the Shanghai five – as the original members. India and Pakistan became members of the group in 2017

▼ Prime Minister Modi led the Indian delegation at the summit where he spoke about ensuring "no double standards" in fighting terrorism and called for peace and stability in Afghanistan

▼ The Bishkek Declaration included strong language on the trioka of challenges – "terrorism, separatism and extremism" – and "strongly condemned" terrorism, reflecting India's concerns

Power beyond the pulpit

Kanthapuram A.P. Aboobacker

The Muslim cleric and scholar based in Keralam has faced criticism over his recent comments that women should remain at home rather than occupy public spaces

Abdul Latheef Naha

Kanthapuram A.P. Aboobacker Musliar, the Grand Mufti of India, has been a leading figure in Keralam's traditional Sunni Muslim community for more than five decades. Not a stranger to controversies, Kanthapuram, as he is popularly known, recently hogged the headlines for jointly issuing a circular to *mohallas* in his capacity as general secretary of the Samstha Kerala Jamiyathul Ulama, asking them "not to exhibit women in front of other men on the streets or stages" during Islamic celebrations.

Issued in the context of the Milad festivities, the circular courted controversy, following which Kanthapuram said bringing women to public forums would cause serious "chaos" and that Islam prescribed purdah for women to prevent this. The comments triggered sharp criticism from different sections and leaders, including from Chief Minister V.D. Sasitharan, who said the cleric's comments were unsuitable for modern, progressive Keralam. The CPI(M), his long-term ally, too, sharply attacked the decree.

But that controversy is only one part of the story of a scholar whose influence extends across In-



dia and to Muslim communities abroad. Kanthapuram, Ustad in Keralam, is known as Sheikh Abubakar Ahmad in the wider Muslim world. He is the founder of Jamia Markaz at Karanthur near Kozhikode, around which he has built a large religious, educational and social network.

At 89, he continues to teach the Hadith collection regarded by Muslims as the most authentic collection of reports on Prophet Muhammad's teachings and practices.

Kanthapuram's rise began when the Samstha Kerala Jamiyathul Ulama, the traditional body of Islamic scholars in Keralam. He was one of its prominent secretaries under Shamsul Ulama E.K. Aboobacker Musliar. In 1989, after the influence of the Indian Union Muslim League (UML) led to a split, Kanthapuram and his followers walked out and formed a separate organisation. The division conti-

nued, leaving Keralam's traditional Sunni community broadly divided between the E.K. and A.P. factions. He built his organisation around Markaz Saquafathi Sunniyya, founded at Karanthur in 1978.

His project Markaz Knowledge City near Kozhikode became controversial after a strand of hair claimed to belong to Prophet Muhammad was brought there. His followers regard it as a sacred relic; critics have questioned its authenticity. CPI(M) leader Pinarayi Vijayan famously called it "body waste". Kanthapuram has repeatedly faced criticism over his conservative views on women.

Political influence

His political influence grew after the 1989 split, when his group developed close ties with the CPI(M)-led establishment in Keralam. Yet Kanthapuram has maintained relations across party lines. Leaders

of the Congress, the IUML, the CPI(M) and the BJP have met him. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has met him several times.

His reach extends well beyond politics. He was associated with the Amman Message and A Common Word, international initiatives promoting Islamic unity and Muslim-Christian understanding.

He has used these networks for humanitarian causes. In 2025, he intervened in the case of Kerala nurse Nimisha Priya, who was facing execution in Yemen, and saved her from the gallows through contacts with influential Yemeni religious figures.

The disappearance of Islamic reformist Chennammoula in 1993 remains a difficult chapter. Kanthapuram was questioned by the CBI but was not made an accused. The Kerala High Court later rejected a petition seeking to arraign him for lack of sufficient evidence.

Few religious leaders in Keralam have remained so influential for so long. From a young scholar in Kozhikode to the head of an international network, Kanthapuram's influence extends far beyond Karanthur. To his followers, he is a scholar, teacher and institution-builder; to his critics, a conservative cleric with deep influence over public and political life.

An icon of modern warfare

Javelin

The anti-tank system India is planning to acquire is a mainstay brigade combat team weapon for the U.S. Army and Marine Corps

Murali N. Krishnaswamy

"BIG news! India plans to buy the battle-tested Javelin anti-tank system", U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gora posted on X on August 28. This is "a great step forward in the U.S.-India defense relationship, opening the door to co-production possibilities", he wrote. The significance of the announcement lies not merely in the planned purchase, but in what the Javelin brings to India's defence arsenal.

Developed and made by the Javelin Joint Venture (JJV) between Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, the Javelin has been described as a versatile, portable and multi-purpose weapon system that can handle a spectrum of threats. More precisely, it is a "fire-and-forget" anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) system that comprises a Command Launch Unit (CLU) and the missile. The CLU has the day/night sighting system, the electronics and the controls while the missile's imaging infrared seeker guides it after the launch. Locking onto its target before launch, it allows the operator to move away after firing.

A peek into the company's production literature uncovers the following list: with over 20 years of performance, the Javelin has



been in action in operations across a range of theatres. After classroom training of only 72 hours, a soldier can take advantage of the missile's 'low-signature' launch (or minimal detectability) to carry out a variety of attack modes; these range from top-attack targets such as tanks to direct-attack capability for caves, bunkers or soft targets.

Operational readiness

And, with an operational readiness rate of 99% and an engagement success rate of 94%, the armament has established itself as a mainstay brigade combat team weapon for the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps. It is expected to be in the U.S. military's operational inventory until 2050. The company has also highlighted its economic impact, covering 63 domestic suppliers in 18 states and 22 international suppliers. But it is one point that stands out: the detail of "5,000 combat fir-

ings (Prior to Ukraine)".

In service since 1996, the Javelin has been used in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and also in Afghanistan. Yet, it is in Ukraine that the Javelin acquired its reputation as a weapon that could take on Russian might. The Javelin also has an interesting imagery. In a 2022 article, journalist Matthew Gault, who writes on conflict and culture, highlighted the popularity of "St. Javelin, a symbol of the conflict in Ukraine". Surrounded by a bright red halo and the golden trident coat-of-arms of Ukraine, this creation of "meme-mythology", clad in green robes, carries an FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missile launcher in her arms, portraying a defiant symbol of resistance.

For India, the nitty-gritty of the August 2026 announcement lies in the proposed assembly of the ATGMs; in the memorandum of understanding between JJV and Tata Advanced Systems Ltd

(TASL), Javelin All Up Rounds (AURs) are to be co-produced domestically. Much of the component production would be in the U.S. where the Lockheed Martin plant in Alabama will produce the Javelin's "sub-assembly kits", while Raytheon's facility in Arizona will manufacture its "guidance electronics units". Both systems will then be shipped to TASL for final assembly and incorporation into the ATGM. In essence, the U.S. will hold the reins.

The development also marks the difficulty that India has faced in overcoming a hurdle: it has taken it over 15 years to resolve differences with the U.S. over technology transfer and local production. During this time, India has maintained a diverse anti-tank inventory, including limited supplies of the Israeli Spike, while pursuing the Defence Research and Development Organisation's 'Third Generation' Fire and Forget Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile.

However, to a few established defence commentators, such as Rahul Bedi, the subtext of Mr. Gora's "big news" is the path that India has chosen for its anti-tank missile programme – either as a looming shadow over its indigenous missile efforts or a pragmatic response to a pressing military requirement.

REFLECTIONS

[THE BIG PICTURE]

Build liveable India to realise the incredible India potential

Clean streets, reliable transport, clear information and safe public spaces determine whether a visitor feels comfortable extending a stay or travelling beyond the main attraction

India's tourism potential is one of the country's great unfinished opportunities. We possess the history, culture, biodiversity, cuisine and living traditions that travellers search for across the world. Tourism can create work across the country and bring foreign exchange into local economies. It can also carry India's story, values and way of life to people who may never have visited us before.

Over the past few years, Indians have rediscovered their own country in unprecedented numbers. The next task is to make the country ready to receive the world. That opportunity has become more urgent as India's aviation market expands. Boeing forecasts that airlines in India and much of this expansion will serve domestic and on-board travel. India must ensure that it also creates a stronger market for inbound tourism.

There is nothing wrong with Indians travelling abroad. A confident country should welcome that freedom. But the same aircraft, airports and air routes can bring more international visitors to India, if our destinations are ready to receive them. Otherwise, India risks building the connectivity to carry Indian spending overseas without capturing a proportionate share of international spending at home.

The biggest case for boosting international tourism is employment. Official estimates

based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and the Tourism Satellite Account suggest that tourism supported about 84.63 million direct and indirect jobs in 2023-24.

The importance of these jobs lies in where they are created. Tourism can take employment beyond the largest metropolitan centres and connect local businesses to a much wider market. A visitor's spending reaches hotels and restaurants, but it also supports taxi operators, food producers, artisans, guides, homestays and small retailers. The World Bank estimates that small and medium-sized enterprises account for around 80% of licensed tourism and tourism-related businesses globally. A heritage town, a coastal village, a forest landscape or a craft tradition can therefore become the basis for local employment if it is connected to markets and managed well. Tourism gives states an economic use for assets that cannot be relocated.

The sector can also provide an important entry point for young people into the formal economy. Work in hospitality, food services, guiding and visitor management builds skills in customer service, languages, digital tools and operations that can be used across the wider services economy. The Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council estimates that the sector will require around 3 million additional workers between 2022 and 2028, creating a substantial opportunity for youth skilling.

This is why the Economic Survey described tourism as a relatively low-hanging fruit for job creation at a time when technology is reshaping services and protectionism is making manufacturing more difficult. But the opportunity will not be realised automatically. States will need to align training with actual demand, improve working conditions and

help local enterprises connect to hotels, travel companies and destination circuits. They must treat tourism as a jobs strategy.

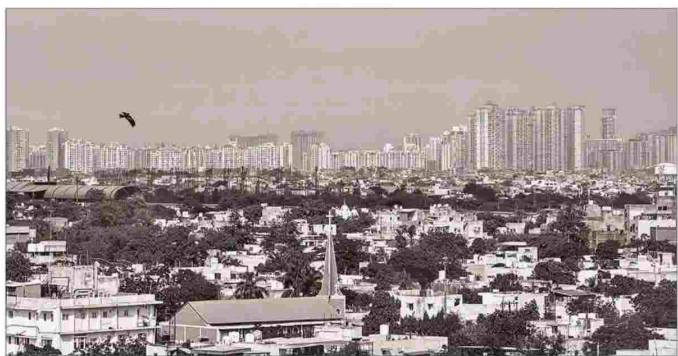
Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's Independence Day address this year placed this opportunity in the right context, identifying India's soft power as the seventh stream of the country's development strategy. Promoting India abroad is, therefore, not simply an advertising exercise. It is one of the most effective ways to build soft power because visitors encounter India through its people, its heritage, its landscapes and its living culture. Those experiences travel back with them through conversation, media and memory.

That message now needs to be matched by a serious promotional effort. In the Union Budget for 2026-27, the allocation under Overseas Promotion and Publicity, including Market Development Assistance, was ₹3.5 crore. A Parliamentary Standing Committee has noted that the entire amount is effectively committed to India's mandatory contributions to international organisations, leaving no meaningful allocation for international marketing. It described the absence of a dedicated promotional budget as a "serious deficiency". The ministry of tourism has reportedly sought ₹265 crore from the ministry of finance for promotional activities.

The Union government should create a ring-fenced promotional fund for international tourism, with resources large enough to support sustained campaigns in priority markets. Advertising and branding cannot be treated as an afterthought once infrastructure has been built. A destination has to be visible before a traveller considers visiting. The campaign should be based on clear market research and should distinguish experiences rather than repeat a general slogan. India's



Amitabh Kant



A city that is easier for a foreign visitor to navigate is usually easier for its own citizens to live in. Tourism also gives city governments a direct economic reason to improve basic services.

SUNIL GHOSH/HT PHOTO

embassies, airlines, airports, cultural institutions and private tourism companies should be part of the effort.

The states must carry a substantial part of this responsibility. India is not one tourism product. Rajasthan, Kerala, Goa, the North East, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and the Himalayan states each offer different reasons to visit. State governments are closest to these destinations and are responsible for many of the services that determine whether the visitor experience is good. They must promote their regions in overseas markets, build strong destination brands and commit their own resources to destination management. A state cannot expect the Union government to advertise a destination that it has not made easy to reach, safe to navigate and pleasant to experience. International promotion will work only when it is tied to better public spaces, reliable transport, clean surroundings, trained guides, honest pricing and well-managed heritage sites.

This is where Incredible India needs to become Liveable India. India is judged at the airport, on the road to the hotel, while looking

for a public toilet, at a heritage site and during an evening walk through a city. Clean streets, reliable transport, clear information and safe public spaces determine whether a visitor feels comfortable extending a stay or travelling beyond the main attraction.

These are also the conditions that residents need. A city that is easier for a foreign visitor to navigate is usually easier for its own citizens to live in. Waste collection, functioning public transport, walkable streets and well-maintained public spaces improve daily life and help local businesses attract customers. Tourism gives city governments a direct economic reason to improve basic services because the quality of those services affects where visitors go, how long they stay and what they spend.

India should begin with a limited number of high-potential circuits and take responsibility for the full visitor journey. Delhi-Agra-Jaipur, Mumbai-Goa-Hampi and Kochi-Munnar-Thekkady already have the visibility to attract international visitors. Nature and culture trails in the North East have similar potential. The aim should be to improve

the entire journey, including arrival, local transport, public spaces, interpretation, accommodation and departure. The Union government can provide funding and coordination, but the states must lead on execution and promotion.

Foreign tourism complements India's strong domestic travel market. Domestic travel provides the volume and resilience that sustain the sector through the year. Inbound tourism adds foreign-exchange earnings and access to international demand. The aim should be to grow both markets without allowing India's expanding aviation and travel economy to become primarily an engine for outbound spending.

If India treats tourism as a jobs strategy, a services export and a soft-power instrument, it can move from being a country that travels to being a country that is truly travelled to.

Amitabh Kant is the chancellor of NIT University, chairman, Fairfax Centre for UPE University, former G20 Sherpa, India, and former CEO, NITI Aayog. The views expressed are personal

[SUNDAY SENTIMENTS]

Karan Thapar



Imran Khan as Munir's 'rock-hard place' problem

I can't claim Imran Khan is a friend but I've interviewed him on multiple occasions. In fact, in multiple locations — at a hotel in Delhi, at his home in Bani Gala near Islamabad, at his hospital in Lahore and at his in-laws' estate outside London in Kingston. On each occasion, he was charming. You can't help but get attracted to the man. Usually, he speaks in a blunt and forthright manner but never offends and certainly not rudely. But he always makes his point and leaves you in no doubt of it.

He also has a droll sense of humour. "Are you going to eat me up?", he asked when I last interviewed him. "Certainly not," I replied. "Why do you ask?" "Because you did it on all the earlier occasions," he laughed loudly. "Doesn't it give you indignation?"

In those days, he wasn't the most popular politician in Pakistan. Today, he undoubtedly is. He has been in power for over three years and the Pakistan government seems determined to keep him there.

The charges he faces, for which he's been convicted, are not his problem. His real problem is he doesn't get on with Pakistan army chief Asim Munir. When Imran Khan was Prime Minister, he had sacked Munir as director general of the Inter-Services Intelligence. Undoubtedly, Munir is getting his own back.

The major charges Khan faces are the Al-Qadr Trust case regarding land corruption, the Toshakhana case about illegally retaining and selling expensive State gifts, the Cipher case which is to do with sharing the contents of a classified diplomatic cable and inciting his supporters to attack military and government sites after his May 2023 arrest.

For three years, he has languished in jail, in a small cell, frequently in solitary confinement, usually denied meetings with his relatives and, often, his doctors. Not surprisingly, his health has suffered. He is reportedly being treated for a vision in his right eye. Others say he has anxiety and blood pressure issues.

Last month, the Pakistan Supreme Court ordered Khan to be moved to a private hospital for medical examination and treatment within two days and stay there till September 16.

It allowed him to meet his family once a week and speak to his sons by phone in London twice a week. Twenty-four hours later, the government moved a review petition calling the order "discriminatory". It claimed Khan is "a convict and has to be treated in accordance with the law like any other convict." A day later, the Supreme Court registry returned the appeal deemed incomplete.

This meant the government had no choice but to do as ordered by the court. It chose to act very differently. Instead, it took him to a State hospital late at night for just a couple of hours. Neither his family nor his personal doctor were present when he was examined. By daybreak, he was back in Adiala jail.

This is surely contempt of court. More importantly, it is a further indication that the government is determined "to eliminate" Khan? His two sons, Sulaiman and Kasim, believe he will not survive his imprisonment in solitary confinement unless he's given proper medical treatment. Is that why it's being denied?

The mistreatment of Imran Khan can only add to his appeal and popularity. By its prejudicial behaviour the Pakistan government is enhancing his stature, not eroding it. Khan today is loved in his own way he certainly wasn't when he lost power in 2022.

IMRAN KHAN'S REAL PROBLEM IS HE DOESN'T GET ON WITH PAKISTAN ARMY CHIEF ASIM MUNIR. WHEN HE WAS PRIME MINISTER, HE HAD SACKED MUNIR AS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INTER-SERVICES INTELLIGENCE. UNDOUBTEDLY, MUNIR IS GETTING HIS OWN BACK

If anything should happen to him, like Caesar's ghost, Khan will become more powerful and more threatening to the government.

If Khan alive worries Munir and Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif, Khan dead could very well paralyse them. That they're scared of his popularity and its consequences, is perhaps, undeniable. Why then are they fueling it with their inexplicable treatment?

I get the feeling they're creating their own nemesis. If they bring it on themselves for gender equality, it's making capital for the change we are trying to create.

Often, grants and other resources are piecemeal and not enough to create the infrastructure and systems designed for long-term, gender equality. At the same time, India's private philanthropy has grown to approximately ₹4.43 lakh crore in FY25, with family philanthropy contributing roughly 42% of that total. Private philanthropy directed toward development has reached a meaningful scale, yet only 8% is identified as gender-specific. India is uniquely placed to help shape this agenda. We have

Karan Thapar is the author of *Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story*. The views expressed are personal

Reading Manusmriti and its many contradictions

These days, the *Manusmriti* is the subject of heated debate. The debate relates to whether the *smriti* sanctioned patriarchy and treated women as subordinate. The problem in evaluating Hindu texts, and the Hindu world view, is that simplistic condemnation or exaggerated counter claims are both unwarranted, because for every proposition made, an opposing one can be cited. This surface contradiction is not uncommon for such a profound, complex and ancient corpus of thought and practice which nurtured differences of opinion.

The first thing to understand is the difference between *shruti* and *smriti*. *Shrutis* are believed to be revealed texts, such as the *Vedas*. *Smritis* are texts which are remembered and then compiled. The *Manusmriti* belongs to the latter category, in part of the normative tradition of *Dharmashastras* — a large body of Sanskrit literature concerned with *dharma*. Duty, righteous conduct, social obligation, right property, family relationships, kingship, inheritance, and judicial procedure.

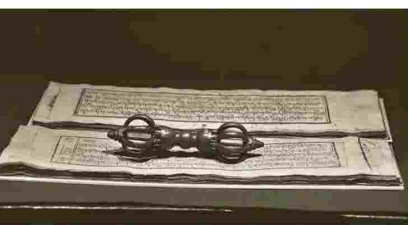
Traditional Hindu understanding attributes the *Manusmriti* to the primordial sage, Manu. Modern scholarship, however, places its composition broadly in the period between the second century BCE and the second century CE. It is important to remember that the *smriti* is not a homogenous text, and contradicts itself often, indicating it had more than one author, and

additions made over time.

On what it says specifically on the question of women, the evidence becomes decidedly contradictory for anyone wishing to place Manu neatly in either a pro-woman or anti-woman box. There are passages that appear to be unambiguously patriarchal. In verse 5.3, Manu famously declares that a woman should be protected by her father in childhood, by her husband in youth and by her sons in old age, and that she should not live independently. But in interpreting the actual Sanskrit text, there is debate on whether "independently" means under the supervision of men, or that men — father, husband, brothers or sons — are conjoined at every stage of a woman's life to protect her independence.

This possibility cannot be completely dismissed because the same *Manusmriti* in verse 3.36 says: "Where women are honoured, the gods rejoice; where they are not honoured, all rites are fruitless." The verses surrounding this declaration instruct fathers, brothers, husbands and other male members of the household to honour women and adorn them. Another verse says that where women suffer, the family perishes; where they do not suffer, the family prospers. Manu even connects the happiness of husband and wife with the enduring welfare of the household.

For should Manu be mistaken for the whole of Hindu civilisation, for there is no single uncontested Hindu legal code. On the



The problem in evaluating Hindu texts is that simplistic condemnation or exaggerated counter claims are both unwarranted.

SHUTTERSTOCK

contrary, the Hindu intellectual tradition is astonishingly plural. The *Bhadracharya Upanishad* recounts the episode where in a large assembly of learned men called by King Janaka of Videha, Gargi opened questions the most prominent and leading sage, Yajnavalkya, as does, later, the sage's wife, Maitreyi, in the *Mahabharata*, the fiery Draupadi bluntly asks Yudhishtira what right he had to put her on the stake?

The *Satpatha Brahmana* states that a woman is half her husband. This is in conformity with the concept of *ardharashtrawara*, where divinity is depicted as androgynous — half male and half female. There is also the powerful feminine principle of *Shakti*, goddesses who are not merely comforts but, in some texts, the supreme cosmic power; women poets, saints and rulers; and literary traditions in which women can be morally, intellectually and spiritually superior to men. The *Arthashastra* records that in Mauryan times, women could be bodyguards to the king, serve in the administration, choose an ascetic's life, and donate to temples and monasteries using their own money.

Pavan K Varma is an author, diplomat, and former Rajya Sabha MP. The views expressed are personal

[ENGENDER]

Lalita Panicker



Better data can help fund effective gender initiatives

Funding is a major sticking point for most efforts on gender equality. The government has adopted gender budgeting but it is spread over so many different areas that it is not nearly enough to bring about the needed changes. That said, different types of financing, from philanthropy to market-based capital and even grants, can be used to promote gender equality. But there are challenges that need overcoming. These issues were discussed recently at a panel on Philanthropic Opportunity: Designing the Capital Stack for Gender and Youth Empowerment, in New Delhi. Sudarshana Kundu, founder and director of GenderSphere who addressed the panel, says, "The challenge is not only mobilising more capital for gender equality; it's making capital fit the change we are trying to create."

Often, grants and other resources are piecemeal and not enough to create the infrastructure and systems designed for long-term, gender equality. At the same time, India's private philanthropy has grown to approximately ₹4.43 lakh crore in FY25, with family philanthropy contributing roughly 42% of that total. Private philanthropy directed toward development has reached a meaningful scale, yet only 8% is identified as gender-specific. India is uniquely placed to help shape this agenda. We have

growing domestic wealth, increasingly influential family philanthropy, a dynamic social enterprise ecosystem, powerful women's funds and movements, and a generation of young leaders who are redefining both wealth and responsibility. The opportunity is not to import a model of gender philanthropy, but to build one that is locally rooted, globally relevant and commensurate with the ambition of gender equality.

The lack of data makes pooling resources and partnerships difficult. Gender equality, the challenges of which vary between states, communities, classes, and even individuals, can't be addressed by just allocating a chunk of money to the problem. There are several examples which can be shared for the greater common good, many areas where funders and schemes can work together and build a sturdy ecosystem which can last. Of course, at all times, it is important to be in sync with government schemes and policies if for nothing but to avoid duplication of efforts. Targeted funding will yield much better results than scattershot efforts.

Lack of data and information is not a uniquely Indian problem, though. In *The Lords of Poverty*, author Graham Hancock, once a UN employee, speaks of how misguided funding and aid, though well-intentioned, deliver little to no benefit to the end user. He illustrates this with an extreme example: A huge consignment of slimming pills going to war-torn Somalia where starvation was rampant at that time and refrigerators going to Sudan to areas which did not have electricity.

In many cases, one criticism has been that funding is given without taking into account the needs of the target women users. Their voices have to be heard to channel resources and money in an effective manner. The funding and resources should be flexible and change as circumstances do.

The views expressed are personal

[SUNDAY LETTERS]

The new West Asia calculus

This is with reference to "Mecca-pact questions India must ask itself" by Karan Thapar (Aug 30). The pact between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey is a major shift in West Asian security. India must closely monitor this development while safeguarding its growing economic and strategic partnerships with West Asia and Europe.

Sanjay Chopra

Not a good look for men and society

This is with reference to "Judge work, not looks, of women in public life" by Namita Bhander (Aug 30). People cross boundaries and leave no stone unturned in commenting on the looks of women irrespective of their work, status, and talent. Care needs to be taken when speaking publicly about women to maintain their dignity and give respect to their contributions to society.

Abhilasha Gupta

Judgemental mindset with comments on looks of women is completely uncalled for. Society must focus on the quality of their work & the proficiency they bring to the table.

Anuradha Bisaria

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

Kitchen pest to political force: Rise of the roach

My brother and I would be in our rooms doing homework or reading or chatting with friends, when the enveloping calm from Ustad Amir Khan's elaborations in all vilambit laya emanating from our living room was suddenly shattered by the sounds of scurrying feet, followed by my mother screaming "someone do something please..." We would dash across, chappal in hand, often only to discover that it was just an onion skin that had been picked up by the breeze, but occasionally to murder a visiting cockroach.



Abhijit Banerjee
TASTING ECONOMICS

There is a name for the exaggerated fear of cockroaches, "katsaridaphobia", from katsarida, which is Greek for cockroaches. The hatred of cockroaches is not new: the ancient Egyptians prayed to the ram-headed god Khnum to get protection from them.

When asked, people talk about the fact that they go everywhere (meaning that they wallow in rotting food and worse) and then get into the food. Which

I have been thinking about what my mum would have made of the events of the last few months. Despite her katsaridaphobia, she would surely have been amused by the cheeky humour of naming the "party" after her least favourite insect. She would have certainly admired their chutzpah as they tried to stick out their necks. —Why are you young guys so meek in front of authority?" she would often ask me, ignoring the fact that I was pushing sixty. Her prime targets were young women, who, she felt, had made very little progress in terms of advocating for themselves since she was a young woman in the 1960s. But she was also troubled by the general unwillingness to challenge authority, be it parents, teachers, or political leaders.

The Jantar-Mantar crowd's commitment to holding out for what they wanted — the resignation of the education minister — would have made her happy. And she would have been truly delighted by the sight of young women carrying posters full of words that they aren't "supposed to know" (let alone use), not

the government's reaction made it very clear where the country's youth stand in the nation's politics. This was not new — it is precisely what made them embrace their insect identity — but it united the youth in a way that mere self-interest could never have. What started as a movement of aggrieved aspiring medical students became the rallying cry of a large and diverse group of the youth, including many for whom medical school is an impossible dream.

A low opinion of the wisdom of the young cuts across pretty much all political parties in India (and indeed South Asia). I first encountered it with the communist parties in West Bengal: the young are impulsive and emotional, and lack the kind of considered (cynical?) judgement that politics requires. The idea that they bring something else, like hope and vision, spunk and energy, mostly never comes up. Volodymyr Zelenskyy and John F. Kennedy would not stand a chance in our party politics.

The prejudice against the young, of course, extends much beyond politics. I grew up at a time when age was authority. Not only our parents, but pretty much every male adult walked around with a wand of wisdom. Twenty-year-olds were taken only marginally more seriously than six-year-olds, and were expected to hide their cigarettes from all the neighborhood "uncles", which meant pretty much everyone above 40.

I remember standing at a street corner with a couple of friends, waiting for the puchka-wala (puchka is the tarter and spicier Bengali golgappa, IMHO infinitely superior to the sweeter versions popular in the rest of India) to drop one of those delicious fireballs into our empty sal-deli packages, when one of those middle-aged men of limited employability (and therefore little time on hand) walked up to us and demanded that the next round of puchkas was all his. When we protested, he said, "You think I didn't see you hide your cigarettes?" And that was that. Even I, who never went near any form of tobacco, lost mine.

Some 20 years ago, a very charming man of roughly my dad's age claimed that Google had fully undermined the authority of age: "it used to be that I was the expert on everything, but now it was what came out of my mouth. One day recently, I said that the capital of Armenia was Yerevan, and a young man did something on his computer and told me, 'Uncle, Yerevan is in Georgia'."

I think my friend was overly optimistic. It may be that we are more willing to check our facts, but when it comes to who



we live with or how we live, the young still have very little authority.

In a 2018 survey of 150,000 households, 83% said that they had an arranged marriage. A large fraction of the young in a recent survey claims to eat meat but not at home, out of "respect for the family". And while there are no similarly comprehensive studies of career choices, in a recent study in the Journal of Education and Health Promotion of 570 college-bound adolescents in Udupi district, over three scholars from the Manipal College of Nursing (Pienyu et al., 2024), 87% report high parental pressure to do well in competitive exams for medicine/engineering/tech.

The trouble is that high school completion rates have gone from 26% for boys and 19% for girls in 2005 to 54% and 48%, respectively, in 2020. Good news in itself, but since there aren't many more good public educational institutions (and the better private ones are expensive), it makes competition for quality education even more intense. To make matters worse, the supply of desirable jobs seems to be drying up: the most coveted jobs are the salaried ones, but average salary actually fell slightly between 2017 and 2023, after adjusting for inflation, and unemployment among those

under 30 was 16% in 2023.

No wonder 98% of the adolescents in the Udupi study are highly stressed about academics, and particularly about test-taking. The least they could expect is that the grown-ups will do their part. When that failed, they were blandly told that they had to retake the famously stressful NEET. It was the last straw.

I usually stay away from the prediction game, but if I had to guess, it would be hard to put this particular genie back in its bottle. The way the protests went — the widening sweep of issues, the mockery and the use of expletives — all points to a long-simmering anger that won't easily be assuaged. What is more, participation in the protest — speaking to authority in the language that the youth use among themselves but hide from their elders, rich in humour, irony (and obscenities) — must have been quite heady. It is hard to imagine rolling that back.

I am less sure of where it will land. Fairer tests won't end the accelerating rat race for the few jobs. AI has already slowed job growth in the tech sector, and there's a good chance of things getting worse. The young will need to rethink the entire shape of their lives. I leave that for a future column.

In terms of politics, it reminds me

RECIPE FOR MUTTON REZALA

Here is my mother's way to make mutton rezala, with the yogurt added at the end, which is unusual. Soak together 10 cashew nuts, 2 tbs charmagaz or just melon seeds, and 2 tbs toasted poppy seeds. Heat 1/4 cup oil and 1/4 cup buffalo ghee and fry 8 dried red chilies in it till they darken. Remove the chilies and add 1 piece of mace and 4 green cardamom pods to the oil, followed by a paste made from 1 medium (100 gm) onion, 1 heaped tbs chopped ginger paste and 1 tbs chopped garlic. Fry the paste in a large saucepan at low heat till you can see oil separating from it. While the onion-ginger-garlic paste is frying, grind the soaked nuts and seeds with 1 tbs toasted white pepper and 2 tbs coriander seeds into a fine powder. Mix it with 1.5 cups of water and set aside. Add 1 kilo bone-in lamb with some fat in it to the cooked onion paste and brown slightly and then mix in the spiced water. Pressure cook for 15 minutes and release the steam.

Let cool, uncovered, for 10 minutes. Add in 4 tbs yogurt that has been mixed with 4 tbs water, 1 tbs sugar and 2 tsp kewra water (or to taste), a few peeled almonds if you have them, and the fried red chilies and cook, stirring constantly, at low heat till steam starts to rise. Take it off the heat and serve, garnished with rose petals, if you have them.



(and others of my vintage) of the JP movement of 1974-75, another youth-dominated movement provoked by corruption and high-handed politics. It didn't solve those problems (Indira Gandhi clearly didn't change her style) but the leaders that came out of it — Sushil Modi (BJP), Lalu Prasad Yadav (RJD), Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP), Ram Vilas Paswan (JJP), and Nitish Kumar (JDP) — less prominently — at the time, Narendra Modi — came to dominate north Indian politics of the left and the right in the next 50 years. Their shared commitment was to fight the dominance of the English-edited British-ruled elite. It was through that they changed India. Perhaps the present generation will do the same for the dominance of age.

A low opinion of the wisdom of the young cuts across pretty much all political parties in India (and South Asia). The idea that they bring something else, like hope and vision, spunk and energy, mostly never comes up

is true. Thirty-five years since, I still remember that moment when I lifted the cover on a lovingly prepared bowl of rezala made from my mother's recipe, redolent with ground poppy seeds and charmagaz with a drizzle of new metro, to look into the eyes of a little cockroach probably quite relieved to be released from its fragrant prison. (Unable to face my American guests this was in New York) who I had been telling about this wonderful Bengali Muslim concoction. I threw the whole pot into the kitchen trash. We had some dal (and plenty of veggies), so no one starved, but I never dared to invite them back. But I still don't buy this as a reason why people hate roaches so much. Because then we would have a total horror of flies, since they are really impossible to keep out of the food. Maybe it's just the way cockroaches look, the slightly sneering expression on their faces — or their tendency to suddenly take off into flight. I should have grilled my mum.

because she loved obscenities — I never heard her use one — but because they were finally doing something that most of their fathers would hate.

I am less sure of her reaction to the movement's agenda. I can imagine her saying "we have so many bigger problems than medical college exams". I disagree. I think they were clever to pick an issue that is both so central to middle-class life in India and so clear-cut: who, after all, would support exams where the questions were leaked to a select few? Yet the government mostly ignored the first month of protests, except to insinuate that it could be part of a larger conspiracy. I suspect that the student leaders expected that — this is how state and national governments typically deal with evidence of massive and egregious governance failures, be it rape or corruption, followed by the announcement of a high-level inquiry, never to be heard of again. And whether or not this was part of the BJP plan,

A blast that lasts: Why Gen Z is tuning into the 90s

From 'saloon hits' to 'truckwala music', these viral playlists are reeling in young listeners who find refuge and feels in old favourites

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Gopal Das came to Delhi from Bihar's Munger district nearly two decades ago to drive an auto. He has seen the city change, from lines built and chief ministers come and go. But one thing has remained constant: his playlist.

"I used to listen to them on the radio when I came here. Now I hear the songs on YouTube using wireless earphones. Set against the nostalgic backdrop of a roadside saloon, it plays a set of songs that have almost become synonymous with the setting, including 'Mujhse Mohabbat Ka Izhaar Karta', 'Bahut Pyar Karte Hain', and 'Jeeta The Jiske Liye'. In keeping with the era, the website does not allow endless scrolling or an elaborate menu to choose from. Instead, there are just three: forward, back, and pause/play.

Men like Das never stopped listening. Now the genre is moving beyond these working-class spaces with Gen Z discovering the same music in rather different settings. From Spotify and Instagram reels to slick websites devoted to 'saloon' and truck-driver playlists.

Yash Bhardwaj, a 28-year-old designer and content creator from Mumbai, decided to tap into the moment and create a website "that plays bangers from barbershops. Set against the nostalgic backdrop of a roadside saloon, it plays a set of songs that have almost become synonymous with the setting, including 'Mujhse Mohabbat Ka Izhaar Karta', 'Bahut Pyar Karte Hain', and 'Jeeta The Jiske Liye'. In keeping with the era, the website does not allow endless scrolling or an elaborate menu to choose from. Instead, there are just three: forward, back, and pause/play.

"I made a playlist around two years ago on Spotify after a conversation with my friends. We were discussing how the barbershops always seem to play really good songs. Then I forgot about it. Recently, I saw a number of reels on my feed — many with millions of views — about men going to old-school saloons just to listen to these songs. That was when the idea for making the website was born," he says.

What Bhardwaj didn't anticipate was that his "silly" idea to get out of a creative rut "would go viral. Within hours of posting on X, his tweet had clocked over five million views, and similar websites began springing up, devoted to truck playlists, masood radio, chai tapri music and other saloon anthems.

It's not a simple case of nostalgia-baiting, says Bhardwaj. Apart from the fatigue of algorithm-driven music, the emotional excess of these songs is part of the appeal. "I was not even born when these songs were being made, but I connect with them. They mostly talk about feelings that most men are never good at expressing, not just to their lovers, but even to friends. I've had phases where I wanted to talk to my friend about something but stopped myself, thinking this was too emotional. That's how I turned to this music. A part of me felt seen, and it was oddly comforting," Bhardwaj says.

The music itself, and the way people consume it,



STILL PLAYING: The vibe-coded music player serves up a steady stream of Kumar Sanu-era tracks

has changed too. Aditya Lal, a former music executive-turned-lecturer, says that in the age of shortening attention spans, film music has become far less immersive. "An average song today is two to three minutes long, compared to five to six minutes in the 90s," says Lal, pointing to reel-friendly hooks and films carrying fewer songs than they once did. Music, he says, is designed to accompany another activity. "Functionals like gymming, cooking or running, in contrast to music that was meant to be hummed, played at gatherings, bought at record stores and sung together in theatres."

Lal cautions against slotting these listening habits into one bracket. "I've sat in cabs where rap and hip hop were being played, and contemporary music coming out of Dharavi, for instance, is well known. But there's a certain element of aspiration that 90s music channelled. A lot of the videos were shot abroad, with beautiful costumes, melody and lyrics. They were always meant to appeal to the masses."

Bhardwaj, on the other hand, sees another appeal in the old songs: escape, and the chance to slow down. "For a lot of people even today, mass movies and songs are a means to escape the realities of life. It's also a means to slow down intentionally, which is becoming a movement in itself," he points out. "This movement" has several offshoots, including vinyl-listening parties that are taking over cafes and bars in cities like Bengaluru and Delhi, but are often reserved for more highbrow genres like jazz and classical music.

For Das, this music is often his only company through long days on the road and nights spent alone. His wife, children and parents are back in the village. He listens while driving, but at night he likes to listen in bed. "I don't sleep. I will ever sit in an airplane, but through these songs, I have seen America and London already."



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Ask anyone in Delhi who grew up watching, playing, or simply spending their weekends at the Jaipur Polo Ground — sealed by the govt in June for an unspecified "larger public purpose and benefit" — what they will miss, and the question almost doesn't land. It was where generations learned the sport, trained horses and teams, where Sunday families brought together wide-brimmed hats and tailored dresses, ministers and army chiefs, diplomats and casual spectators in a ritual that was part sport, part social theatre. It's like asking someone to describe the house they grew up in.

For nearly a century, this 15.2-acre patch of green in the heart of Lutyens' Delhi was a regular fixture in the capital's winter calendar. The Jaipur Polo Ground (JPG) was gifted by Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II of Jaipur to the Delhi Polo Club around 1930. After Independence, it evolved into a marquee polo venue where anyone could walk in free of charge to watch top-tier matches. The 61st Cavalry, one of the world's last horse-mounted military regiments, trained and competed here for decades, and it was here that cricketer Brij Lal and Khan Pataudi collapsed and died in Jan 1952, on his son Mansoor's eleventh birthday. When the Delhi Polo Club dissolved in 1983, the Indian Polo Association (IPA) took over. In 1989, among India's oldest sporting bodies — took over, backed by the 61st Cavalry, keeping the field at international standard for decades.

That ended this year amid a long-running dispute over dues. The IPA says it paid ground rent through 2030, and the payment was accepted; the government handed the ground to the military in March 1983 and the association had occupied the land unauthorised since. The Centre took physical possession in June after the IPA failed to secure interim relief, ending nearly a century of polo at the ground. On Aug 27, the Centre also took possession of the neighbouring Delhi Race Club — home to several hundred horses and an entire economy of trainers, jockeys and grooms — following an eviction order earlier that month.

"We'll move somewhere else, the beautiful game will be forced to diminish. Polo is our gift to the world. And now we're restricting our own people from seeing our own sport, because there's no space left for them to see it," says Col (ret) Navjit Singh Sandhu, an IPA coach who has played polo for over 25 years.

He points to private facilities absorbing the displaced matches — the Jindal Polo Estate in Noida and Golden Greens Polo in Gurugram — while the Army has built two new fields within the Nicholson Ranges in Delhi. This year's Delhi Fall Polo Season will run at the Army Polo & Riding Centre (APRC) in Delhi Cantonment in mid-Oct, where the final will also be played.

APRC's location inside a secure military zone makes drawing large civilian crowds harder. "Whatever we try to do, it will not be the same. This sport is anyway difficult to pick up and expensive to play," says Sandhu, who believes the "elite" tag attached to polo was always misleading: losing a major accessible ground will now push it toward becoming more private and exclusive.

One of India's highest-ranked female players, Monica Saxena,



LAST CHUKKAR? Sanawar Polo and General Sparrow Charity Cup

holds a 0 handicap and made history at JPG, capturing the Lockher Singh arena polo. It was the first time a woman's polo tournament match in 2016. She remembers how APRC hosted regular matches and practice, while JPG, reserved largely for high-level semis and finals, had time to recover between games. "I have played in Manipur, where the ponies and grounds are smaller; Hyderabad is arena polo. Frankly, JPG was my favourite. Now that it's gone, APRC has to absorb everything — Finals, semis, league matches and practice," says Saxena, who worries the pitch won't get proper rest and that players will be pushed to the sides for practice, or told to skip it, rather than be allowed onto the main field as before.

She especially liked the spectacle around the match — the unknown gentleman in leisure who arrived with a different woman on his arm each time, an army wife who never repeated an outfit, patrons waiting for polo balls after Sunday finishes, the fashion shows, tentage and high tea. "There, the ladies and girls would make an effort, really go to parlours and dress up, because it was a place to

be seen," recounts Saxena, describing the "aura of JPG."

Many assume Delhi's players are moving to Jaipur, now that India's polo's prime venue is gone. Col (ret) Kuldeep Singh Garcha — a 5-goal handicap player, Arjuna Award winner, former national captain and mentor to a generation of Indo-pakistani polo players — says he is not leaving. "I am commanding the 61st Cavalry from 1994 to 1996, I realised that sooner or later we'd need another ground, that something could happen. We got about 250 acres allotted as an equestrian centre for the Army. Now the IPA has developed polo grounds there of international standards. But because it's in the Army area, civilians and foreigners may not be allowed in. My suggestion is a separate civilian entrance on the other side. Let's see what happens," says Garcha, also co-founder of the Jaipur Polo Club with his son Satinder.

An IPA official who did not wish to be named called this a test season in which logistical inconveniences can be ironed out. Jaipur Polo Ground, he believes, was always an anomaly. "In every other major polo-playing country, the grounds are invariably outside the city. In London, the polo grounds are almost an hour's drive from the centre. In Buenos Aires, Argentina's polo grounds sit in a suburb called Pilar, just as far removed from the capital. What we had in Lutyens' Delhi was, frankly, a luxury," he says.

Without JPG's guaranteed foothold, many worry sponsorship will become harder to secure just as the polo player's shrinking fanbase. "Honestly, the only thing required right now to boost the players' morale is the crowds that used to throng JPG on Sundays. Now, the players' morale is shrinking. Honestly, the only thing required right now to boost the players' morale is the crowds that used to throng JPG on Sundays. Now, the players' morale is shrinking. Honestly, the only thing required right now to boost the players' morale is the crowds that used to throng JPG on Sundays. Now, the players' morale is shrinking."

Sagar Sondhi, owner of a Delhi team. "The soul of polo has been taken away."

Col (ret) NS Sandhu, IPA COACH



From Nepal to Assam to Kerala, nature's fury is colliding with unchecked development

Alenjith K Johnny

Over the last few years, Nepal's weather has become increasingly unfamiliar to those living there. The Himalayan nation has experienced weather events that were once unheard of, including the first tornado in the country's plains a few years ago.

All of this worries Shri Acharya, an international climate policy and just transition specialist based in Kathmandu. It is not merely that extreme events are becoming more frequent, but that they are becoming harder to anticipate. Each new disaster seems to bring something Nepal has not dealt with before.

The latest: a glacial collapse triggering flash floods along the Nepal-Tibet border, killing more than 1,200 people and leaving thousands missing.

The problem is not confined to Nepal. Chamoli district in Uttarakhand experienced a similar disaster when a glacier and bedrock collapse triggered a flood in 2021. Just this year, flash floods and landslides struck across India—from Assam and Uttarakhand to Kerala.

According to Hydrosense Lab, a research facility in IIT-Delhi, India recorded nearly 2,000 such events between 2019 and 2023. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) says that studies point to an increase in reported flash floods since the 1990s.

While climate change is a major catalyst, the disasters unfolding across the region are also influenced by indiscriminate development in fragile mountain landscapes. For years, the debate has been framed as a choice between development and conservation. The human cost of that false binary is now becoming harder to ignore.

CRISIS TIME

Glacier-related floods are a particularly worrying sign of how quickly the risks are changing. Such events are occurring at shorter intervals across the Himalayan region.

In August, an ice patch weighing about 69 million kilos collapsed from the Srikranta Glacier in Uttarakhand's Garhwal Himalayas, according to a study published in *Natural Hazards*. The glacier sits at an altitude of about 5,220 m.

Glynda Alves

In the new workplace wardrobe, the tie is vanishing—that flash of colour that could showcase your mood, your hobbies and, on a Friday, even the cartoon character you liked. So what takes its place? Socks are good, but only a silver is visible; watches are expected but tend to signal status rather than personality; and jewellery can feel fussy. Enter the once-discreet frames. If eyes are the windows to the soul, frames are the curtains—and the latest workplace ones are anything but being discreet.

Glasses with bold and distinctive frames have firmly established themselves as the ultimate professional power accessory emerging as a form of self-expression for mature professionals who traditionally relied on luxury watches, silk ties, or fine jewellery," says Amarbir Singh, India head, Kering Eyewear.

Retainers are happy about the shift. "Frames are worn throughout the day and are far more visible, making it a natural medium for personal expression," says Saravash Kalra, director, Dayal Opticals. He adds that professionals in their late 30s to 50s now approach frames with the same intent they reserved for a fine watch. "The frames are reflective of personal taste, while still operating within a largely restrained overall look."

Once rimless and barely there, frames were the workplace norm. Not anymore. Eyewear in 2026 is all about confident impact—stronger shapes, refined colours and a sharper take on familiar classics. Styles that do well include sculptural acetate with thick carved frames and structured metal frames with angular bridges and

The Chamoli disaster was a grim warning when a large chunk of a Himalayan glacier collapsed in the district, sending debris and water downstream, killing about 200 people. Scientists later estimated the force of the collapse to be equivalent of roughly 15 atomic bombs.

The changing nature of the floods is only one part of the problem. The other is what has been built along the rivers.

"Often floodplain guidelines are not fully followed in hilly terrain," says Kapil Gupta, an IIT-Bombay professor who specialises in urban flood forecasting and mitigation. Local pressure, he says, often pushes construction closer to rivers.

India has guidelines to keep such construction away from flood-prone areas. The Central Water Commission guidelines propose a default 100 m restriction from the edge of a river until a state completes the scientific identification and demarcation of its floodplains.

The broader policy problem has been acknowledged by NITI Aayog, which has noted that human activity can substantially increase the severity of floods and has called for strict implementation of floodplain zoning. Whether this is happening on the ground is the big question.

As Sher Muhammad, a scientist at ICIMOD, points out, "In the Himalayas, we increasingly have to consider extreme rainfall together with glacier change, glacial lakes, unstable slopes, landslides and large sediment loads. At the same time, expansion of settlements, roads and hydropower infrastructure is increasing exposure in some already vulnerable valleys."

Many parts of the Himalayan region fall in highly vulnerable seismic zones, while construction has expanded rapidly. Wetlands and floodplains are being lost. Forests are being cleared. Slopes are being cut for roads and other infrastructure.

Construction can alter drainage and destabilise terrain. When extreme rainfall or a glacial event follows, the damage can be amplified by what is already on the ground.

The Char Dham road project in Uttarakhand was launched in 2016 to widen and upgrade about 889 km of highways to two-lane roads with paved shoulders, while adding tunnels, bypasses and other structures. In 2017, the Kargil Zaskar Road was declared National Highway 301.

While quiet neutrals such as champagne, caramel and smoke keep frames understated, there has been a shift toward green, navy, ox blood and burgundy. Ronak Sheth, founder of Opium Eyewear, says professionals are ditching the discreet look in favour of frames with attitude. "Customers are looking for brighter colours, stronger silhouettes and more distinctive frames, rather than defaulting to simple, understated styles. Even when they aren't opting for colour, there is a

definite preference for thicker, more substantial acetate frames that make a statement," he says.

At GKB Opticals, customers over 35 years account for about 70% of clientele. "And the 35+ customer is fashion-savvy and not afraid to go beyond traditional colours like black and brown, and rimless eyewear," says Priyanka Gupta, director, GKB Opticals. "They are no longer seeking frames appropriate to their



The Chamoli disaster of 2021 was a grim alert in the Himalayan region

opening a new phase of highway development in the Trans Himalayan region. Highway projects in Uttarakhand have continued to expand, with the government announcing and inaugurating multiple projects in 2024, including widening stretches in Rudrapur and Chamoli. Better roads have opened remote parts of the Himalayas to tourists and pilgrims.

In the Himalayas, we have to consider extreme rainfall together with glacier change, glacial lakes, unstable slopes, landslides and large sediment loads. At the same time, expansion of settlements, roads and hydropower infrastructure is increasing exposure in some already vulnerable valleys"

Some of these destinations have become popular through social media. Acharya says the increase in access has also brought more pressure on natural resources in high-altitude areas. "The Himalayan region is increasingly popular among trekkers and tourists, but it is also facing growing disasters. Tourism is also energy- and resource-intensive, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions," he says.

Roads, hotels and other infrastructure are bringing more people into areas exposed to floods and landslides. The development can make communities more connected and economies more dependent on tourism. It can also increase the number of people and assets that a sudden disaster can put at risk, he added.

In the South, in Kerala, major floods and landslides have continued to cause losses in life and livelihood. It is not as if the warning was 'loud'. Around a decade and a half ago, the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, headed by ecologist Madhav Gadgil, had examined the ecological pressures building across the region, including from infrastructure, tourism, mining and other development. It recommended treating

the region as an Ecologically Sensitive Area and dividing it into zones according to ecological sensitivity.

However, the report was rejected by state governments. Besides Kerala, the Western Ghats cut right through Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Critics have pointed to the rise of extreme weather events in the region—including the 2018 Kerala floods, the 2024 Wayanad landslides and the 2024 Ankola/Shirur landslides in Karnataka—and their human toll as a consequence of dismissing the report.

The report's broader message was that development could not be separated from the ecological limits of the landscape. "When we talk about the landslides in Kerala, there is a lot of discussion on the destruction of the Western Ghats," says Gupta. "When you are widening roads, you are digging into slopes, thereby making some of them unstable. It is the same thing with tunnels. This is one of the reasons slopes are becoming unstable."

As Muhammad says, the objective should not be to stop development, but to make development risk-informed.

In the Himalayan region, roads, hydropower projects and settlements in high-hazard valleys need to consider how the place is changing in a warming climate.



Heavy rains caused massive landslides in Meppadi in Wayanad in July 2024

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QUESTION OF RESPONSE "A few decades back, floods used to be very balanced, it had a fixed timeline. Communities used to be better prepared," says Avinash Kumar Chanchal, deputy programme director, Greenpeace South Asia. "Those knowledge and adaptive measures are no longer helping them."

The Centre approved the National Glacial Lake Outburst Flood Risk Mitigation Project in July 2024, for Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh,

People talk a lot about early warning systems. But if you don't know the drill to shift a person to a safe shelter during a catastrophic event, it will be harder to manage"

KAPIL GUPTA, professor, Dept of Civil Engineering, IIT-Bombay

Sikkim and Uttarakhand, with a financial outlay of ₹150 crore. The Central Water Commission also monitors glacial lakes across the Himalayan river basins using remote sensing techniques.

But is that enough for these new challenges? In a conventional flood, water level rises gradually. Monitoring stations can detect the change and send an alert before the water reaches communities. The recent Nepal event was different.

"This time, the size of the ice mass was so enormous that by the time it hit the ground, it released a huge amount of energy," says Acharya. "Even before these stations could send triggers, the flow moved so much quicker."

Some of the monitoring systems were washed away. That raises a question beyond alerts: where do people go when it arrives?

"People talk a lot about early warning systems," says Gupta. "But if you don't know the drill to shift a person to a safe shelter during a catastrophic event, it is going to become harder to manage."

The question, he says, is what comes after the warning. "Where is that safe place? How many people can be saved?"

DISASTER WITHOUT BORDERS

The Himalayas span across Nepal, India,

FLOODS IN INDIA, 2026

HIMACHAL PRADESH, June-Aug: 259 dead, losses worth ₹1,200 cr

ASSAM, July: 61 dead, 700,000+ affected

KERALA, July-Aug: 26 dead

ARUNACHAL PRADESH, June-Aug: 10 dead, 90,000+ affected

POONCH-RAJOURI, July: 10 dead

Note: List not exhaustive
SOURCE: Media reports

China (Tibet), Bhutan and Pakistan. So are many of the river systems that carry water from the mountains into communities downstream. A disaster in one country can quickly affect another.

Acharya says the region needs stronger cooperation on early warnings and monitoring. Existing arrangements between countries are not enough, he adds. What is missing are joint monitoring, timely sharing of information and coordinated assessment of hazards before they occur.

Muhammad says that while several bilateral mechanisms already exist, there is no comprehensive Himalayan framework covering cascading mountain hazards and development across the region. The mechanisms exist, but there is considerable scope to connect them more strongly with glacier monitoring, glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) and landslide risk, satellite observations, early warning and planning of infrastructure in sensitive mountain areas.

For Nepal, which has fewer resources to monitor these rapidly changing hazards, that cooperation is particularly important. Acharya says the country needs stronger monitoring systems and greater international support.

He adds that disasters linked to global climate change should not leave countries such as Nepal carrying the cost alone.

USAID cuts, put in place by US President Donald Trump and its erstwhile government efficiency czar Elon Musk, may also have had some impact on Nepal's early warning systems.

The recent flood has shown the limits of systems already in place. Chanchal says communities may have had only a short window to respond to the event. The exact timeline is still being studied, but reports suggest that communities living near the border had no time to react. It took nearly 30 minutes for local authorities to report the disaster. People in the downstream areas had just 40-60 minutes to evacuate. "Basically, the early prediction went wrong," says Acharya.

The Himalayan region needs a coordinated approach to early-warning systems, he adds.

That would be the bare minimum of what vulnerable communities deserve.

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THE MORNING BRIEF PODCAST

Development Turns Disaster

How climate change and unchecked development are turning natural hazards into disasters

Time in to ETplay.com. Available on EconomicTimes.com/podcast, Amazon Prime Music, Apple Podcasts, JioSaavn and Spotify.

Hal of Frame

Glasses with bold and distinctive frames are the new corporate accessory

Customers are looking for brighter colours, stronger silhouettes and more distinctive frames. There is a definite preference for thicker, more substantial acetate frames that make a statement"

RONAK SHETH, founder, Opium Eyewear

age but frames that reflect their personalities and lifestyles."

Dayal Opticals is seeing a similar shift. "Older consumers are becoming more experimental. Customers who bought safe, understated frames are now exploring colours, textures and new silhouettes," says Kalra. "They are no longer buying purely for utility; they are engaging with eyewear as a style decision, which marks a clear departure from past behaviour."

The change, says Sheth, is not about older consumers trying to look younger; they are just dropping the idea that certain styles belong to certain age groups. "The distinction between what is considered 'young' and 'old' eyewear is becoming less rigid," he says.

Perhaps the biggest change is not just what frames people are buying, but how many they are buying.

"Consumers are using different frames for different occasions, times of day and moods," says Sheth. "There is a growing feeling that you don't need one pair of glasses to do everything."

EYE CANDY

That is turning eyewear into something closer to a wardrobe than a prescription purchase. "Consumers are building an eyewear wardrobe that works across different aspects of their lifestyle," says Emma Lithander, head of merchandising, John Jacobs.

"Refined shapes, a modern design language, bolder silhouettes and unexpected colours allow consumers to express their style while maintaining a polished, versatile look."

"The biggest indicator of this is multiple purchases. When eyewear was viewed primarily as a functional product, people looked for one pair that worked for everything. Today, consumers are buying different frames for different outfits and occasions."

Dayal Opticals is seeing the same pattern. "There is a rise in multi-coloured frames, customers buying separate frames for work, weekends and even seasonal rotations," says Kalra. "This behaviour is a clear indicator that eyewear has moved beyond function to

The 35+ customer is fashion-savvy and not afraid to go beyond traditional frame colours like black and brown, and rimless eyewear. They are no longer seeking frames appropriate to their age but frames that reflect their personalities and lifestyles"

PRIYANKA GUPTA, director, GKB Opticals

become an integral part of one's fashion vocabulary."

Gupta of GKB Opticals agrees. "A sign that eyewear is becoming a fashion accessory is that many own multiple pairs of eyeglasses, with one being conservative enough for office, while the other serves a more stylish purpose," she says.

What changed? For one, the office itself. The post-pandemic workplace is less rigid about personal expression, while social media has made eyewear trends considerably harder to ignore. Kalra says, "Eyewear today operates in a far more visible and discussed space, largely driven by social media, which has made consumers more aware and open to experimentation in a category that was once considered conservative."

He also points to an unlikely catalyst: masks. "During the pandemic years of mask usage, attention was drawn to the upper half of the face. That heightened focus has persisted, leading many customers to approach eyewear as a more deliberate and expressive choice than they once did."

Gupta attributes the shift to a combination of influences. "The development is due to social media, celebrities

Glasses with bold frames have emerged as a form of self-expression for professionals who traditionally relied on luxury watches, silk ties, or fine jewellery"

AMARIBIR SINGH, India head, Kering Eyewear

and influencers' styles, changes in office environment and international fashion influences. Perhaps the biggest change is psychological. "What matters most is that people view eyewear as an addition to their style."

Sheth puts it more bluntly: "Older consumers are adopting styles traditionally associated with younger shoppers, as no one wants to look old." He says the trend is fuelled by "high discretionary income, changing mindset on ageing and the influence of 'silver influencers.'"

"The result is a new kind of workplace accessories. You can keep it discreet or you can let your frames do the talking."

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SUNDAY CLATTER

Why Footpaths in This Country Are Not Paved with the Best of Intentions

With sidewalks mostly a theoretical concept in our cities, pedestrian culture is very, well, pedestrian, while walking itself is déclassé, which is a pity since that's from where most of life is reliably observed

ON THE LEDGE



PALASH KRISHNA MEHROTRA

The Supreme Court recently declared the right to walk on demarcated footpaths a fundamental right. Justice PV Narasimha wrote, "The absence of footpaths to walk on, and even when they exist, their subjugation to motor transport, has been a civilisational problem." The funds is solid, no doubt, but we Indians are sceptical of the gap that exists between normative ideal and ground reality. One hopes we can walk the talk.

I've been hit twice from behind, once by a

motorcycle and another time by an auto-rickshaw. Both times, the pavement was absent. I'd like to extend the right to pavements to the right to cross the road. When I first went to England, I was surprised to find that there exists something called the pedestrian's right-of-way. Indian pavements, where they exist, become unusable or they're turned into a parking lot. During peak traffic hours, 2-wheelers use them as a road to get ahead of traffic snarls. Our pavements are great at multitasking.

I live in Dehradun. It has narrow roads. Most pavements are at the same level as the street, offering no protection. Recently, at the beginning of monsoon, the municipality thoughtfully installed a series of rumble strips on potholed roads, missing the point that concave crater-like potholes already inadvertently serve the role of convex rumble strips. SUVs are built to absorb the impact of potholes, but they still end up swerving on to the pavement because they want to avoid the bump. When crossing a road, many thoughts



PATHBREAKING

cross the pedestrian's mind as she waits for that tiny opening, the brief window of opportunity in which to scurry, make the Usain Boltian dash. I tend to lurk on the kerb for the longest time, waiting for the traffic to thin. In my head, I'm playing a Test match. One has to let a lot of balls go. There will be a period of play when the runs will come—that is, when one can run across.

I'm amazed by skitter street dogs that scamper across with practised ease. At times, the dog goes over, says hello to his pal, and returns to my side of the road. In that embarrassing moment, I realise that the time has come to take the plunge. It's

There is a class element to walking in India. In Delhi, walking is an activity meant for the domestic help and dogs

now or never. If dogs can do it...

There is a class element to walking in India. You stop walking the moment you buy a vehicle. It's considered déclassé to walk. In cities like Delhi, walking is an activity meant for the domestic help and dogs, more specifically for domestic helps walking the dog. The sahib and mensahib will walk on a walking path in the park, but not the street.

I like walking. One can stop and admire a tree, take in hoardings and signboards, stop for a corn-on-the-cob, gently bump into people, for Indians have this funny habit of abruptly stopping dead in their tracks to check something on the phone. One can catch snippets of overheard conversation from passers-by.

I've witnessed scenes of petty violence: a woman whacking an 'eve-teaser' with her chappal; a bunch of students beating up another student over some quarrel; a man

blaming a girl over a failed attempt at picking her pocket. In a moving vehicle, life passes you by when you're walking, you can stand still and observe life.

The pace at which one walks reflects the pace of the city one is in. Once in Mumbai, I was walking briskly at night, in a hurry to get to my grandfather's place. A disembodied voice rose from dark: 'Aaram se chalo. Ab raat ho gayi hai!' I slowed down on hearing the friendly command. In the morning, our roads tend to disappear. The other day, news came of pedestrians using barricades with wheels to cross a flooded road in Gurugram. A section of the Lucknow-Kanpur Expressway sank following heavy rain. For them, the pavements, we need roads in the first place. We might come across a situation in the future when the pavement remains, but the road has vanished. That will be poetic justice for pedestrian culture.

JUGULAR VEIN



JUG SURAIYA

Working Naam Ke Vaaste on Benami Dealings

What's in a name? Ask Friedrich Drumpf's name-dropping grandson

Asking what was in a name, Juliet sighed on her balcony that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. By which she dismissed the nominal basis of identity, a declaration to which Gertrude Stein would add the tautologous postscript in her 1913 poem, 'Sacred Emily', that 'a rose is a rose is a rose', a reiteration Umberto Eco echoed in the concluding Latin epigram of his 1980 novel, 'The Name of the Rose'. 'Starcross pristinam nomine, nonne nota tenemus'—the pristine rose remains only in name, we are left only with naked names.

Confronted with such flowery verbiage, the current tenant of the White House might mistake the rose-eyed Juliet with Juliet Huddy; and Fox News anchor, who alleged that POTUS had made osculatory contact with her in an elevator, and conflated Gertrude Eco into a portmanteau illegal immigrant, who should be ICE'd.

Such wars of the roses have topical relevance and resonate with headlines inspired by Donald Trump's baptismal name of renaming geographical features to fit his fancy.

In what might be called nominal neo-colonialism, the MAGAmaniacal occupier of the Oval Office unleashed a terminological tour de force by renaming the Gulf of Mexico the 'Gulf of America' and, as a follow-up, rechristening Lake Ontario as 'Lake America'. This, in the context of the ongoing tariff tangles with the US' northern neighbour, might be interpreted as a certain-raiser for a territorial takeover, which would make Canada the 51st state of the US—or the You Yes of Aye as in You Yes when I say Aye.

Far from pouring Texas oil on troubled waters, POTUS has gone to moot an onomastic sea change for both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me, goes the old children's rhyme. However, as conventions and credos as diverse as international law, numerology, and superstition believe would have it, monikers possess mojo. Namesmanship is gamesmanship by another location regarding location. It is seen as an underhand undermining of national sovereignty, be it the Gulf between Mexico and the US—Poor Mexico, so close to the US and so far from God', as former president Porfirio Diaz of the Amigo Country lamented—or the Lake of Lacuna between Washington DC and Ottawa PO (PO standing for Pissed Off).

Closer to home, New Delhi's dudgeon is high over the sneaky Chinese tit take away of Arunachal Pradesh by calling it 'Zangnam' (Southern Tibet). MEA is pulling no punches in letting Beijing know that that's not the way for the fortune cookie to crumble, nor for all the chai in China—the Hindi name for China—notwithstanding all the sweet talk at next weekend's BRICS summit.

That names can literally cast a spell on one is central to numerology, the crypto-science which ascribes numeric values to letters of the alphabet, which, when totted up, arrive at a figure deemed to be either lucky or otherwise.

If the sun arrived at its unfavourable, extra consonants or vowels, or both, are appended to the name until—Abra-cadabra!—alphabetical arithmetic arrives at the magical password which will open portals of fame, fortune, and good will. Even today, by now, the auspicious appellation resembles the verbal version of a corkscrew defying articulation by even such an epitome of elocution as Harivansh Rai Bachchan.

In diverse cultures and climes, names are believed to have mystical essence, knowledge of which would give ill-wishers power over one. Such a belief has resulted in the disguise of a true name known only to the family and a closed circle of intimates, cloaked by a surname designation for the outside, and possibly inimical, world.

Trump himself has a legacy of a name change in that his German immigrant paternal grandfather, Friedrich Drumpf, morphed into the anglophone-friendly 'Trump' as being a more winsome handle, if not a winning hand, is POTUS' proclivity for the ledgerman of labelling an atavistic throwback to such Drumpfery?

Whatever be his motivation, the prey presses on with his epithetical enthusiasms, even if they are seen to be nam ke vaaste exercises, revealing him to be just another benami guy.

BETWEEN BEGGING & BELLIGERENCE

In our dealings with customer service, these two tactics lie at either end of the 'getting things done' spectrum

WORD COUNTS



TUSHAR GORE

One of the most essential life skills is the ability to persuade someone to do something that has a favourable outcome for ourselves. There is sophisticated psychology at work here. What is the incentive for the other person to do this activity? A cynical view that individuals are fundamentally self-centered and will act only in self-interest will inevitably condemn us to search for some leverage before interacting with anyone.

Fortunately, most humans do behave with a basic sense of decency—probably the source of clichés like 'faith in humanity'—and in most instances will accommodate others' needs and perform activities to benefit others. And, as with any population statistic, there is a spread for the 'helpfulness' index of individuals.

But if helping others is in the job description, then individuals in customer service should not be faced with any philosophical dilemma regarding whether to help. They are required to do this. Simple.

Yet, in our dealings with customer service, often there is frustration that instead of service we get short-change, and customer care has to be interpreted as customer beware. Raised voices in

varied settings such as banks, shopping malls, hotels and hospitals are a frequent reminder that the customer service pact has broken down. This column isn't about the root causes of these inefficiencies, but rather about the tools available to us to persuade service professionals and secure a favourable outcome. How do we accomplish this when we are interacting for the first time with a person, and that too only for a matter of minutes?

The most cited research on persuasion is by psychologist Robert Cialdini. A partial list of dimensions—tactics that he used to persuade someone—includes:

► Reciprocity: because it requires a similar act or promise.

► Commitment: because of a prior similar act or promise.

► Social proof and acceptance: because everyone else does it.

► Authority: acting because of someone's command.

► Liking: because the act is for a 'likeable' person.

Many of these tools require that the two individuals share several interactions, and have substantial time for discussions. Real-life situations don't permit such extended dialogues. Even the most basic form of the reciprocity tactic, a tip, is possible only in certain instances, and that too not over the phone. My experience is that routinely, the interaction is a see-saw between two tactics that are not named explicitly in the list: begging and belligerence. First ask politely, and even suppliantly. If that fails, or is taken as a sign of weakness,

es, then shift into an aggressive mode and try to think of any power name-dropping, customer complaint threats, bad reviews, making a public scene—that can be brought to bear for a fast resolution. The first tactic could line up with the 'liking' dimension. The second is closely linked to 'authority'.

Often, the interaction starts with 'I'd really appreciate it if you can...' and escalates to 'I want to speak to the manager!' There are utterances in-between of 'Please see how best you can help me out'. These utterances can raise one's temperature, and blood pressure. But reflection in the aftermath reveals the comical nature of using these two diametrically opposite tactics. It seems that the best outcome is achieved by letting the service agent feel some authority and agency in this transient relationship, while also restricting that authority by invoking a superior power.

Skills requiring such optimisation and finesse are not highlighted in any research. Mastery of these tools can only be achieved through repeated practice. Regrettably, the day-to-day provides more than enough opportunities to conduct multiple trials and to develop proficiency.

As Gen-AI takes over these roles, either as auto-voice agents or as chat bots, the question is: will it remember that it is in the job description to help the customer, and not harass him or her? It doesn't have any statistical 'helpfulness' spread. But if persuasion tactics are still met, will it yield to pleading or to power-play?

The writer is MD, Resonance Laboratories, Bengaluru

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Many of these tools require that the two individuals share several interactions, and have substantial time for discussions. Real-life situations don't permit such extended dialogues. Even the most basic form of the reciprocity tactic, a tip, is possible only in certain instances, and that too not over the phone. My experience is that routinely, the interaction is a see-saw between two tactics that are not named explicitly in the list: begging and belligerence. First ask politely, and even suppliantly. If that fails, or is taken as a sign of weakness,

es, then shift into an aggressive mode and try to think of any power name-dropping, customer complaint threats, bad reviews, making a public scene—that can be brought to bear for a fast resolution. The first tactic could line up with the 'liking' dimension. The second is closely linked to 'authority'.

Often, the interaction starts with 'I'd really appreciate it if you can...' and escalates to 'I want to speak to the manager!' There are utterances in-between of 'Please see how best you can help me out'. These utterances can raise one's temperature, and blood pressure. But reflection in the aftermath reveals the comical nature of using these two diametrically opposite tactics. It seems that the best outcome is achieved by letting the service agent feel some authority and agency in this transient relationship, while also restricting that authority by invoking a superior power.

Skills requiring such optimisation and finesse are not highlighted in any research. Mastery of these tools can only be achieved through repeated practice. Regrettably, the day-to-day provides more than enough opportunities to conduct multiple trials and to develop proficiency.

As Gen-AI takes over these roles, either as auto-voice agents or as chat bots, the question is: will it remember that it is in the job description to help the customer, and not harass him or her? It doesn't have any statistical 'helpfulness' spread. But if persuasion tactics are still met, will it yield to pleading or to power-play?

The writer is MD, Resonance Laboratories, Bengaluru

THE MOST CITED RESEARCH ON PERSUASION IS BY PSYCHOLOGIST ROBERT CIAL

Economy

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2026

IN THE NEWS

CBIC RELAXES DOCUMENTATION NORMS UNDER EMI SCHEME



THE CENTRAL BOARD of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has "substantially reduced" the data and documentation requirements for businesses that opt for the Eligible Manufacturer Importer (EMI) scheme. The simplified documentation process for enrolment under the scheme will come into effect from September 15, the CBIC said in a circular. The FY27 Union Budget had introduced a new facilitation measure for trusted manufacturers by enabling the facility of deferred payment of Customs duty to a new category of importers called Eligible Manufacturer Importers (EMIs).

Jaishankar in Poland, discusses trade, defence



EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER S. Jaishankar and Poland's Deputy Prime Minister Radoslaw Sikorski held wide-ranging talks on Friday, focusing on trade and investment, space, AI, semiconductors, defence and energy, as well as the complex global challenges and conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia.

NFRA sets up advisory panel on audit quality

NATIONAL FINANCIAL REPORTING AUTHORITY (NFRA) has set up a nine-member advisory committee on audit quality, assurance and technology. Former RBI Deputy Governor Shyamala Gopinath and ex-Sebi Whole Time Member Ananth Narayan are among the panel members.

Punjab govt to hike DA of 85,000 employees to 60%

PUNJAB WILL RAISE the dearness allowance of around 85,000 government employees recruited after July 17, 2020 from 42% to 60%, Cabinet Minister Aman Arora said.

AGENCIES

TAX REVENUES GROW AROUND 12%, BORROWINGS DECLINE

States' capex growth halves till July

Monsoon, lack of extra tax devolution weigh on investments

PRASANTA SAHU
New Delhi, September 4

STATES' AGGREGATE CAPITAL expenditure (capex) likely grew at half the pace in April-July of the current financial year compared with the year-ago period, partly due to monsoon-induced slowdown.

Going by the finances of 20 large states reviewed by FE, their capex during April-July FY27 rose 10.7% year-on-year to ₹1.79 lakh crore, compared with 21.8% growth in the same period of FY26. The moderation could also partly stem from only four tranches of tax devolution being shared with the states in April-July 2027, compared with five in the year-ago period.

However, stronger tax revenue growth, lower borrowings and the likely front-loading of tax devolution in the coming months could provide

INVESTMENTS SLUMP

State finances in April-July* (Growth % y-o-y)



*20 states reviewed

states with greater fiscal space to step up capex in the remaining months of FY27.

The 20 states analysed by FE are Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Haryana, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

Maharashtra recorded the sharpest increase in capex, with spending more than tripling to ₹18,472 crore from ₹6,000 crore a year earlier. Punjab also more than tripled its capex to ₹4,299 crore, albeit from a much lower base. Kerala recorded a 69.1% increase, while capex rose 58% in Chhattisgarh and 54.9% in Telangana. Among the larger spending states, Gujarat remained the

biggest spender, with capex rising 10.9% to ₹23,612 crore. Madhya Pradesh, despite spending ₹18,102 crore, recorded a 21.2% decline in capex, while Uttar Pradesh's capex fell 3.8% to ₹18,049 crore.

West Bengal registered the steepest decline, with capex plunging 52.9% to ₹1,670 crore, underscoring its fiscal constraints.

Bihar's capex declined 40.5%, while Jharkhand and Haryana recorded declines of 31.5% and 25.1%, respectively.

Revenue expenditure across the 20 states rose just 4% during April-July 2026-27, sharply lower than the 11% growth recorded in the year-ago period.

In contrast, tax revenue growth accelerated to 12% from just 3% in the corresponding period of FY26.

The states' borrowings and liabilities declined 15% YoY during April-July FY27, reversing a 60% increase in the year-earlier period. The decline indicates lower reliance on borrowings amid stronger tax collections.

The Centre is encouraging states and public sector enterprises to maintain the momentum in capex to support economic activity, even as private-sector capital expenditure shows signs of gaining traction.

The Centre's own capital expenditure grew a robust 30% YoY during April-July of the current financial year.

WATERLOGGING AT DELHI AIRPORT



Airport staff inspect the waterlogging condition at Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) after heavy rainfall, in New Delhi on Friday. A source said there was excess water inside Terminals 2 and 3, which was later cleared. At least 11 flights were diverted and more than 400 flights were delayed at the Delhi airport on Friday due to bad weather conditions. IGIA is the country's busiest airport and handles more than 1,300 flight movements daily.

ANI

QUICKPICKS

CAQM assessing intensity of stubble fires

TO CURB AIR pollution during winters in Delhi-NCR, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has begun to assess the intensity of stubble fires in Haryana and Punjab instead of just relying on fire counts. A senior CAQM official told PTI that the statutory body is also focusing on measuring land area affected by stubble fires, called burnt area, and having a well-defined protocol in place to do so.

PTI

Maritime regulator starts seafarer tracking module

THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL of Maritime Administration (DGMA) has launched a Seafarer Tracking Module on the eNAVIG Portal, in view of the prevailing geopolitical tensions and heightened maritime security threats. DGMA in a circular said the module also provides region-wise data on vessels and seafarers, facilitating enhanced maritime coordinated response during emergencies.

PTI

E-way bills rise 7.7% in August

SHUBHAM RANA
New Delhi, September 4

THE NUMBER OF e-way bills generated under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime rose 7.7% year-on-year (YoY) to 139.1 million in August, according to data from the GST Network. Sequentially, however, e-way bill generation declined 0.5% from 139.8 million in July.

In July, e-way bill generation had increased 6% YoY, marking the slowest growth in 45 months.

An e-way bill is an electronic GST document required for the movement of goods valued at more than ₹50,000. Growth in e-way bill generation is considered a leading indicator of economic activity and domestic trade.

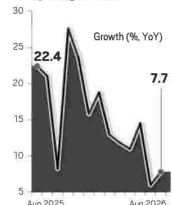
"The sustained rise in e-way bill generation figures clearly reflects that the growth momentum in India's organised economy remains firmly intact. This consistent upward trend is a strong signal of underlying economic resilience, driven by improved compliance, formalisation of business activity, and steady consumption demand across sectors," said Saurabh Agarwal, tax partner at EY India.

"Building on this positive trajectory, it is reasonable to expect that collections in September are likely to be even more robust, as the country

IN NUMBERS



E-way bills generated



moves into the festive season," Agarwal said.

A rise in e-way bill generation generally points to stronger GST collections in the subsequent month, as a significant portion of the underlying transactions gets reflected in the following month's tax receipts. India's gross GST collections rose 14.8% YoY to ₹2 lakh crore in August.

Battery storage to be mandatory at solar, wind units

SAURAVANAND
New Delhi, September 4

UPDATED NORMS



INDIA PLANS TO mandate two-hour battery storage equivalent to at least 10% of capacity for all new ground-mounted solar and onshore wind projects commissioned after July 1, 2027, as the rapid addition of renewable capacity poses growing challenges in balancing intermittent generation and avoiding curtailment, according to draft regulations issued by the Central Electricity Authority (CEA).

The requirement will become more stringent from July 1, 2029, when the minimum storage duration will double to four hours, while the minimum storage capacity will remain at 10% of a project's installed capacity.

The CEA draft states that ground-mounted solar and onshore wind plants commissioned after July 1, 2027, "shall be equipped with co-located Energy Storage System (ESS) having a minimum storage duration of two hours" and a capacity equivalent to at least 10% of installed capacity.

For a 100-MW solar project, this translates into at least 10 MW of storage for two hours.

For projects commissioned after July 1, 2029, and up to June 30, 2031, the draft proposes "a minimum storage duration of four hours" while retaining the minimum storage capacity at 10%. A 100-MW plant would therefore require 10 MW of storage capable of delivering power for four hours, equivalent to 40 MWh.

The proposal comes as

Govt to mandate battery storage equivalent to at least 10% of installed capacity

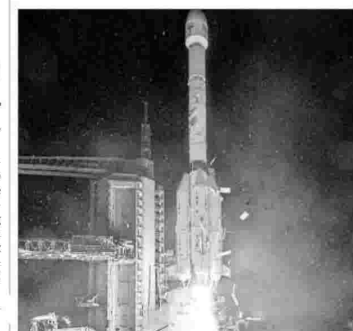
This applies for all new ground-mounted solar and onshore wind projects commissioned after July 1, 2027

The requirement will become more stringent from July 1, 2029, when the minimum storage duration will double to four hours

India rapidly expands renewable energy capacity but faces increasing challenges in managing fluctuations in solar and wind generation. Energy storage systems can absorb surplus electricity during periods of excess generation and release it when demand rises or renewable output falls, helping reduce curtailment when clean power exceeds the grid's ability to absorb or transmit it.

The CEA has invited comments and objections on the draft regulations until October 4, 2026. It has also proposed that any future change in the required percentage of grid-forming capability or ESS capacity "shall be notified by Authority from time to time".

Isro sends India's first geo-imaging satellite EOS-05



Indian Space Research Organisation's GSVL-F17 rocket carrying EOS-05 satellite lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh

SIHATBH SINHA
& ANONNA DUTT
New Delhi, September 4

IN ITS FIRST launch since January, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) sent an earth observation satellite, EOS-05, to space early Friday morning, using a GSVL rocket.

The EOS-05 is India's first dedicated imaging satellite to be placed in the geosynchronous orbit, about 36,000 km from Earth, from where it can keep constant watch over the country and provide real-time imaging service. With a 10-year mission life, the satellite is designed to image large areas of interest at frequent intervals for purposes such as monitoring natural disasters or keeping track of agriculture or forestry. It will also have defence uses.

India has several other active earth observation satellites in the lower-earth orbits which circle Earth and periodically capture imagery over India. In the geosynchronous orbit, the satellite remains stationary relative to Earth, and is able to watch the same region

continuously, without gaps. The GSVL-F17 rocket deposited the EOS-05 satellite in a transfer orbit, at an altitude of more than 190 km from Earth, about 18 minutes after the launch. From there, the satellite will perform a series of orbit-raising manoeuvres over the next few days to travel to the geosynchronous orbit, its final destination.

In a message congratulating ISRO, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Yet another outstanding achievement by ISRO and a proud moment for our nation. The successful launch of GSVL-F17 carrying EOS-05, India's first-ever imaging satellite from geosynchronous orbit is a reflection of the excellence, innovation and growing capabilities that define India's space sector".

Weighting more than 2,360 kg, the EOS-05 was the heaviest satellite to be carried by the GSVL rocket until now.

The successful launch is a big relief for ISRO as three of the six missions launched in 2025 and 2026 turned out to be unsuccessful.

Company formation slows in first quarter of FY27

In April-June qtr, LLPs formation grew faster than firm registrations

MANU KAUSHIK
New Delhi, September 4

THE NUMBER OF new companies registered in the first quarter of FY27 remained high, but the pace of growth slowed sharply from the previous quarter. Data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) showed that 62,986 companies were registered during April-June 2026, up 3% from 61,139 in the same period a year earlier. However, registrations were 9.7% lower than the 69,772 companies registered in January-March 2026, the highest quarterly figure on record.

Despite the sequential decline, the latest quarter was the second-highest in the series. The slowdown was also pronounced compared with the previous quarter, when company registrations had risen 25.5% year-on-year (y-o-y). Experts said the sequential

SEASONAL TREND

	Companies registered	% y-o-y growth	LLP registered	% y-o-y growth
Q1 FY25	47,417	0.1	17,725	28.8
Q2 FY25	40,697	11.5	16,300	17.2
Q3 FY25	37,393	14.5	14,502	2.4
Q4 FY25	55,617	15.4	20,429	24.1
Q1 FY26	61,139	28.9	23,013	29.8
Q2 FY26	60,836	49.5	22,221	36.3
Q3 FY26	56,008	49.8	21,106	45.5
Q4 FY26	69,772	25.5	29,306	43.5
Q1 FY27	62,986	3.0	27,573	19.8



Registrations were 9.7% lower than the 69,772 firms registered in January-March 2026, the highest quarterly figure on record

In the first quarter, limited liability partnerships (LLPs) formation grew much faster than company registrations. MCA data showed that services continued to account for the largest share of new company registrations, led by community, personal and social services, followed by business services, trading and manufacturing.

The number of LLPs registered during the quarter rose to 27,573, up 19.8% from 23,013 a year earlier.

The trend comes as the government seeks to ease compliance requirements for LLPs. The Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, proposes to decriminalise certain procedural requirements for LLPs. It also seeks to simplify some reporting requirements for LLPs registered

Opinion

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2026

Conflict over Cauvery

The long-festering water-sharing dispute can be resolved only by the riparian states

TENSIONS OVER SHARING waters of the monsoon rain-fed Cauvery between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu flare up whenever there is a deficiency in rainfall. When rainfall is good, there is no problem in water-sharing. This year, the rain gods have not been kind as the Cauvery basin districts have experienced a rainfall deficit and the water stored in the seven major reservoirs are filled to only 55.7% of their capacity. The poor monsoon and low storage levels were a major reason why Tamil Nadu's chief minister, C Joseph Vijay, belatedly opened the sluice gates of the Stanley reservoir — built across the Cauvery in Salem district of the state — in Mettur. Water stored in this reservoir is also 55% of its live storage capacity and releases will be for 45 days starting September 1 to meet irrigation needs for the samba paddy crop.

Matters have come to a boil this year as flows to Tamil Nadu have considerably diminished from the upper riparian state of Karnataka. Tamil Nadu is clamouring for its share of water as per the directions of the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) and has approached the Supreme Court in this regard. On August 25, the CWMA upheld the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee's recommendation directing Karnataka to ensure a flow of 9,000 cusecs for 15 days to Tamil Nadu between August 26 and September 8. Karnataka, for its part, told the apex court that it is complying with the CWMA's directions. Tamil Nadu has further sought its intervention to direct Karnataka to also make good the accumulated shortfall in earlier releases. Since it sought water over and above what the CWMA had directed, Tamil Nadu was urged to challenge the authority's decision before the appropriate forum.

Approaching the Supreme Court may make for good political optics but a settlement over sharing waters will be elusive unless there is a mutually acceptable distress-sharing formula for years of rainfall deficiency. Only a political dialogue between the riparian states (which should include Kerala and Puducherry as well) in a genuine spirit of give and take can lay the foundations of a durable settlement. Karnataka should stop harping on the inequity of historical agreements. Tamil Nadu, for its part, should get used to living with less water from the Cauvery, perhaps shifting away from water-intensive crops like paddy. Interestingly, its farmers have been requested to cultivate medium-duration paddy varieties with low water requirements and also adopt direct sowing of rice to conserve water supplies.

Perhaps all of this is easier said than done as the biggest stumbling block is Karnataka's assumption of primacy of rights over the Cauvery as an upper riparian state. How can a party to a dispute assume the role of the judge as well? In contrast, as a lower riparian state, Tamil Nadu is often reduced to the position of a supplicant and forced to approach the Supreme Court for implementation of the directions of the CWMA to Karnataka regarding the flow of water. As if all of this weren't bad enough, Karnataka has plans to build the Mekedatu Dam across the Cauvery to supply drinking water to Bengaluru despite the opposition of lower riparian states. This problem is not specific to the Cauvery. Even West Bengal as an upper riparian state has for a long time come in the way of equitably sharing waters of the Teesta with Bangladesh.

The tech mogul strongman is on the rise

THE RISE of the liberal order in the 19th century depended on two revolutions. The most obvious was in the political sphere, where reformers restrained over-mighty rulers with a combination of constitutional rules and individual rights. But just as important was the transformation of the business world that created public companies, answerable to their shareholders rather than the government. That political model began to crumble with Vladimir Putin's ascent to the Russian presidency, and continues to devolve with the rise of strongmen globally. But it is the reversal of the second revolution that may prove the most long-lasting and history-shaping.

Previously, public companies had been instruments of state power. But in the 1800s, anybody could create a limited-liability company so long as they could put together a board and management team. Robert Lowe, chancellor of the exchequer under William Gladstone, called these companies "little republics" because they simultaneously limited the power of the state and bound themselves to strict constitutional rules. Lowe's "little republics" are now under threat, externally and internally. Donald Trump has asserted his power over even the biggest US companies, taking stakes in some and telling others where to locate their supply chains.

The internal transformation has been even more far-reaching. Google's 2004 IPO launched a new corporate era in which the link between control and ownership has been severed and the constraints on founders weakened or removed. The company that would eventually become Alphabet adopted three classes of shares: A shares with one vote, B shares with 10 votes, and C shares with no votes. Today, co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin retain over 50% of the company's voting power, despite exiting daily management and owning less than 11% of its outstanding voting stock. Concentrated ownership inevitably reduces the oversight directors or shareholders can exercise. But that's only part of the problem. Successful CEOs such as Zuckerberg have their pick of compliant directors. What does "independent" mean when the controlling shareholder oversees the composition of the board?

CEOs can also up stakes if someone gets in their way. This cocktail — dual-class shares, subservient directors, and jurisdiction shopping — has created a new type of corporation: public capital combined with private control. Many of the most powerful firms are no longer classic public companies in which shareholders elect a board that can replace management. They're something new: vehicles whereby visionary CEOs can raise money without losing control or opportunities for the public to bet on great men.

A recent study found the proportion of US tech IPOs with dual-class shares increased from 20% in 2012 to 15% in 2022. Grab Holdings shareholders recently voted to double the voting power of Class B shares, handing co-founder Anthony Tan 74.5% of voting rights. Cloudflare has won approval to replace its dual-class shares with triple-class shares. Elon Musk has introduced a dual voting structure in SpaceX to make up for his mistake with Tesla: He controls around 90% of Class B shares, which carry 10 votes each, giving him over 80% of voting power, and obliged shareholders to forgo the right to a jury trial or class-action suit. Class B shares also hold the sole power to remove Musk as chairman and CEO, meaning that he can't be ousted without his own consent.

So what? Critics of capitalism have long complained that companies are blinded by the need to generate short-term results to satisfy the stock market. Alphabet and its ilk have come up with a way of raising public money while retaining the freedom to make long-term investments in risky but potentially world-transforming technologies. Investors who don't want to sacrifice corporate control have plenty of conventionally governed options. Surely such corporate innovation should be celebrated rather than reviled — particularly if it is driving, as with AI, a great tech revolution? There are nevertheless reasons for worry. These new corporate forms exploit shareholder capitalism's legal protections while escaping its discipline. The biggest worry is the concentration of power in the hands of a few. And the close relationship between Trump and his favourite CEOs means the state can reach deep into the private sector and undermine the rule of law. It is simply not acceptable that public and private oligarchies rule with fewer constraints. This arrangement would be worrying enough in ordinary times. But it is taking place at a moment when AI is remaking the world. Such fundamental change requires careful oversight if it is to serve the general good. Thanks to a combined political and corporate revolution, it is instead being driven by a tiny handful of people who are answerable to nobody but themselves.



ADRIAN WOOLDRIDGE

Bloomerg



EXPANDING SPACE

ISRO Chairman V Narayanan

We have to really ensure that the space ecosystem in our country grows. Therefore, we will have a lot of job opportunities, the economy will grow, and more satellites will be produced

EXPIRY-DAY CHAOS

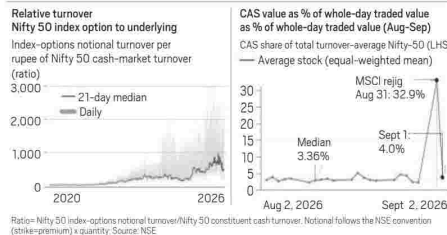
SEBI NEEDS TO TAKE STEPS THAT MAKE SPECULATING IN OPTIONS MORE EXPENSIVE

A liquidity mismatch for CAS

RAJA REDDY BUJUNOORI, SUMIT SAURAV & VENKATESH PANCHAPAGESAN

The authors are faculty members at IIM Bangalore

GROWING GAP



shares (figure 1). On expiry days, when options market activity spikes, the ratio can balloon to as much as 3,000. For comparison, in most developed markets, the number is far more grounded (5 to 15). This mismatch is what India ultimately has to address.

To see why the mismatch matters, consider a trader who trades options and holds just enough of the underlying shares to offset the position's directional exposure, its delta — a strategy also known as delta-hedging and employed by institutional investors. The catch is that an option's delta shifts violently as expiry nears and the price hovers around the strike. Keeping the position delta-neutral therefore forces the trader to buy and sell the underlying again and

again — in a cash market that is already thin, so each rebalancing trade moves the price and feeds the very volatility the hedgers want to neutralise. This participation in the auction only makes this worse. Data so far suggest that less than 5% of daily trading activity now flows through the CAS window (figure 2), down from around 10% before the transition. In a market with this kind of liquidity mismatch, derivatives hedging can end up driving the price of the underlying shares rather than the other way around.

The same mismatch invites a second problem: manipulation. If you hold a large options position, one way to make it pay is to nudge the handful of shares that set the index. A few hundred crore

rupees deployed in a thin cash market can shift the settlement price against which contracts worth thousands of crores are settled. Sebi's interim order against Jane Street alleges that the firm used such a strategy. And Sebi's recent interim order against Copthall Mauritius Investment Limited and Mansi Share and Stock Broking Private Limited over prime fake manipulative trades during the auction suggests that CAS has not eliminated the problem either, in part because it has yet to attract sufficient liquidity.

This points to the only durable fix. Tinkering with the last 20 minutes will not help until the imbalance beneath it is addressed, and there are only two ways to do that. One solution is to deepen the cash market by making short selling easier for investors, creating genuine two-sided flow that makes the closing price harder to move. The other is to narrow the gap in the cost of speculation between options and the underlying shares. An investor can build a large position in the derivatives market with substantially lower capital than would be required to take an equivalent position in the underlying. As long as that differential persists, options will keep attracting disproportionate volumes, and the problem is likely to persist. Therefore, Sebi needs to take steps that make speculating in options more expensive. Its recent moves — larger lot sizes, higher securities transaction tax, fewer weekly expiries on some indices — are a good start. However, the recent data shows these steps have had only limited impact (figure 1). The gap they were meant to close remains substantial.

The auction was never a problem. The mismatch beneath it is — and until that narrows, no closing mechanism that Sebi designs can eliminate the chaos that Indian financial markets experience on expiry days.

Who are you, again?



MITUL JHAVERI ADITYA SINHA

Jhaveri is a public policy and GovTech professional; Sinha is a New Delhi-based economist

Descartes needed only *cogito ergo sum*. The Indian citizen authenticates, therefore he is, and must be again next quarter

EVERY AUTUMN, THE state develops a suspicion that its pensioners have died, and each must file a certificate of being alive, the continued drawing of the pension being, apparently, insufficient evidence of appetite. Every year, a company director must file a KYC certifying that he is himself, a proposition nobody contests on the other 364 days. The provident fund office will not release a claim unless Aadhaar, PAN, and bank details match to the last character. Descartes needed only *cogito ergo sum*. The Indian citizen authenticates, therefore he is, and must be again next quarter.

India has built the most ambitious identity infrastructure in the democratic world, and has arranged its institutions so that almost none will accept another's verification of who a citizen is.

eKYC is a word concealing at least four different activities. First is customer due diligence under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, which asks who a customer is and how risky. Second is authentication under the Aadhaar Act, 2016, which asks only whether a person is who she claims to be. Third is the seeding of Aadhaar and bank accounts that routes welfare to the right beneficiary, not identity verification at all but payment plumbing. Fourth is subscriber verification in telecom and sundry portals, where the object is to trust a SIM, not to know a customer. Four tasks, four laws, one name. That is why "doing KYC" once buys the citizen nothing at the next counter.

The rulebook, oddly, is kinder than the counter. The RBI's Master Direction on KYC, 2016, already permits Aadhaar OTP, offline Aadhaar, video identification, and Digilocker, and directs that where a KYC Identifier exists in Central KYC Records Registry, the record be fetched and customer not troubled again unless something has changed or elapsed. The humane rule is written. The branch has not read it. Under Sebi's circular of May 2024, a "validated" record travels across brokers and funds, but only inside the securities market. Your bank knows you well enough to sell you insurance, but not well enough for the insurer to use the policy without fresh papers, though all four regulators sit on the same registry.

Outside finance, the checks are misdescribed by the very officials enforcing them. The department of telecommunications discontinued Aadhaar eKYC for SIMs in 2018, after Justice KS Puttaswamy v Union of India (2019) 5 SCC 111; the Aadhaar number was struck from the form years ago, yet citizens still believe they are "doing Aadhaar KYC" for a phone. The rural development ministry told Lok Sabha in 2025 that the Aadhaar-based payment system is merely a mode of payment and that MGNREGA work cannot be denied for want of it; at the worksite, it is denied anyway. LPG subsidy can flow to a bank account linked directly to the gas connection, with no Aadhaar; at the showroom, biometrics are demanded regardless.

Why did centralisation not become worse? The registry, created by notification S.O. 3183(D) of November 26, 2015, holds well over a billion records, one for every financially active adult; a library in which every book is catalogued and none is lent. India centralised storage before it harmonised purpose; each regulator runs its own logic atop the common records, and the RBI itself has been wary of records drawn from them. Beneath this runs the incentive that defeats the rest. An institution is legally safe collecting the data itself, and re-collection is always permitted where information locks changed or incomplete. Arid digital flow shuts out the elderly, the disabled, and the mismatched. And a citizen need not KYC relentlessly laws to obey exactly the signal the fraudster imitates; the "update your KYC" scam works because the state has released its victims. The fraudster, it must be said, is the one counterparty who accepts your KYC at the first attempt.

Five changes would fix most of this, and the first two need no new technology. First, amend Rule 9 of the Prevention of Money Laundering (Maintenance of Records) Rules, 2005, to make reliance a duty: where a valid KYC Identifier exists, an entity must onboard from it, recording a specific, risk-based reason for any fresh

demand, with a safe harbour for good-faith reliance. Second, supersede the 2015 notification so that bodies outside the money-laundering perimeter — the EPFO, oil marketing companies, food departments — can rely on the registry under strict purpose limitation. Third, convert the Financial Stability and Development Council's February 2024 proposal for uniform KYC norms into a binding standard: one data schema, one list of documents, one re-verification clock in place of today's two-, eight- and 10-year cycles. Fourth, build a federated exchange rather than another central store, issuing purpose-bound tokens carrying only assurance level, date, source, and consent, routed through the consent managers of the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025. Singapore's MyInfo and Estonia's X-Road rest on the one-only principle: reuse proof, not raw data. Fifth, codify, from the Aadhaar Authentication and Offline Verification Regulations, 2021, an enforceable right to an alternative rail, so that no entitlement is extinguished by an authentication failure alone.

The colonial default was that an activity is prohibited unless permitted. Its digital descendant is that a citizen is unverified unless re-verified. The presumption against the citizen has survived the very technology built to retire it.

The state has identified its citizens a billion times over. It has not yet learnt to remember them. The pensioner, meanwhile, should keep his certificate handy. Autumn returns every year.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tangible growth

Apropos of "Beyond the 7.8% number" (FE, September 4), the debate over revised GDP figures highlights a crucial gap between statistical recalibration and lived reality. While we must certainly appreciate the methodological shift to capture broader economic activity, we cannot ignore that a 7.8% growth rate feels disconnected from the ground realities, where private consumption remains

fragile and investment is still selective. The real issue is not the integrity of our data, but its utility in guiding policy. To restore confidence, we need a balanced approach that pairs these new metrics with a clear focus on job creation and wage growth. We should publish additional granular data that tracks household well-being, ensuring that our statistical evolution is matched by tangible progress in ordinary citizens' lives. —K Chandan Kumar, Bengaluru

Look beyond numbers

Apropos of "Beyond the 7.8% number" (FE, September 4), the impressive Q1 FY27 GDP growth deserves recognition, but the headline figure should not obscure the quality of growth. Strong manufacturing, capital formation, and domestic consumption are encouraging, yet employment generation, private investment, exports, and productivity must keep pace. The new GDP series

also calls for greater transparency and a consistent back series to strengthen statistical credibility. India must therefore look beyond quarterly numbers and ensure that GDP expansion translates into productive jobs, higher household incomes, and broad-based prosperity. Growth is meaningful only when its benefits reach the wider economy. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Shared Peril

The catastrophic floods in Nepal should end a dangerous illusion in India that Himalayan disasters can be neatly contained within national borders or explained simply by blaming an upstream neighbour for "releasing" water. The Himalayan river system does not recognise political boundaries. What happens in Nepal's mountains can shape the fate of millions in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, just as infrastructure decisions on the Indian side can worsen flooding across Nepal's Terai. The growing volatility of this shared ecosystem demands a fundamental shift from reactive disaster management to cooperative risk management. India has long treated floods largely as a domestic engineering problem, responding with embankments, barrages, relief camps and compensation. Yet the record suggests that controlling rivers is not the same as understanding them. The 2008 kosi catastrophe remains an uncomfortable reminder. It was not simply an overwhelming volume of water that devastated Bihar; institutional failure and a breach in an inadequately maintained embankment transformed a manageable river flow into a humanitarian disaster.

That distinction matters even more today. The Himalayas are producing hazards that increasingly defy the conventional definition of a flood. Cloudbursts, landslides, glacial lake outbursts and rock- and ice-avalanches can unleash torrents carrying enormous quantities of sediment and debris. The 2021 Chamoli disaster and the destruction at Dharali in Uttarakhand last year demonstrated the destructive potential of such events. Nepal's latest tragedy belongs to the same expanding geography of Himalayan risk. Climate change compounds the problem, but invoking it should not become an excuse for institutional fatalism. A warming atmosphere may intensify extreme rainfall, yet human decisions determine much of the eventual damage. Roads and railways obstruct natural drainage; settlements expand across floodplains; embankments deteriorate; hydropower projects proliferate in fragile valleys; and warning systems often fail at the point where they matter most - reaching vulnerable communities in time. The India-Nepal relationship consequently needs a more ambitious framework than periodic exchanges of river data. Real-time monitoring must be expanded across vulnerable catchments. Joint forecasting models are needed, along with regular sharing of information on sediment movement, changing river channels, glacial lakes and the structural condition of embankments and barrages. Disaster warnings must also travel beyond government offices to the villages and households directly in harm's way.

This is not merely an environmental issue. North Bihar's chronic vulnerability affects agriculture, migration, infrastructure and regional economic development. Repeated disasters can trap already poor communities in cycles of asset loss and displacement. The economic consequences of Himalayan instability will increasingly extend far beyond the mountains. The deeper lesson from Nepal is therefore one of interdependence. Neither country can engineer its way to safety independently while sharing rivers whose behaviour is becoming less predictable. The question is no longer whether the next Himalayan disaster will cross a border. It is whether the institutions on both sides will recognise that the border is largely irrelevant to the disaster itself.

The AI Bet

Silicon Valley has built a vast economic edifice on an assumption that remains surprisingly unexamined: that once artificial intelligence becomes sufficiently capable, almost everyone will use it as intensively as software engineers do. The assumption matters because extraordinary sums are being committed to make it possible. Technology companies are spending hundreds of billions of dollars on data centres, specialised chips and the electricity needed to run them. The investment is premised not merely on AI becoming useful, but on it becoming an indispensable and heavily consumed utility across the economy.

So far, software developers offer the strongest proof that this can happen. AI coding assistants have moved rapidly from novelty to everyday tools. Engineers increasingly use AI to generate, debug and rewrite code, allowing a single worker to accomplish tasks that once required considerably more time. For technology companies, programmers are therefore the model customer: digitally sophisticated, frequent users whose work generates an obvious and measurable demand for computing power. But coders can supervise an AI system without surrendering professional responsibility for its mistakes. Many other occupations do not offer coding's advantages. A lawyer cannot safely approve a contract merely because an AI system has produced a convincing proof.

A doctor cannot delegate clinical judgement to a chatbot. A corporate executive cannot blame an algorithm for an important negotiation gone wrong. In fields where mistakes carry legal, financial or human consequences, somebody must remain accountable. This may prove to be the central economic constraint on the AI revolution. The problem is no longer simply whether machines can perform tasks. Increasingly, they can. The harder question is whether institutions are willing to reorganise work around systems that remain imperfect and, in many cases, difficult to audit. That distinction should concern investors as much as workers.

History offers ample warnings. The railways, electricity and the internet, all transformed economies but turned out to be spectacularly bad investment decisions. Being right about the future does not guarantee that today's valuations are right.

The same may hold for AI. There is little reason to doubt that artificial intelligence will spread far beyond software engineering. It is already entering law, medicine, finance, marketing and administration. But widespread adoption is not the same as intensive use. An accountant who consults an AI assistant several times a day does not necessarily generate anything like the computing demand created by thousands of programmers constantly running sophisticated coding agents. The danger, therefore, is not an AI winter caused by technological failure.

It is a mismatch between infrastructure built for explosive demand and an economy that adopts the technology more gradually. The great question confronting the AI industry is not whether people will use it, but whether they will use enough of it, often enough, to pay for the colossal machinery now being built. That answer may determine whether the AI boom becomes an industrial revolution - or an infrastructure bubble.

Rethinking Progress

It would be a mistake to see Rasuwa and Guangxi as unrelated and separate tragedies, acts of nature to be mourned and then forgotten till the next tragedy. They are data points in a pattern the Sustainable Development Goals were meant to interrupt and did not. The report on those Goals, drawn up as 2030 approaches, brings out some uncomfortable truths. Barely a third of the targets are on track, close to half are crawling forward too slowly to matter, and a worrying number have actually reversed since 2015



On the morning of August 26, a wall of water and rock roared down the Bhotekoshi valley where Nepal meets Tibet, a glacier somewhere high above the clouds having broken loose and turned an ordinary river into an instrument of annihilation. Villages disappeared within minutes, hydropower stations that had taken years to build were flattened, and a bridge that had carried traders and pilgrims across that border for generations was gone before anyone downstream even understood what was happening. Rescue teams in Rasuwa were still wading through mud in search of the missing when television screens began carrying near identical images from across the frontier in China, where weeks of saturated soil in Guangxi had turned routine monsoon rain into landslides, where tornadoes tore through Hubei, and where the thermometer in Xinjiang touched fifty degrees Celsius in June. Two neighbouring nations, one catastrophe repeating itself in different ways, and a planet serving notice in the plainest language it has that something in the way we have organised our relationship with it has failed.

It would be a mistake to see Rasuwa and Guangxi as unrelated and separate tragedies, acts of nature to be mourned and then forgotten till the next tragedy. They are data points in a pattern the Sustainable Development Goals were meant to interrupt and did not. The report on those Goals, drawn up as 2030 approaches, brings out some uncomfortable truths. Barely a third of the targets are on track, close to half are crawling forward too slowly to matter, and a worrying number have actually reversed since 2015.

What Rasuwa adds to that report is not a new statistic but a human face for it, the particular horror of a glacier that has held firm for millennia choosing this decade to let go, of a warning system built with real ingenuity and genuine cooperation between

two governments being simply outrun by the speed of the collapse it was designed to detect. When the very early warning infrastructure fails because the disaster moves faster than any siren, the perspective should not be that the warning systems need upgrading. It is that the condition producing the disaster needs addressing.

This is the deeper failure of the last three decades of climate governance, that so much of it has been remediation dressed up as strategy. We rebuild the bridge, relocate the village, strengthen the reservoir bunds, deploy the radar, expand the sponge city, and each of these is needed and none of them is sufficient, because every one of them treats the flood as the problem rather than as the symptom.

The permafrost that once held the Himalaya together is thinning because the planet is warming, and the planet is warming because the global economic model built on extraction and consumerism has spent two centuries treating the earth as a quarry rather than as a living system within its own thresholds. A country can install every early warning system science can devise and still be surprised, because the mitigation plans are built on a paradigm that only asks how much damage can be prevented and never asks what kind of relationship with the earth would prevent the damage from arising in the first place.

That distinction, between preventing harm and addressing its root, is where the conversation must now move, and it is here that regenerative development offers something sustainability never could. Sustainability, honestly examined, is a defensive posture, asking us to consume a little more carefully and pollute a little more slowly so that the next generation inherits a world no more ruined than the one we received.

Regeneration asks an entirely different question, how much can be taken before something breaks but how much can be

given back so that a watershed, a forest, a community, a civilisation, becomes more capable of holding itself together than it was before.

A regenerative approach to the Himalayas would not stop at monitoring glaciers. It would ask what combination of deforestation, community stewardship of upper catchments,

and restraint in how those fragile slopes are built upon might restore the resilience that industrial development has spent decades eroding. It would treat the mountain not as a hazard to be managed but as a living ecosystem whose vitality is our responsibility to renew.

India carries civilisational resources for exactly this reimagining, and it would be a failure of imagination not to draw on them at a moment like this. The Vedic notion of Rta, the order binding nature and human conduct into a seamless frame, and the Dharma that grew from it, never allowed human flourishing to be separated from the flourishing of the world that sustains it. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the conviction that the world is one family, was never sentiment reserved for ceremonial occasions but a working theory of interdependence long before ecologists spoke about it.

These are not museum pieces. Mission Life, which Prime Minister Modi placed before the world at COP26 and carried further during India's G20 presidency, translates that inheritance into policy, asking individuals and nations alike to examine consumption not as a private choice but as a collective responsibility. The principle of Antyodaya, beginning with the person standing last, and the practice of Janbhagidhar, making participation the method rather than the afterthought of

development, are exactly the instruments a regenerative response to disasters like Rasuwa would need, because no early warning system, however sophisticated, replaces a community that knows its mountain well enough to read its moods.

None of this argues against investment in infrastructure, forecasting, or the hard engineering that saves lives when disaster does strike. It argues that infrastructure alone, built on an unchanged relationship with the earth, will keep discovering the limits of its own insufficiency once collapsed glaciers at a time.

The nations gathering to reimagine the Goals beyond 2030 would do well to notice what Rasuwa and Guangxi are actually telling them, that resilience without renewal is a losing race against a warming planet, and that the country's best places to lead are not necessarily those with the largest budgets but those carrying the oldest, clearest memory of what it means to live in reciprocity with the earth rather than in extraction from it.

India has that memory, and it has, in the same decade, the practical experience of lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty without needing to be told twice that development divorced from dignity is no development at all.

That combination, ancient wisdom paired with recent, hard-won capability, is a rare inheritance, and it need not stay confined to conference halls and policy papers. Somewhere in the Himalayas right now, villagers who lost everything are already rebuilding, not with despair, but with the quiet, stubborn resolve that has carried mountain communities through worse.

If a civilisation can find in that resolve the seed for a larger idea, that the work ahead is not merely to survive what the earth is enduring but to help it heal, then even a tragedy as raw as Rasuwa will have left behind something more durable than grief. It will have left a lesson the world is hopefully ready to learn.

The Daily Star

What Nepal's devastating floods teach us about climate vulnerability

Nepal is a natural disaster hotspot, but over the past several years, the scale of damage caused by disasters have grown severe. The country experienced the severe Gorkha earthquake in 2015, monsoon floods and landslides in 2017 and 2024, Melanchi floods and landslides in 2021, the Jajarkot earthquake in 2023 and floods, landslides, and a glacial lake outburst in 2025. The latest flash floods on August 26, 2026, triggered by glacial collapse and subsequent landslide near the Nepal-Tibet border, have had a devastating impact, killing more than 1,000 people while nearly 4,000 remain missing, and causing widespread displacement and extensive damage to hydropower plants, roads, bridges, settlements and livelihoods.

Flood impacts are multi-dimensional, encompassing both economic and social aspects. These impacts will be felt long

after the floodwaters recede. The cost of the reconstruction process will be determined in the coming days.

But given the extent of the damage, it is expected to strain Nepal's limited resources. The actual cost of long-term rehabilitation and climate-resilient rebuilding of the economy could be assessed after a transparent damage assessment and livelihood restoration.

The Nepal government has taken several measures, including mobilising security forces, disaster management agencies, local authorities and health services for rescue, evacuation, medical assistance and relief distribution. It has also sought international assistance, such as rescue expertise, medical supplies, forensic support, and finance.

However, the disaster has exposed

constraints in technology, transport, healthcare, coordination and information. The disaster has turned into a national catastrophe in the Himalayan country because of a combination of factors, including glacial instability, heavy rainfall, fragile mountain terrain, unplanned settlement, and insufficient infrastructure.

There are discussions about whether, and to what extent, climate change plays a role. Scientists can determine that. However, rising temperatures and shrinking Himalayan glaciers are clearly increasing the region's vulnerability to glacial floods and the resulting disasters.

Last week's flash floods are a cruel reminder of the profound climate injustice facing vulnerable developing countries, including Bangladesh. Despite its meagre contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions - 0.1 per cent - Nepal is experiencing

increasing climate-related shocks.

Similarly, Bangladesh has been increasingly experiencing flash floods, cyclones, salinity intrusion, extreme heat and sea-level rise even though its GHG contribution is insignificant. Both Bangladesh and Nepal have limited fiscal space, technology, institutional capacity, and insurance coverage.

A single disaster can erode development progress, human livelihoods, and increase poverty. Consequently, governments often reallocate resources from sectors like infrastructure, health and education to emergency response and rebuilding efforts.

Such actions have lasting effects. For Nepal, climate variability significantly contributes to food insecurity and poverty. Experts fear that if climate impacts are not managed, the country's GDP could shrink by at least 7 per cent by 2050.

Letters To The Editor ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Lasting results

Sir, Apropos "Beyond Victory" published today, the BJP's success in West Bengal should not be viewed merely through the lens of electoral numbers.

As the editorial rightly suggests, the party now faces the more demanding task of converting political gains into credible governance. Restoring confidence in institutions, addressing industrial stagnation and creating meaningful employment must receive priority.

Political confrontation cannot become a substitute for administration. West Bengal needs investment, but investors will also look for policy stability, efficient administration and social peace.

The government must therefore engage with all sections without allowing ideological disputes to overshadow everyday concerns. The real test will be whether the new

administration can improve public services and economic opportunities. Electoral victories are temporary; public confidence is sustained only when governance produces visible and lasting results.

Yours, etc, S.M. Jeeva, Chennai, 2 September.

Reality

Sir, The RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's sentiments expressed at his speech in New York on 20 August where he stated that "anyone who believes Muslims should have no place in Bharat cannot truly call himself Hindu" are unexceptionable and rightly to be applauded by all irrespective of faith and community.

Unfortunately, these noble sentiments do not express the ground reality in India. When Muslims are described as "ghuspathis"

(intruders) by senior BJP leaders, when the same leaders state that "those who are creating violence can be identified by their clothes" and when hate remarks are continually spewed against the minority community on an ongoing basis how can we believe that the noble vision articulated by the RSS chief is anywhere near realisation in our country?

Yours, etc, L. Gopalakrishnan, Kolkata, 31 August.

Woman and child

Sir, The headline of the article by Srinivas Madhav - "Dignified Childbirth Is a Mother's Right" - published today honours women and motherhood worldwide.

It effectively highlights an issue demanding serious consideration from medical professionals, hospital authorities, and the



government, the need to institutionalise respectful maternity care.

The alarmingly high rates of maternal and neonatal mortality in India must be accorded the highest priority. As a mother, I sincerely hope that, alongside ensuring "dignified childbirth," appropriate infrastructure will be developed to harness the country's best healthcare services, across both government and private sectors and regardless of financial means, to save the lives of mothers and children.

Yours, etc, Indrani Guha, Kolkata, 31 August.

When Centurions sent Pattons to their graves

ADITYA MADAN

On September 1, the 1st Armoured Division commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Phillora in the Sialkot sector—one of the fiercest armoured engagements of the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Six decades later, Phillora remains etched in the memory of the Indian Army not merely as a contest between tanks, but as a story of bold leadership, professional skill and extraordinary courage in the face of formidable odds.

The Pakistani Patton tanks were, by the standards of the time, among the most advanced armoured fighting vehicles in the region. Their technological superiority had created an aura of invincibility. Yet at Phillora, Indian Centurions demonstrated a lesson that remains relevant even in an age of precision weapons, drones and artificial intelligence technology can provide an advantage, but it is human skill, leadership and determination that ultimately convert capability into combat power.

That enduring legacy came alive at a commemorative social evening-cum-dinner organised by the Patiala Armoured Division. Among the most moving features of the gathering was the presence of octogenarian veterans—men who, as young officers and soldiers six decades ago, had faced those very Pattons across the battlefield.

Their recollections were more than anecdotes. They were fragments of living history.

As the veterans spoke, often with the humour and flourish that come naturally to those who have spent a lifetime recounting extraordinary

experiences, the events of 1965 seemed to acquire a new immediacy. For the younger officers present, this was history without the distance of a textbook. These were the men who had actually been there.

It was particularly heartening to see young officers listening with such attention. They were not merely paying courtesy to their seniors; they were engaging with a generation whose experiences remain relevant to the profession of arms. In an age of rapidly changing technology, the conversations served as a reminder that leadership, judgement, courage and camaraderie cannot be downloaded, automated or acquired overnight.

For the veterans of Patiala, the occasion was equally meaningful. We remain grateful to the General Officer Commanding, Maj Gen P S Kanwar, for providing us the opportunity to remember and honour those who fought at Phillora. As the evening progressed, conversations naturally returned to the battle—the decisions that shaped it, the men who fought it and the sacrifices that made victory possible.

At the centre of those recollections was the daring leadership of Maj Gen Rajindra Singh Sparrow and the battlefield valour of Lt Col Ardeshr Burzoi Tarapore, alongside the skill and determination of the armoured troops who fought in the Sialkot sector. Their actions demonstrated the importance of bold leadership under pressure and the ability to exploit opportunities amid the confusion and uncertainty of battle. The numbers associated with Phillora remain striking. Indian armoured formations inflicted heavy losses on Pakistani armour, including



its much-vaunted Pattons, while Indian losses were limited. Contemporary accounts record 67 enemy tanks destroyed or damaged against six Indian Centurions lost. But statistics, impressive as they are, tell only part of the story.

A tank battle is ultimately fought by crews sealed inside steel, operating under extraordinary stress, uncertainty and danger. They must identify targets, make split-second decisions, manoeuvre, fire accurately and continue fighting despite knowing that every engagement can be fatal. The quality of the machine matters enormously, but so do training, discipline, leadership, morale and the ability to remain composed when everything around you is chaotic. That is perhaps the most enduring lesson of Phillora.

It is also a lesson reflected elsewhere in the 1965 war. In the skies, the diminutive Gnat fighters earned the celebrated sobriquet of 'Sabre-slayers' for their performance against Pakistan's F-86 Sabres. Across land and air, Indian servicemen demonstrated that superior equipment does not automatically translate into battlefield superiority.

The gallantry awards associated with the war provide another measure of the extraordinary courage displayed by India's armed forces. One Param Vir Chakra, four Maha

Vir Chakras and seven Vir Chakras were awarded for acts of exceptional bravery during the conflict. Behind every decoration, however, was a human story of fear overcome, duty placed above self, and comradeship sustained under the most difficult circumstances. There is another lesson in these stories that deserves to be remembered in today's India.

Courage does not belong to a caste, creed, religion or social class. On a battlefield, distinctions that may seem so important in ordinary life rapidly lose their meaning. What matters is whether the man beside you can be trusted, whether the leader can inspire confidence, and whether each individual is prepared to do his duty when circumstances demand it. British General Sir Edward Bruce Hamley captured something of this idea in his famous reflection on the flag:

"A moth-eaten flag is a worm-eaten pole. It doesn't look likely to stir a man's soul. 'Tis the deeds that were done 'neath the moth-eaten rag."

The words endure because symbols acquire meaning through the deeds of those who serve beneath them.

Six decades after Phillora, India faces challenges very different from those of 1965. The battlefield has changed dramatically. Technology has transformed warfare, and the character of national power is

increasingly shaped by economic strength, innovation, cyber capabilities, information and human capital. Yet the fundamental qualities required to meet adversity remain remarkably constant.

Excellence, discipline, resilience, courage and a willingness to put the larger national interest above personal considerations are not merely military virtues. They are nation-building virtues.

The young officers who listened to the veterans at Patiala therefore received something more valuable than a history lesson. They were reminded that every generation inherits not only institutions and equipment, but also a responsibility to preserve the values that enabled those institutions to endure.

The Centurions that fought at Phillora are long gone from the battlefield. The men who commanded and crewed them are now in their eighties and beyond. Yet the spirit that carried them into battle has not become obsolete. The Centurions may have made a graveyard of Pattons at Phillora. Their greater achievement, however, was to leave behind a legacy of courage, leadership and unity.

That is the legacy worth remembering—and passing on.

The writer is a retired Brigadier of the Indian Army and comments on strategic and international affairs.

NOW AND AGAIN

HARBINGERS OF RAIN

KSSPILLAI

When a newspaper reported the declining population of dragonflies in the Western Ghats recently, many considered it a warning signal of unpleasant days ahead. A 35 per cent decline in the dragonfly's population is attributed mainly to the reduction of freshwater systems, pollution, reckless infrastructure expansion, mining and quarrying, and the loss of wetlands, which were their usual habitat.

The arrival of the winged insect signals rain, badly awaited by farmers. They come in droves and fly at great speed with the help of two pairs of transparent wings. To the delight of those in the open, they keep flying around us.

During my childhood, when these flies flew around us in hundreds, many predicted it as a sign that rain was not far away. The farmers were happy, as crops depended on rainwater, and the dragonflies predicted the rains' arrival even before the skies carried quick-moving dark clouds of different shades. No one was afraid of the harmless flying insects when some of them landed on them.

All welcomed the flies, harbingers of rain, as people were suffering from the severe summer heat. There were almost no electric fans or air-conditioners to mitigate the suffering. The only respite came from the cool water in the mud pots, drawn from the wells near the kitchens of most houses, and the frequent breeze, shaking the branches of cashew and mango trees, present in most of the compounds. Most of the houses were thatched with woven coconut leaves through which air used to flow, and we slept on mats spread on the cool mud floor, which was periodically smeared by cow dung.

Sometimes we caught a dragonfly, but as darkness fell and the others flew away, it was released unharmed, and it would join its friends with a nod of thanks to its captors, who had played with it for hours.

Dragonflies are Earth's most successful predators. They, with their elongated bodies, come in large numbers, flying at great speed with a pair of large, multifaceted, compound eyes and two pairs of strong, transparent wings.

Adult dragonflies are aerial killers that eat flies, moths, bees, beetles, and other dragonflies, but become food for birds, frogs and fish. Their eyes provide a 360-degree panoramic view of their surroundings. They are remarkable fliers and hunters. They can fly straight up and down, move forward and backwards, hover like a helicopter, and even mate in midair. The lifecycle of a dragonfly is centred around water, where they lay eggs. They are incredibly agile fliers who can reach a speed of up to 30 mph. They have existed on the Earth for over 300 million years.

Dragonflies are considered good luck, prosperity, and a sign of positive change. They represent harmony and good fortune, especially if they land on you. They are so highly regarded in Japan that they call their country 'the island of dragonflies', Japan and China use them in traditional medicines, while in Indonesia people catch them to eat.

Many writers, including Lord Tennyson and H E Bates, have admired their bright colours and agile flights, and have written volumes about them.

Why don't we marry the same way?

SOUMYASREE MUSUNURI

In India, a wedding is rarely just the union of two people. It is a meeting of families, customs, languages, cuisines, histories and communities. This is why an Indian wedding can look completely different depending on where it takes place. A wedding in Kerala may have little resemblance to one in Punjab. A Bengali wedding may follow rituals unfamiliar to a Tamil family. A Christian wedding in Goa, a Muslim wedding in Hyderabad, a Sikh wedding in Amritsar or a tribal wedding in the Northeast may each have their own ceremonies, clothing and symbolism. Yet all of them are recognised as weddings.

So why, in one nation, don't we marry the same way?

The simplest answer is that India was never culturally uniform. Its geographical size is only part of the explanation. Over centuries, different communities developed their own ways of understanding family, kinship, religion and social relationships. Marriage naturally became one of the strongest places where these identities were preserved. Geography played an important role.

Different regions developed different foods, clothing, occupations and lifestyles, and wedding traditions evolved alongside them. Climate influenced clothing and cuisine. Agricultural communities developed

ceremonies connected with harvests and seasons. Coastal communities developed food traditions shaped by access to seafood and tropical ingredients. Local flowers, grains and spices became part of wedding celebrations. History added another layer. India's many kingdoms, migrations, trade routes and cultural exchanges created traditions that travelled, merged and changed. Communities moved across regions and carried their customs with them. Some traditions remained relatively local, while others spread widely. Religion also shaped married rituals, but even within the same religion there is enormous variation.

Hindu weddings are perhaps the clearest example. A wedding in North India may prominently feature the pheras around the sacred fire, while a South Indian wedding may place greater emphasis on the tying of the thali or mangalsutra, exchange of garlands and rituals specific to the regional community. Bengali weddings include customs such as the bride's ceremonial entrance and the shubho drishti, while Maharashtra weddings have their own distinctive rituals and symbolism. There is no single 'Indian Hindu wedding.' There are many.

The same diversity exists beyond Hindu traditions. Muslim weddings



vary significantly among regions and communities. Sikh weddings centre around the Anand Karaj ceremony, yet surrounding customs and celebrations can differ according to family and region. Christian weddings in India may combine church traditions with local customs, clothing and food.

Then there are India's tribal and indigenous communities, whose marriage traditions may be completely different from mainstream

ceremonies. Some have distinctive dances, community participation, symbolic exchanges and traditional forms of matchmaking. This diversity tells us something important: marriage is not only a religious institution; it is also a cultural memory.

When samples repeat a wedding ritual, they are often repeating what their grandparents and great-grandparents did. A particular song may carry the language of a region. A piece of jewellery may represent a community's history. A dish served at the wedding may have been prepared in the same family for generations. In that sense, weddings become living videos. But Indian weddings are changing.

Urbanisation, inter-state marriages, migration and social media are creating increasingly hybrid celebrations. A couple may combine a traditional ceremony with a modern reception. A bride may wear a South Indian saree after for one ceremony and a North Indian lehenga for another. Families from different linguistic or religious backgrounds may deliberately combine their customs. Inter-community marriages are therefore producing something new: the Indian fusion wedding.

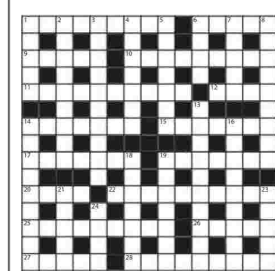
At the same time, modern weddings also raise questions about expense and social expectations. The pressure to organise increasingly elaborate celebrations can place financial burdens on families. The idea that weddings must be extravagant has been amplified by social media, celebrity culture and the wedding industry. Perhaps the challenge for modern India is not to make every wedding look the same, but to decide which traditions are worth preserving and which pressures are worth abandoning.

A wedding does not become meaningful because it follows the same script as everyone else's. Its meaning often comes from the traditions that make it personal. India's wedding diversity therefore reflects something larger about the country itself. We have a national identity without having to erase regional identities. We can belong to one nation while speaking different languages, eating different food and celebrating different customs. That is why we don't marry the same way. And perhaps we shouldn't.

India's strength has never been its ability to make everyone identical. It has been its ability to allow different traditions to exist, evolve and sometimes come together. One nation. Many languages. Many cultures. And, naturally, many ways to say, 'I do.'

The writer is a South Korea based author and Doctor of Physiotherapy.

Crossword | No. 293572



Last Sunday's Solution

V M D V B A E P
A P O L O G I S E V I L L A
L I B A T O R S L U N D S P O R T
S I K H N O B T A R T
H O S T I L E M I E N T A N D
E M I L I O N
S U S I N O W E P E T E R
B R O W N I E F O U S P O T
S N I N G D O I N G
S I A H A D I A M O V I N E
A A R E M I N D O
M O D I E M E A N D I M
M E S T R I N S N

ACROSS

- 1 Soldier and sailor returning after leave (6,3)
- 6 Die for soft rugs from the east (5)
- 9 Girl maintaining it's indispensable (5)
- 10 Breast-feeding Polish queen becoming abrasive perhaps (9)
- 11 Handy to have tin for cash (5,5)
- 12 Suffer when exposed in speech (4)
- 14 Points is taken in by girl's facial expression of disgust (7)

- 15 Went to protect my back in advance (7)
- 17 Tolerant fellow and striking girl doing a bunk (7)
- 19 Artist's mother to pose for painters around the London area (7)
- 20 Supporter finding witty remark after Sunak's first to resign (4)
- 22 Exceptional talent shown by Bill in race abroad (10)
- 25 Happen to be right about anger following answer by Penny (7)

DOWN

- 2 Daughter having too much pot (5)
- 3 Office suit annoyed by legal proceedings about to be dismissed (9)
- 5 Rarely messed up by experts in team events (5,5)
- 8 Do up shop near the centre of Alfreton (7)

- 26 What Madame Defarge does fools king in the beginning (5)
- 27 Grant makes a profit (5)
- 28 Officer extremely lucky as a rule (9)

- 5 Worried teens in court become unable to relax (5,2)
- 6 Numberless photos of foolish people (4)
- 7 Specimen not originally large enough (5)
- 8 Game failing to start after concern for winger possibly (9)
- 13 Head of languages upset during squabble with servile flatterer (10)
- 14 Bravery of girl soldier captured in (4)

- Lowell's opening lines (9)
- 16 In distress it's seen by almost everybody as absolutely necessary (9)
- 18 Rotation is good after shock at home (7)
- 19 Ponder over trace of ergot on wooden plan (7)
- 21 Let loose at the outset then relax (5)
- 23 Attempt to speak in support of drugs (5)
- 24 Employed by some pious educators (4)

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

100 Years Ago

News Items

TRIBUTE TO A KAVIRAJ

MEMORIAL MEETING IN CALCUTTA

Delhi, Aug.

References to the public spirit and charitable disposition of Kaviraj Jamin Bhusan Roy were made at a meeting at the Astanga Ayurvedic Vidyalaya, last evening, Maharaja Sir Manindira Chandra Nandy presiding. Proposals were made to erect a marble statue of the Kaviraj at a suitable place on the premises of the Vidyalaya (of which he was the founder) and to name after him a portion of the street on which the school stood. The Maharaja offered a donation to cover the expenses of 20 beds for the indoor hospital attached to the Vidyalaya. Mr. Justice Mammatha Nath Mukerjee, Mrs. Sarala Devi, Mr. J. N. Basu, Rai Bahadur Dr. Chunilal Bose, Principal G. C. Bose, Mr. Ramprasad Mukerji, Professor K. N. Mitter and Kaviraj Ganamath Sen were among those present.

HOWRAH BY-ELECTION

CONGRESS NOMINEE'S BIG MAJORITY

Simla, Aug.

Mr. Barada Prasanna Pain, the Congress nominee, was yesterday declared successful in the by-election for the seat on the Howrah Municipal Board rendered vacant by the death of Mr. Nriyadhone Mukerji. Five hundred and seventy five votes were cast in favour of Pain, while his rival, Mr. Suranjan Dutt, obtained only 248 votes.

Bhagwat: Hindu cannot be exclusivist

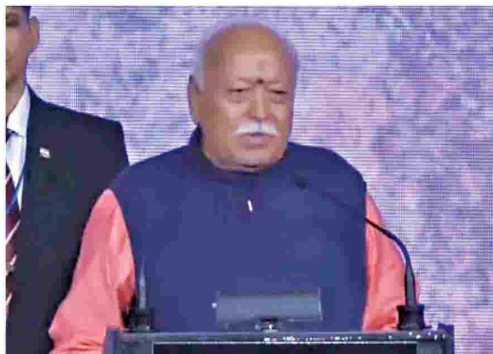


RATANA SHARDA

"The basis of this true belief, that my pain and pleasure lay in the pain and pleasure of the other is the reason for yearning for unity and its experience, humanity within humanity and feeling brotherhood... This knowledge is safely stored with Hindus. No one else has it. It is the duty of one who has a treasure, to protect it and make it easily available to others. To shy away from this duty would not be the cause of our ruin alone but also of the world. This is the purpose for which we organize ourselves to create a strong society. Thus, our organization is for the good of the world... People of the west are not aware of this science. Their senses are directed outwards and see outer world. They do not see inward, we see thus. Therefore, it is something worth doing for us, to awaken Hindu society to such levels that it can teach the world, that has the inclination to see outward to see inward, this knowledge with firm resolve and confidence." These words would sound familiar to many who heard Dr Mohan Bhagwat's speech in USA. However, they were spoken in 1954 in RSS meeting in Sindi by Shri Gururaj. (M S Golwalkar: His Vision & Mission, Page 131) Dr Bhagwat presented this global vision of RSS to the world from New York.

The last stanzas of the 'Vishwa Prarthana' of Hindu Swamimeshva Sangh clearly state the global vision of Hindu thought: "Let our devotion to the cause be steadfast in organizing the people for the achievement of world peace and tranquility in the light of the universal Dharma... In pursuit of the welfare of mankind which indeed is the holy cause and inspired by the noble virtues of service and sacrifice, let my being O' Lord, be offered at your feet."

Though Sangh works only within Bharat, it is recognized as a force that changed the social and political landscape of Bharat. Heavy agenda drive propaganda against RSS and Hindus hurts the Hindu commu-



nity globally. RSS is dragged in to paint targets on Hindu organisations as is apparent from the reactions and responses from various political, academics and media during Mohan's visit. Having completed 100 years of growth, consolidation and evolution from an organisation to a movement - it was time for RSS to present itself to global audience. It is worth noting that religious heads of 30 countries, from 16 religions and 180 scholars came together for this event. They had a heart to heart conversation with Dr Bhagwat before the public event. Looking at this big outreach with 200+ organisations across USA, one may dare say that it was the first time after Swami Vivekananda's epoch making visit in Chicago that a global vision about Hindu dharma and Bharat was presented before the world. USA was chosen as the stage, because whether we like it or not, narrative begins from USA and echoes around the world. Dr Bhagwat recalled Swami Vivekananda's words that every nation has a message, a mission and a destiny. Bharat's mission is the spread the world pluralism - see the divine unity in apparent diversity and celebrate diversity as an expression of unity in different forms, like nature. Hindu nation of Bharat stands as a living example of Spiritual Democracy where every faith, every religion has been respected and welcomed. In the same

spirit, persecuted people of different religions and races were given refuge in Bharat. Even in recent times, it has gone and supported refugees of war, people suffering from Covid etc. The message of global relevance of Hinduness was in tune with what Shri Gururaj had said decades back. It was about the one aatman/soul within all the human beings of whichever race, colour, religion they might be - Universal Oneness. The day chosen was Raksha Bandhan that celebrates the bond of brotherhood of the humanity, a pledge to protect each other. It is not just a festival of brother and sister, but of the society for the society sending out a message of social harmony. Prallada Kettar recalls that Hindus and Muslims tie rakhi to each other when they launched a successful agitation against 'Bang Bhang' division of Bengal on religious lines. The RSS chief stressed the Hindu philosophy that material satisfaction cannot give lasting happiness. There is something else, the spiritual hunger which needs to be satiated. This can be through thought or action of helping other living beings. He talked about the difference between human beings and other living creatures who live just for consumption and pleasure. Animal does not think beyond present, human beings think of life and afterlife. He explained that an animal

does not know the reason of its life, human being searches to know the purpose since eons. Only human beings have vivek - intellect - that really differentiate them from animal kingdom. And this awareness must be put to good use. He reminded the audience about the integral view of human beings and the nature of Hindus and importance of human beings living in harmony with the society and nature; not just as consumers but as a part of this vast universe.

In keeping with the inclusive nature of Hindu dharma, he clearly stated that Hindu cannot be exclusivist like many other ideologies, hence cannot think of throwing out minorities when it talks about Hindu Rashtra. We should be clear that Hindu idea of nationhood is not that of nation state but of cultural spirit of Bharat, which is Hindu culture. This is the culture that binds us together for eons. This thought has been expressed at various times, from Shri Gururaj's interview of 1971 to Balasahdeo Prasad's Samskaran ji. He presented the two diametrically opposite ideas that can make or break the world - 'Live and Let Live' or 'Only the people who follow a certain idea have a right to live. If they agree with us, we will protect them, or they have no place in the society'. And he reiterated the Hindu philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' as the only way for the world to survive, the thought that directs action of every conscious Hindu.

For the Indian diaspora, the message was what had been said much earlier by Shri Gururaj to the swamimeshvas who came to meet him from overseas. You may take inspiration from your jannabhoomi, your punyabhoomi, but your primary loyalty should be to your karmabhoomi and see what you can contribute to the society you adopted. Thus, it was a positive messaging from RSS to dispel all the negative propaganda by the western left intellectuals, academia and media that could spread positivity. This speech of his, along with his speech in Toronto, Canada, will echo for a long time globally. If taken in right spirit, as enunciated in the joint declaration of the religious heads and scholars signed about Universal Oneness for world peace, this could be the beginning of leading non-state actors led push for peace.

Ratana Sharda is a well known TV panelist and has authored several books. He has been a member of the RSS since his childhood days

FROM AGENDA COVER

It is time for Global...

As stated above the major emerging economies - specifically India, China, and Brazil - must spearhead a dedicated South-South Climate Technology Summit to directly transfer and scale green solutions across vulnerable nations without Western patent gate-keeping or predatory debt traps. In this regards the China's advanced solar manufacturing, India's ultra-low-cost green hydrogen and grid-scale renewables, and Brazil's agricultural bio-energy must be pooled to allow open-access vault for developing states.

From the point of view of Himalayan & equatorial early warning systems, India, China and Nepal need to establish joint satellite networks operated by ISRO, CNSA, and partner agencies must provide free, real-time glacial, atmospheric, and oceanographic monitoring data to frontline nations like Nepal, Bangladesh, and small island states.

Further countries having technology must provide Patent-Free Climate Resilient technologies for agriculture along with establishment of a collaborative research programmes for drought-tolerant seed varieties and share precision-irrigation networks tailored to tropical climates. Another important thing needed is to evolve grassroots Climate Resilience for Every Household and for this the macro-level political shifts must be matched by a micro-level transition. Families can no longer rely on fragile centralized infrastructure; every household must adopt a climate-resilient lifestyle to weather the coming shocks. Water conservation is another area which the developing countries must act both at the village and city levels and promote rooftop water harvesting & greywater reuse by installing basic rainwater catchment systems and recycling household sink water reduces dependency on municipal supplies during climate-driven droughts and flood-induced contamination. To reduce the impact of heat waves painting house roofs with high-albedo reflective white coatings will lower indoor temperatures offering vital thermal protection without relying on power-hungry air conditioning. In this regards the Prime Ministers roof top solar systems and off-grid micro small rooftop solar kits with battery backups ensure uninterrupted access to lighting, communications, and water pumping when national power grids fail during extreme weather events must be evolved through a scheme especially in rural areas in a big manner.

For food security the households should utilize micro-spaces like balconies, yards, rooftops etc to cultivate hardy, nutrient-dense native crops such as millets, sweet potatoes, and local greens that thrive with minimal water and supplemented by decentralized seed banks, local composting networks, and emergency relief committees to act immediately when extreme weather strikes. Nepal's melting peaks are and occasion for Indian leadership to lead the global south. This tragedy also is an early warning signal for the rest of humanity. The Western-dominated climate negotiation framework has failed to deliver equity or safety. By forging a unified South-South technological alliance and fortifying our homes through grassroots resilience, the developing world can build its own defence against a warming world. The era of waiting for permission or help is over; survival demands immediate action.

The writer is former Director-general of Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and is Chairman of Centre for Resource Management and Environment

From Kedarnath to Nepal...

The government has made progress with geotechnical, LiDAR, drone and InSAR surveys - these should become standard practice. Every major road, tunnel, bridge, hydropower project and township should pass a Disaster Impact Assessment, weighing environmental damage alongside disaster risk and to from the project. Former Union Minister Karan Singh's proposal for a Himalayan Authority - raised over concerns about infrastructure expansion, including highway four-laning - deserves fresh attention, combining geological, hydrological, ecological and disaster-management expertise with development planning, not another bureaucratic layer. Science can warn us; it cannot make an unsafe place safe - one of Uttarakhand's sharpest lessons. Hazard maps must shape land-use decisions: floodplains, unstable slopes and debris-flow channels shouldn't turn commercial just because the land is valuable. The question shifts from whether we can build somewhere to whether we should. Kedarnath's lesson isn't a ban on pilgrimage or tourism - it's managing visitors by real risk.

However, advancing the national warning system, the first responder in a remote Himalayan village will be the community itself. Every vulnerable village needs trained responders, emergency communication, a marked evacuation path and a safe point, plus food, medicine, water, fuel and rescue equipment stocked before roads become impassable. Nepal's hardest test begins once the crisis passes. Reconstruction defaults to restoring exactly what existed - the same home, road, bridge, tourist site - but without a fresh risk assessment, that simply recreates the next disaster. Where a settlement is unsafe, relocation must be on the table, and livelihoods need rebuilding too. The principle should be to build back better, not just what was lost.

Himalayan disaster management cannot stop at a border. India and Nepal need a real-time exchange of data on rainfall, river levels, glacial lakes and landslides - encouragingly, the Centre has asked agencies to share information. It happens, not after a disaster begins. Coordination must go beyond meetings; every major valley needs a shared risk map - hazard source, flow path, exposed population, warning status, evacuation routes, response capacity - the same logic scaled across the Himalaya, linking government, science and local communities. India's gap is not knowledge. Since Kedarnath, it has built early warning systems, GLOF mitigation, landslide prediction, satellite monitoring, community response programmes and more scientific infrastructure planning.

What's missing is the connective tissue: risk maps must shape construction; warnings must trigger decisions; sensors must prompt evacuation; roads must follow geology, not convenience; tourism must respect carrying capacity; and communities need training before disasters strike. Above all, the Himalaya needs a development philosophy of its own. The mountains don't oppose development - they oppose development that doesn't understand the mountains. We can't stop extreme rain, avalanches, landslides or glacial lake outbursts, but can limit who stands in their path, warn and evacuate faster. The real test of disaster management was never how well we rescue people from calamity, but how many never faced it. The truest tribute to those lost in Nepal, and at Kedarnath before them, is not another report after the next disaster - it is a safer Himalaya, built before it comes.

The writer is Former Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management and Director, SAARC Disaster Management Centre

The ghosts that are really memory

LAKSHMI PURI

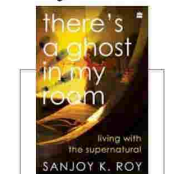
"Ghosts are all around us. Seek them, and they shall tell you their story," Ruskin Bond once said - an apt threshold into a disarmingly entertaining book. As someone susceptible to such phenomena, I read it hoping for insight as much as validation that the unreal is real. Roy's hauntings are never confined to decades of his life but to premonitions, eerie presences, even an apparent possession.

Calling it a ghost-story collection undercuts it; this is closer to a supernatural memoir, part autobiography, part travelogue, part social history, where the unexplained becomes a portal into decades of lived experience. Roy begins with an advantage rare among writers of the paranormal: he isn't anxious to convince anyone. He owns experiences that challenged his rational understanding without claiming to be a mystic or seer; these, he suggests, are his reality. The reader decides. That refusal to proselytise gives it credibility and charm; there is no grand theory, only an accumulation of experiences offered as: this happened, I cannot explain it, perhaps you can. The sixteen chapters move from Calcutta and Delhi to Khajuraho, Rishikesh and the Himalayas, then onward to Jerusalem and Valladolid. Geography is never decorative - Roy has an instinct for places where history seems to settle into the walls. That is the book's most compelling idea: places remember.

A Delhi neighbourhood conceals histories beneath modern construction; Khajuraho becomes a repository of centuries; in Valladolid, an apparition leads Roy toward the Inquisition and the persecuted Alambros. His technique is effective: chapters often open cinematically - a child staring into darkness, Roy convulsing on a bus - before he wanders into a house's history or a memory, circling back to the inexplicable only later.

At its best, this gives the book the expansive quality of conversation. A second memoir sits quietly inside the first: the story of an India changing around its narrator.

Roy's childhood spans Cochin, Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and



Author: Sanjoy K. Roy
Publisher: Harper Fictions
Pages: 100 pages
Price: ₹329

London; his father's naval career brings the 1971 war home; later come liberalisation, television's rise, and teamwork's ferment through the 1990s, forming the world that produced the Jaipur Literature Festival. These are not interruptions; for Roy, the supernatural does not exist outside ordinary life - it walks straight through it. Puneeta is one of his key presences, often more instinctively receptive than her husband; children, siblings, friends and pets lend warmth, and the paranormal unfolds amid marriages, meals and domestic chaos.

Humour helps too - in Rishikesh, a feared tiger turns out to be light glinting off a packet of chips. The register darkens in 'The Fire', where Roy's narrative meets the 1997 Uphaar cinema tragedy - an all-too-real horror of negligence and grief, a reminder its gravest terrors aren't always paranormal. Elsewhere the ghosts turn benign: the Nalinal presence at the end of the book, almost custodial, and the Valladolid apparition inspires curiosity rather than fear.

Perhaps the truest ghosts are history, memory and attachment - people leave, houses change hands, civilisations build over ruins, yet something remains. Roy never tells us what it proves, and that is exactly why the book works. Warm, atmospheric and richly anecdotal, 'There's a Ghost in My Room' is less about fearing the dead than learning to live with the unexplained; believers will feel confirmed, sceptics may begin to wonder - and either way, you'll look differently at the rooms and memories we mistakenly think we inhabit alone.

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This Week's Zodiac Insights

Prophecy • Money • Family • Relationships • Health • Travel

Mesha | Aries

This week feels rewarding, especially after a period that may have tested your patience and resilience. At work, long-awaited recognition or even a promotion may finally come through, while friends can be especially helpful if you are racing against a deadline. Family life brings warmth and pride, but joint pain or physical discomfort could slow you down, so give yourself enough rest.

Lucky colour: Dark purple
Watch out for: Overexertion and ignoring recurring joint pain.

Vrisbhaha | Taurus

A little good luck seems to follow you this week, and people around you are likely to value your opinions more than usual. Business connected with transport, imports or exports can do well, while money matters may improve enough to ease an old debt or financial pressure. Relationships need more patience, especially your partner or sibling, and stress may show up through headaches, fever or general tiredness.

Lucky colour: Sun brown
Watch out for: Family disagreements and neglecting your health.

Mithuna | Gemini

You are likely to handle pressure better than you expect this week, and staying calm will help you get more done. Work progresses smoothly, finances may bring a pleasant surprise and plans around shifting home or booking a new place could also move ahead. Relationships may need some compromise, while an elderly family member's health deserves attention if it has been put off for too long.

Lucky colour: White
Watch out for: Careless words with elders and overlooking family health matters.

Karka | Cancer

Some of the effort you have put in earlier may begin to come back to you this week, even if a few official matters continue to move slowly. Your communication is strong and business shows steady progress, but be particularly careful with banking, payments and important financial transactions. Personal relationships can become tense over differences of opinion, and those already dealing with blood pressure or stress should avoid situations that leave them worked up.

Lucky colour: Blood red
Watch out for: Financial mistakes, arguments and stress related health issues.

Simha | Leo

The week may start with a few frustrations, but things become easier once you stop seeing every setback as a defeat. Business concerns may think about expansion or bringing new people into a venture, while fresh professional contacts can turn out to be useful, although money owed is possible. Misunderstandings at home need a calm response, and seek to consider stress in detail if your posture or routine has been poor.

Lucky colour: Sun brown
Watch out for: Delayed payments, heated arguments and physical strain.

Kanya | Virgo

This is a week when things finally begin to move after a period of feeling stuck. People are more willing to trust your judgement, long-term plans can make real progress and your finances look steady enough to start building a stronger safety cushion. Keep key matters simple and avoid turning small differences into bigger discussions, while time with friends or outdoors can do wonders for your mood.

Lucky colour: Green
Watch out for: Unnecessary relationship debates and spending without setting something aside.

Tula | Libra

Patience will help you more than speed this week, especially when deadlines, paperwork or last-minute changes begin to test you. Extra effort can still bring additional income and better savings, but rushing through work may only create more pressure. Relationships can become touchy over differing viewpoints, a planned trip may change because of family needs and physical strain should be avoided if you are already feeling uncomfortable.

Lucky colour: Pink red
Watch out for: Arguments, deadline stress and pushing yourself physically.

Vrishechika | Scorpio

You may have a lot on your plate this week, but that pressure can actually bring you to your most focused edge. Career and business look strong, especially if you are planning something of your own, while finances and vehicle-related plans may also move in a favourable direction. Your partner is likely to be supportive, though different opinions at home could create some tension and old friends may unexpectedly come back into your life.

Lucky colour: Maroon gold
Watch out for: Family disagreements and taking on more responsibility than you need to.

Dhanu | Sagittarius

This can be a strong week for anyone whose work depends on ideas, writing, speaking or being seen by the right people. A fresh professional idea may win support from seniors, but property or land-related matters should be checked carefully before you sign or commit to anything. Family concerns, particularly around an elderly relative, may need your attention, while a short trip can help you rest mentally.

Lucky colour: Terracotta blue
Watch out for: Legal paperwork, family concerns and ignoring unusual health symptoms.

Makara | Capricorn

Progress may be slow this week, but the good news is that things that have been pending can finally start getting finished. Career matters need careful judgement and major investments, especially in property or construction, are better handled only after checking every detail. Relationships feel lighter, travel can bring good family time and a calm, measured way of speaking will help you handle people more easily.

Lucky colour: White
Watch out for: Busy investments, work pressure and minor injuries while moving around.

Kumbha | Aquarius

You may feel more drawn to home and family this week, even if work is still bringing you some good results. Career-related goals are possible and money that was lent out earlier may return, giving your finances a welcome boost. Relationships may not feel as dependable as you would like, so lean on trusted friends when needed and pay attention to any recurring nervous system or physical discomfort.

Lucky colour: Silver red
Watch out for: Expecting too much from others and brushing aside health concerns.

Meena | Pisces

This is a week to slow down before saying yes, no or making any decision you cannot easily reverse. You may feel eager to get moving at work or an unexpected financial development connected with family assets could come up, but acting in a hurry may not give you the result you want. Relationships and family conversations need a softer approach, and it is better to take your time before trusting new people or ignoring a health issue that keeps returning.

Lucky colour: Silver red
Watch out for: Hasty decisions, unnecessary arguments and delaying health care.

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Paryushan: A cuisine shaped by mindfulness



ANIL
RAJPUT

Some festivals announce themselves through abundance. Paryushan enters the home by asking what can be relinquished. The kitchen grows quieter, ingredients disappear from the shelf and appetite itself becomes a subject of reflection. Yet this deliberate simplicity does not diminish food culture. It reveals another kind of richness, shaped by ahimsa, discipline, seasonality and care.

Indian festivals are not simply occasions marked on a calendar. They are among the most enduring carriers of India's cultural memory. Through rituals, stories, prayers, family customs and food, values pass almost imperceptibly from one generation to the next. Every traditional dish forms part of this inheritance: its ingredients speak of geography and season, its preparation preserves household knowledge, and its place within a festival recalls why and when it was made. Recording such traditions therefore preserves not merely recipes, but the cultural meaning that gives them life. In 2026, Shvetambara Paryushan begins on Tuesday, 8 September and continues for eight days until Samvatsari on Tuesday, 15 September. Across those sacred days, many jains fast completely, while others eat within carefully chosen limits. For those who cook, every decision, from selecting a pulse to boiling drinking water, can become an expression of reverence for life.

Paryushan is among the most important annual observances in the Shvetambara Jain tradition. Its name carries the idea of drawing closer to the self, quietening passions and shedding karma through austerity. It falls during the monsoon Chaturmas, when Jain monks and nuns remain in one place. The rains bring forth insects and minute forms of life, making travel more likely to cause unintended harm. Staying put therefore reflects ahimsa as a discipline practised in response to the living world.

Over eight days, devotees deepen prayer, meditation, scriptural study and self-examination. The Kalpa Sutra, which includes accounts of the Tirthankaras and Lord Mahavira's birth, is read in Shvetambara congregations. Pratikraman encourages reflection upon faults in thought, speech and action. The observance culminates in Samvatsari, when forgiveness is sought with the words "Micchami Dukkadam", acknowledging hurt caused knowingly or unknowingly. Digambara Jains mark the related but distinct ten-day Das Lakshana Parva, devoted to ten virtues. The distinction preserves Paryushan's particular religious setting while recognising a shared Jain commitment to purification.

Food participates in this inner work because Jain philosophy asks the eater to consider the life affected by every meal. Underground vegetables such as potatoes, onions, garlic, carrots and radishes are avoided because uprooting them destroys the plant and disturbs organisms in the soil. During Paryushan, many households adopt further restrictions, including fresh greens, certain fruits and ingredients whose use can involve greater harm during the monsoon. Meals are prepared and consumed before sunset, although exact practices differ among families and sanghs. Taken together, these choices give Paryushan a distinctive philosophy of food. What is eaten, when it is eaten, how it is prepared and even what is consciously left uneaten become expressions of ahimsa, restraint and responsibility towards other forms of life. Its cuisine is therefore not simply religious food, but an ethical system practised in the



kitchen.

There is no single Paryushan menu because the observance includes different forms of tapasya. Some undertake upvas and consume no food, often taking only boiled water within prescribed hours. Ekasana permits one sitting for a meal, while Bhisana permits two. Ayambil is stricter, centring on one plain meal without rich flavouring, oil, ghee, milk products or sweets. The dishes described here belong to the wider food culture surrounding Paryushan, especially among Gujarati and Rajasthani Jain families eating restricted meals. They are not suitable for every fast or expected of every devotee.

Within those limits, western Indian Jain kitchens have developed an extraordinary pantry intelligence. Dried vegetables, gram flour, pulses, grains, dairy where permitted and preserved foods can carry an entire meal without underground produce. Gujarati Gathiya nu Shaak captures this resourcefulness. Thick chickpea-flour gathiya are simmered in a spiced gravy, often based on curd, buttermilk or dry masala adapted to family rules. They soften at the edges while retaining some bite and are eaten with rotli or another permitted flatbread.

A related pantry dish, Papad nu Shaak, turns roasted lentil papad into pieces that soften in a curd-based or spiced gravy. Its salty, toasted character gives body to a meal when fresh vegetables have been set aside. Moong Vadi nu Shaak follows the same logic. Sun-dried nuggets made from moong paste are cooked until tender in a restrained gravy, providing texture without fresh produce. Ingredients dried before the monsoon thus become especially valuable during sacred days.

The Gujarati repertoire continues with Chana Dhokli nu Shaak, in which pieces of firm gram-flour dough are simmered with chickpeas and dry spices until they absorb the surrounding flavours. The dish is substantial without relying on root vegetables and is served with rotli as part of a daytime meal. For a different balance of sweet and savoury, Pakka Kela nu Shaak uses ripe banana rather

than raw plantain. Slices are gently cooked with cumin, chilli, turmeric and a souring element allowed by the household, creating a soft shaak in which the natural sweetness of the fruit is checked by spice. Bananas also appear in Kelawada, small fritters made by combining mashed ripe banana with flour and seasonings before frying spoonfuls until golden. Where frying is permitted, they are enjoyed warm as a compact snack rather than an unrestricted indulgence.

Another ingenious preparation is Banana Chivda, made from thin banana slices fried until crisp and tossed with salt, pepper or selected dry spices. It keeps well, requires no green garnish and is eaten in modest portions during permitted hours. Alongside it, Sing Daliya ni Chutney combines crushed roasted peanuts, dry coconut, sesame or permitted spices. Ground without fresh herbs or garlic, this dry, nutty accompaniment enlivens rotli and gram-flour dishes. Both show how flavour can be created without weakening the observance's restraint.

Across Rajasthan, an arid landscape had already taught cooks to make exceptional use of gram flour, dried berries and little water. Gatte ki Sabzi is therefore naturally at home in many Paryushan kitchens. Besan is kneaded with spices into firm cylinders, boiled, sliced and simmered in a curd gravy. The dumplings absorb the tangy sauce and are eaten with rotis, turning stable ingredients into a complete dish.



The desert's most distinctive contribution is Panchkuta, traditionally built from dried ingredients such as keri berries, sangri beans, kumatiya seeds, gunda and dried mango. The components are soaked, cleaned, boiled and cooked with oil and dry spices. Each contributes a different sensation, from the sharpness of keri to the fibrous bite of sangri, while dried mango supplies acidity when fresh lemon is avoided. This is not a generic festival vegetable, but an expression of a regional ecology in which scarcity, preservation and respect for resources have long shaped taste.

Curd and gram flour also meet in Pakodawali Kadhi, a Rajasthani preparation in which small besan fritters are immersed in a gently simmered yoghurt gravy. The tempering is adjusted to Paryushan rules, relying on asafoetida, cumin, mustard seeds and dried chilli rather than fresh aromatics. The soft pakodas make the kadhi more substantial and it may be paired with rice during a permitted meal. Each of these savoury dishes is adaptable, but adaptation must remain honest. A recipe becomes appropriate only when every ingredient, preparation method and eating time agrees with the discipline observed in that particular home.

Sweet preparations require the same qualification. They are not part of Ayambil and have no place during a complete fast, but some families prepare them for those who are eating, for children, for communal hospitality within permitted rules or for the pama meal after a period of fasting has formally ended. Gujarat's Mohanthal is among the most prized. Coarse besan is rubbed with ghee and milk to form a grainy texture, roasted slowly until nutty, then set with sugar syrup, cardamom and sometimes saffron. Cut into dense squares, it rewards patient roasting and is served in small pieces.

Wheat takes a more rustic form in Churma Laddoo. Coarse flour dough portions are fried or baked, crushed into crumbs and mixed with melted ghee, jaggery or sugar and cardamom before being shaped into balls. But Churma begins with a similar crumb but is pressed into a tray and cut into squares or diamonds,

giving the familiar flavours of churma a firmer, sliceable form. Both preparations preserve an older household knowledge of judging texture by touch, knowing when the flour is roasted enough and adding just sufficient ghee for the mixture to hold.

In Sukhdi, also called Gol Papdi, wheat flour is roasted in ghee until aromatic, removed from intense heat and mixed with jaggery so that it melts without turning hard or bitter. The mixture is spread quickly and cut while still warm. Its short ingredient list makes precision essential. Lapsi develops sweetness more slowly. Broken wheat is roasted in ghee, cooked until the grains swell and then sweetened with jaggery or sugar, often with cardamom and nuts. Served warm, it retains a pleasantly separate grain and carries the comfort of a sweet made from the everyday grain cupboard rather than elaborate decoration.

Gram flour returns in Magaj, but with a texture distinct from Mohanthal. Fine besan is gently roasted in ghee and combined with powdered sugar and cardamom to create a soft, rich sweet that may be shaped or set. Moong Dal Halwa, associated especially with Rajasthan, demands still more patience. Soaked moong dal is ground and roasted slowly in ghee until its raw aroma disappears, then cooked with milk or water and sugar until glossy. Kalakand completes the sweeter spread where dairy is allowed. Milk is reduced or gently curdled and cooked with sugar until moist granules form, then set and cut. None of these sweets defines Paryushan by itself, but together they show how regional Jain households accommodate different ages and levels of observance without confusing nourishment with spiritual licence.

Even beverages are governed by attention. Boiled water holds the central place for many devotees because water is filtered and boiled to reduce harm to minute life, then consumed only within the time and storage limits prescribed by one's tradition or sangh. Those not undertaking a strict fast may drink plain milk, lightly flavoured Masala Milk prepared with cardamom, saffron or permitted dry spices, or ordinary tea, a mild dry-ginger infusion or water sweetened with mishri. Such drinks are neither universal nor interchangeable. Milk, sugar and spices are excluded from stricter practices such as Ayambil, while someone observing upvas may take only boiled water. The beverage chosen is therefore another declaration of the vow being followed.

This is what makes Paryushan cuisine remarkable. Its depth lies not in a celebratory thali but in the moral reasoning that precedes the meal. A papad becomes a vegetable, dried desert produce replaces a market basket and ripe banana supplies both shaak and snack, while the empty plate of a fasting devotee remains just as meaningful as another's carefully restricted meal. Both express the effort to loosen appetite's hold and turn attention inward.

The Paryushan kitchen has also served as an informal classroom of culture. Recipes were rarely transmitted in isolation. Along with a method came an explanation: why one ingredient was avoided, why another was preserved, why food was prepared before a particular hour and why a dish belonged to a season or sacred occasion. Younger generations should therefore be invited to roast besan for Mohanthal, clear ker and sangri, shape gatta and grind a dry chutney while learning the values behind each act. Cuisine can carry knowledge without calling itself education. Preserving Paryushan's food traditions means passing on both recipe and reasoning, so the observance remains not only marked on a calendar but understood through choices made at the stove, at the table and, sometimes, through the profound choice not to eat at all.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)

Nutrition Week 2026

The value of eating right, and how India can get there

TEAM AGENDA

New government survey data show India winning some old nutrition battles even as a newer one — obesity — gathers pace. Since 1982, India has observed September 1 to 7 as National Nutrition Week, built around a simple idea: food is not just fuel; it is vital to health, learning and productivity. This year's observance overlaps with Rashtriya Poshan Maah, whose 2026 push uses the theme "Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi" — nutrition and education together for children.

The numbers tell a mixed story. In the 2025 Global Hunger Index, India ranked 102nd of 123 countries, with a score of 25.8, an improvement on 105th the year before. Undernourishment, stunting and child mortality have improved, but child wasting has barely shifted.

The National Family Health Survey-6, covering 2023-24, shows child stunting falling from 35.5 per cent to 29.3 per cent and severe

wasting nearly halving, from 7.7 per cent to 5.2 per cent. But the underweight rate among children barely moved, and overweight and obesity among women have climbed from 13 per cent in the mid-2000s to nearly 31 per cent now. ICMR's National Institute of Nutrition estimates that more than 17 million Indian children and adolescents are living with obesity, with the figure expected to cross 27 million by 2030. The double burden — stunting, micronutrient deficiency and obesity.

It happens when diets change faster than public health systems can adjust: processed food, sedentary work and a food environment where unhealthy options are the

A RECENT UNICEF REPORT FOUND THAT CHILDHOOD OBESITY HAS OVERTAKEN UNDERWEIGHT AS THE WORLD'S MOST COMMON FORM OF MALNUTRITION AMONG SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN FOR THE FIRST TIME — AND INDIA, AGAIN, IS SQUARELY PART OF THAT SHIFT

cheapest and closest.

Policy is responding unevenly. Poshan Abhiyaan's tracking app monitors services for close to nine crore beneficiaries across roughly 14 lakh Anganwadi centres. A parliamentary committee has pushed for mandatory front-of-pack labelling, while an ICMR-NIN-led consortium has proposed a tax on high-fat, high-salt and high-sugar foods. ICMR-NIN's revised Dietary Guidelines for Indians offer a "My Plate for the Day": half the plate should be vegetables and fruit, including green leafy vegetables; the other half should combine grains and protein, including cereals, millets, pulses, nuts, dairy, eggs or meat. Added sugar, salt and refined oil should remain minimal, while fried and packaged snacks should be occasional. Millets, seasonal vegetables and pulses can be cheaper and more climate-resilient than much of what has replaced them in urban diets. Training Anganwadi staff and enforcing food labelling will determine whether next September's numbers look different.

The India beyond the familiar plate



GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Indian cuisine is a vast map of flavours, ingredients and cooking traditions, with each region offering dishes shaped by its own history and communities. MaatriBhoomii seeks to bring that diversity to the table, offering diners an opportunity to explore regional Indian food through recipes, indigenous ingredients and traditional cooking techniques.

That premise comes from research, not romance. The team behind the restaurant covered over 14,000 km across the country, tracking down regional recipes, indigenous ingredients and cooking techniques that rarely make it past the communities that keep them alive. The result is a menu built on discovery rather than the usual butter chicken-and-naan

shorthand for "Indian food" think Dilli Wali Chowmein, Palak Aloo Kebbab, Doodh Puri and Gujarati Dhokla Chaat sharing table space, each dish carrying its region's fingerprint rather than a generic makeover.

The menu also explores the textures, spices and flavours that give each regional dish its identity. From familiar street-food favourites to lesser-known recipes, the food aims to offer diners a sense of place with every plate. The emphasis is on ingredients, traditional techniques and flavours that remain rooted in their original culinary traditions.

What sets the

concept apart is the ambition to hold two things together: regional authenticity and premium hospitality. Too often, one comes at the cost of the other — food dressed down for fine dining, or fine dining

A FLAVOURFUL JOURNEY ACROSS INDIA, SERVING REGIONAL RECIPES, INDIGENOUS INGREDIENTS AND CULINARY TRADITIONS

dropped to keep the food honest. The team is betting that Indian cuisine, in context built in every dish carries the story of the region and community it came from, turning a meal into something closer to a guided tour of India's culinary map.

"MaatriBhoomii comes from a deep desire to celebrate the incredible diversity of Indian cuisine," says founder Priyanka Gautam. "Our journey of over 14,000 km across the country gave us the opportunity to experience food at its source, meet communities that have preserved these traditions, and discover recipes that deserve to be celebrated." Whether execution matches ambition will only be clear once the doors open. But as a concept, it's a rare bet on complexity over convenience — one Noida's dining scene could use more of.



Shri Krishna's Living Presence of Love

AMMA (SRI MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI DEVI)

Behind the perishable faces of this world stands the one unchangeable Reality, the Supreme Self, beyond all space and time, Janmashtami is the holy day that this eternal power took form in Gokula to uplift the world during dark times.

The birth and deeds of Shri Krishna, who lies beyond word and beyond thought, cannot truly be told. By releasing a ganga-flood of loving devotion in countless hearts, by sweeping away the dust of ages, by re-establishing dharma and giving us the essence of the scriptures through the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord brought about a new dawn for humankind.

Such an avatar is the never-ending source of the universe folding itself, of its own will, into the small vessel of a human form, and walking among us as an "ordinary" person.

It is a rare grace to be able to see the Divine in this form with our very own eyes, hear it with our ears, speak to it with our lips, touch it with our hands, and feel it with our hearts.

More words cannot give the sweetness of honey, but let a single drop fall on the tongue, and we know it at once. This is what the presence of an enlightened being imparts to the world. Their company is itself a path to the experience of the Self. As the very light of the world, they live on forever in the hearts of the people they reach.

This was the experience Shri Krishna offered to everyone who saw him. From the moment of his birth, life was thick with obstacles and opposition, yet he went forward unshaken.

He protected those in need of protection and corrected those in need of correction. He consoled the grieving, gave courage to the faint-hearted, and showed the way to those who had



With children around, Amma watches the speaking of pots for Janmashtami celebrations in Amritapuri

lost it. In hearts that were pure, he awakened selfless love.

According to their level of understanding, Shri Krishna gave each one the fruits of their lives — teachings, understanding, prosperity, righteousness, fulfillment, and liberation. In every way, the lives of all those who came to the Lord were blessed.

For the sake of dharma Krishna was ever at work, and he honoured every kind of labour alike, counting none too lowly. As Arjuna's charioteer, he tended the horses. At Yudhishtira's great sacrifice, he washed the feet of the guests. When Draupadi's garment was pulled away in insult before the court, he made the cloth endless so her honour was saved.

Shri Krishna lived on Earth both as the protector of devotees and as their servant, attached to nothing, flowing

along with time. By his life, his work, his teachings, and just his presence, he made every particle of the Earth he stepped upon sacred again.

When an actor enters the stage, he plays his role as though it were life itself; so too did Krishna live in the world as a divine play. A theatre performance is meant to give joy to those who watch, and to carry within it a teaching of values.

In just this way, the Lord both delighted the people around him and taught them the lessons of dharma. The many acts of this sacred story,

from scenes of sorrow to scenes of joy, led to the redemption of countless souls.

Krishna manifested many wonders, yet the greatest wonder was the loving devotion he awakened in human hearts, above all in the gopis of Vrindavan. Those simple, unlettered village women rose to a height that even the sages could not reach.

Even if we have everything else in life, we become truly blessed only when there is sincere love for God, and we surrender everything to Him. That is the message of Shri Krishna's life.

(Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, known simply as Amma, is a spiritual master and humanitarian who has given her darshan in the form of a motherly embrace to more than 4 crore people. Listening to the cries of the suffering, Amma leads the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, an NGO that reaches across more than 50 countries, working in the areas of healthcare, disaster relief, education, gender equality, and environmental restoration)

Inner management is essential

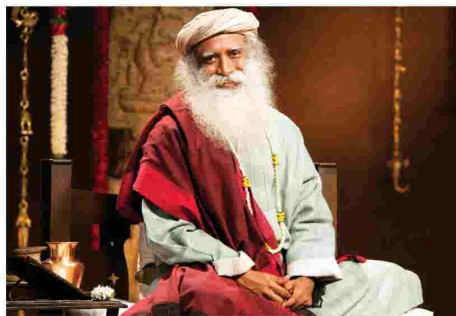
SADHGURU

Commerce is something that we believe will decide the quality of human life in many ways. It is a 50 per cent truth because when a human being is in poverty, you cannot tell him anything other than food. When you are hungry, your whole consciousness will be food. If you go and ask a beggar how much is 2+2, he may say four chapattis. The whole thing will be about food when there is no food.

It will not be possible to talk to a human being about anything higher in his life when his fundamental needs are not taken care of. But we need to understand that this journey from poverty to affluence is a hard

journey. Whether it is for an individual person or for a society or nation or large populations in the world, it is a hard journey. It does not happen easily, it comes with an enormous price attached to it. But most of the time when people get there, they cannot enjoy their affluence.

Most societies suffer their affluence. For example, in the United States, which is among the richest country in the planet, average citizens have so much comfort and convenience that even royalty could not have afforded a couplet years ago. In spite of that, a significant percentage of the population in United States is on some kind of anti-depressants. If you just take away a particular medicine from the market, half the nation will go crazy. That is not wellbeing. It does not matter where you live, how you live, what you eat, what you



WE AS AN INDIVIDUAL, AS A SOCIETY, AS A NATION, AS A WORLD, WE HAVE NOT INVESTED ANYTHING TOWARDS INNER WELLBEING. IT IS TIME WE INVEST IN OUR INNER WELLBEING

wear, what you drive, if you are not happy, you cannot call it wellbeing.

If you do not know how to manage yourself, your happiness will be accidental. Outside situations are not always going to be in your control because the outside situation involves a million different ingredients. Most of them do not even know what they are actually. Only some you understand and those you try to control. Rest you do not even understand, so there is no question of controlling. You are just hoping it will all fall into place. But when it comes to inner situa-

tion, there is only you, just you. This inner situation at least must happen your way. If this one does not happen your way, you are a lost case. So if you want to be happy, you have to manage yourself properly. Management means creating situations the way you want it. Just as you manage your family, finance, industry, business, it is important to manage your mind, your emotion, your energy, your body. And your ability to manage the outside situations will come to you only when the inside is well managed. Unfortunately we as an individual, as a society, as a nation, as a world, we have not invested anything towards inner wellbeing. It is time we invest in our inner wellbeing.

(Ranked amongst the fifty most influential people in India, Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and a New York Times bestselling author. Sadhguru has been conferred the Padma Vibhushan by the Government of India in 2017, the highest national civilian award, accorded for exceptional and distinguished service. He is also the founder of the world's largest people's movement, Conscious Planet- Save Soil, which has touched over 4 billion people)



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Does God dwell in the temple?

The mandir does not bring God closer to us; rather, it brings our wandering hearts closer to God.

When our hearts are filled with devotion, the silent murti begins to speak, and the heart understands it all

DR SWAMI GYANANANDAS

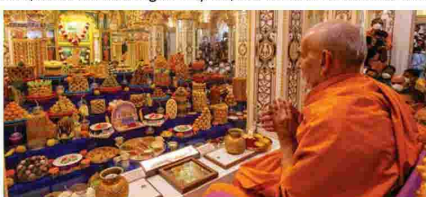
How did this magnificent universe come into existence? Was it the result of an accident, or did it unfold according to an intelligent order? Is there a Creator behind this vast cosmos? And if God truly exists, is He merely an abstract, formless reality, or can He assume a personal and manifest form?

These questions have accompanied humanity for centuries. Philosophers have debated them, scientists have explored the mysteries of the universe, and rishtis have sought their answers through direct spiritual experience. Yet for millions of devotees, the answer is not confined to philosophical arguments. It is experienced in a far more intimate way, in prayer, in devotion, and before the sacred murti of God in a temple (mandir).

The history of Indian spirituality is filled with such experiences. Mirabai, the great saint-poet of Rajasthan, possessed an unshakable conviction that God was not just a distant philosophical concept but a living, loving presence. Her devotion to Shri Krishna was so intense that, according to devotional tradition, she experienced the ultimate divine bliss of Him. To those who dismissed her faith as imagination or superstition, her life itself became her answer. For Mirabai, the murti was not an object of stone or metal; it was a sacred medium through which the Divine became present to the heart of the devotee.

This is the essential idea behind the Hindu tradition of murti worship. A mandir is not merely an architectural structure, nor is a consecrated murti simply a work of art. Through the sacred rite of consecration and, more importantly, through the faith and devotion of generations, the mandir becomes a spiritual space where the human heart learns to encounter the Divine.

Even in the modern age, incidents have occasionally drawn public attention to this question of divine presence. On 21 September 1995, reports spread rapidly from India to many parts of the world that devotees were observing murtis of Lord



Ganesha appearing to accept milk offered with a spoon. The phenomenon created extraordinary public interest, and people gathered at mandirs across India and abroad to witness it. Whatever explanations one may offer for such events, the episode demonstrated something undeniable: for millions, the sacred murti of God is not a lifeless symbol but the focal point of a living faith.

The Hindu scriptures have expressed this principle for centuries. In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan cites a verse from the Shrimad Bhagavatam to explain the divine presence in the consecrated murti of God and in the God-realized saint. He states, "God eternally resides in His various forms of consecrated murtis and in His spiritually enlightened devotees." The purpose of the murti, therefore, is not to limit the infinite God within a material form. Rather, it is to make the human encounter with the infinite more personal, accessible and loving.

After all, the human mind often needs a point of focus. We cannot easily love an abstraction. We must intellectually accept that God is everywhere, but the restless mind struggles to experience that omnipresence continuously. A murti provides a center for the wandering mind and a direction for the searching heart.

This is also why mandirs continue to hold relevance even in the twenty-first century. In a world filled with noise, distraction and constant digital stimulation, a mandir offers something increasingly rare: silence. The ringing of a bell, the fragrance of incense, the rhythmic

sound of prayers and the peaceful darshan of the murti gradually draw the mind away from worldly anxieties. A mandir gives the individual an opportunity to pause and ask questions that technology cannot answer: Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? How should I live? Pramukh Swami Maharaj often affirmed this simple yet profound truth: Bhagwan is eternally present and lovingly accepts the devotion of His devotees. His own life was a living expression of such faith. To stand before the murti, for him, was not to stand before an image; it was to stand in the presence of Bhagwan.

Perhaps this is the deepest purpose of a mandir. It teaches us to see beyond what the physical eyes can perceive. To one person, a murti may appear to be stone or metal. To another, it becomes the most beloved presence in life. The difference lies not merely in the object being viewed, but in the vision with which it is viewed. Mahant Swami Maharaj reminds, "When we enter a mandir, we should not merely look at the beauty of the architecture or admire the artistry of the murti. We should pause, quiet the mind and allow the heart to speak. With faith, humility and devotion, the mandir can become more than a place we visit; it can become a place where we rediscover ourselves."

Therefore, visit the mandir every day and make a personal relationship with God.

(Dr Swami Gyananandas is a dedicated follower of the Swaminarayan tradition and has earned a PhD from MS University)

What makes a good teacher?

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

There is a unique concept associated with the teacher-student or Guru-Shishya tradition in India. The Guru or teacher always wishes for the student to succeed, and the student wishes for the teacher's victory. The student wishes for the victory of the big mind or the Guru. It is healthy because if the student feels that he knows more than the teacher, that would mean the learning has stopped, and that his arrogance has killed the wisdom. The student knows even if his/her small mind wins, it is going to be miserable, but if the teacher wins, it is the victory of knowledge, which will only bring good and joy to everyone.

A great teacher understands where the student is coming from and how to guide them step by step. For example, Lord Krishna was such an amazing teacher! He took Arjuna step by step to attain his final goal. Arjuna was initially very confused. When a student starts evolving, they become confused because they see their concepts breaking apart.

As a student, first, you learn that the sun rises from the east. Later, you are taught about the planets and their movements around the sun. As you learn more, you break at each step as you grow. Great teachers know this. They do not let the student hold on to a particular concept because each concept is a step towards the ultimate goal. And the concepts have to break to reach the next steps. A good teacher helps students overcome their confusion. And, sometimes, they also create more confusion when needed.

Teaching is a great responsibility. A teacher can be a living example to students because children watch them very carefully. They learn values not only from their parents but also from their teachers. Children observe much more than adults do. They notice when you are calm and composed, and when you are tense or unhappy. And they imitate what they see. This is what makes teaching a more responsible job than it may first appear. Parents may have to deal with one or two children, but a teacher has many children in the classroom, and the situation can be much more challenging and stressful. Aspiring teachers should have a deep trust that everything is being taken care of, and that you have been given a responsibility that you can handle. If you think the task is too big for you, then you may find yourself unable to handle it. Instead, you should have the confidence that the task given to you is appropriate for you, and that you will do your best to fulfill it. To handle it, you need to centre



yourself a few times every day. Just before lunch, you should sit and calm yourself, or just be with nature for a short time. You can start meditation regularly to increase your energy. A few deep breaths will also help to stay centred. Before a teacher can help children become steady, confident and joyful, the teacher has to cultivate that steadiness within. Once that steadiness is in place, the deeper work can begin. A child is born with basic human values, and teachers just need to uncover them. The human values are compassion, co-operation, friendliness, smile, laughter, lightness, helping nature, belongingness, caring for each other, etc. These need to be nourished and brought out. Often teachers need to de-program some of the behaviour children would have learnt at home. Any negativity you find in a child is only on the periphery. It is not their nature. With patience, loving attention and care, you can bring out the positive human values in them.

I remember in my childhood, we had a social science teacher who was very sweet and everybody loved to be in her class, but students would get very less marks in her exams. In contrast, we had a very strict physics teacher, and students were terrified of him, but everyone scored very well in the exam. Great teachers know how to strike the right balance between being loving and being strict. Some children are rebellious. They need more physical contact, encouragement, and pats on the back. They need to feel that they are loved and cared for, and that they belong. On the other hand, sometimes, the teacher can act with a little firmness when dealing with timid children. The aim is to help them stand up and speak out.

Often, the opposite is done. Teachers are strict with rebellious children and liberal with shy ones. Then those behavior patterns continue to remain. The teacher needs to be tough and sweet both; otherwise, they will not be able to guide the student to where they want to take them. Even seemingly small classroom practices can influence the values a child develops. Usually,

children sit in the same place in the classroom every day. This is not a good idea because they become attached to that particular seat. When another child comes and sits there, they quarrel. They begin to feel, "This is my place," and become possessive about it. Instead, children can be encouraged to sit in different places and next to different children at regular intervals. Making them sit in the same place may be more convenient for the teacher, but it deprives children of a sense of belongingness with everyone in the class. It may make things a little more challenging for the teacher, but it is better for the child's growth.

The same principle can be extended to the way children are grouped according to academic performance. Usually, children who rank higher sit together and those who rank lower sit separately. This is not healthy for the classroom atmosphere. These values should be with everyone in the class. It may make things a little more challenging for the teacher, but it is better for the child's growth.

In Canada, some schools give an award to the friendliest child in the classroom. I think this is a wonderful practice and can be adopted by schools everywhere. It encourages children to be friendly and inclusive with everyone.

Ultimately, the purpose of education is not to fill minds with information. It is to enable the total development of the body and mind. Children also need to be taught values like sharing, caring, non-violence, and developing a sense of belongingness. These values should not just be read about but be made part of their daily lives. Teachers always have a very big role to play in shaping the country's future. They must work together to bring peace and progress to our country. It is the teachers who brought about a wave of change at the time of the country's struggle for independence. They took the responsibility of inspiring the entire nation. Today, too, teachers must inspire children.

Children are like empty transparent vessels; whatever knowledge you fill them with, they will reflect the same and behave in that way. If you fill them with fear and wrong ideas, then they behave as such. But when you give them good ideals and noble virtues, then they grow up to become ideal and responsible citizens. We can pass on ideals to someone else only if we ourselves have imbibed and demonstrated those ideals and virtues. It is thus very important for teachers to walk the talk in their daily lives.

An exhibition at DAG traces the origins and legacy of the Faculty of Fine Arts at MS University, home to Independent India's first school of art

SARIKA SHARMA

ARTIST Gulammohammed Sheikh still remembers his first day at the Faculty of Fine Arts. "It was awe-inspiring. I had not visited a big city like Baroda, coming from a small town like Surendranagar. I couldn't imagine that there could be a college where everyone and everything was devoted to art and just art."

It would take Sheikh several years to realise that painting was to become his vocation. With the studios open 24 hours, he recalls "working furiously day and night to find my own idiom". Many such stories were to emerge from the Faculty of Fine Arts (FFA) at MS University in the years that followed. Together, they would shape a remarkable chapter in the history of modern Indian art. A seminal new exhibition at DAG offers a glimpse into that extraordinary legacy.

'Freedom to Form: Baroda Modern' traces the origins and the enduring legacy of the FFA, which came up at the MS University in 1950, positioning Baroda as a critical site for understanding the development of artistic practice in post-Independence India.

The show, in New Delhi, brings together nearly 200 paintings, sculptures, prints, photographs and mixed-media works alongside rare archival material. The accompanying scholarly publication features commissioned essays by Priya Maholay-Jaradi, Kathleen L. Wyma, Sandhya Bordevekar, Kanupriya Sharma and Gayatri Sinha.

1950 — in fact the decade it ushered in — was an important point in modern Indian art. The FFA came up at a time when the Progressive Artists' Group had begun to disband, with several members shifting abroad. Following Tagore's demise, Santiniketan was reeling under institutional uncertainty; in Mumbai, the JJ School of Art was trying to shed its colonial legacy. It was at this moment that the FFA was founded, its birth rooted in the progressive cultural vision of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, whose patronage of the arts, crafts and education fostered an indigenous modernity decades before the establishment of the university.

An exalted faculty and equally talented legions of students were to emerge out of the city, fusion of traditional idiom and modernist ideas being the hallmark of their art.

After finishing his studies at Santiniketan, KG Subramanyan had spent some time at a refugee rehabilitation camp in Punjab in 1949 and taken up odd jobs in Delhi when he got an offer to join a new art school coming up in Baroda. Sancho Chaudhuri, his contemporary at Santiniketan, was already there, establishing the department of sculpture. Along with NS Bendre, Markand Bhatt and VR Amberkar, they were to lay the foundation of Independent India's first art school.

If MSU Vice-Chancellor Hansa Mehta was instrumental in setting up of the college, the teachers shaped the curriculum. As Bordevekar points out in her essay on KG, while FFA represented the inclusiveness and informality associated with Kala Bhavana, this was reinforced with a more structured studio programme and supportive discursive studios,

The making of Baroda Modern



(Clockwise from top) Artworks by KG Subramanyan, Pratibha Dakoji, NS Bendre and Haku Shah. PHOTOS COURTESY: DAG

"including the administrative independence to plan its courses, revise them when needed and assess student performance through its own devices..."

Comparing FFA with JJ and Santiniketan, art historian and curator R Siva Kumar says each of these colleges was shaped by the moment and context of its founding. "JJ was founded during the colonial period and was designed to address the social needs and aesthetic sensibilities of colonial India. Santiniketan, on the other hand, was started in the midst of the anti-colonial movement in Bengal and embodied Rabindranath's vision of culturally rooted modernism. The Baroda art college was founded in post-Independent India and reflected the aspirations of a new India that wanted to be part of the world. Like Santiniketan, it was also part of a uni-

versity and placed art practice within the sphere of a larger intellectual pursuit. While it had close connections with both Bombay and Santiniketan through its first teachers, it did not carry the burden of either colonial taste or anti-colonialism. That helped Baroda become an art college of special eminence between 1960 and the 1980s."

This freedom is where the show derives its name, and character. Ashish Anand, CEO and MD, DAG, says the freedom in 'Freedom to Form' is, above all, the freedom to build a new model of art education at a moment when India itself was being reimagined. "Unlike the colonial art schools of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, which had inherited established academic systems, Baroda had the opportunity to create its own pedagogical framework. But that did not mean turning

away from the past or from international modernism. Rather, Baroda's freedom lay in being able to bring different traditions into dialogue: European modernism alongside Indian art histories, folk and craft practices alongside the fine arts, and formal experimentation alongside questions of everyday life and society. The teachers helped establish an environment in which students were encouraged to discover an individual language rather than conform to a prescribed style. It made the art school itself a laboratory for modernism."

"The FFA did well, and it did so quickly, curatorial lead Kanupriya Sharma points out in her essay. The first exhibition of students' work at Bombay within the first few years showed to the world what Baroda was doing, says Sharma, adding that it spurred conver-

sations about the need to develop and update art education curricula all over India. In due course of time, the college was to spawn a myriad of learners who would define modernism, making the world sit up and take notice.

It was the environment the college offered that made Baroda what it was: studios open 24x7, teachers' homes welcoming students at any hour of the day, students joining teachers on commissioned projects, the art *melas* assimilating the "cosmopolitan island" of FFA with the rural background around.

Kanupriya says the pedagogical culture was unusually porous. "Teaching extended beyond formal classroom instruction into studios, homes, discussions, study tours and encounters with living traditions. Subramanyan, for instance, challenged the conventional hierarchy between fine art and craft, bringing processes such as terracotta, mural-making, toy-making and textile-related practices into the field of modern artistic enquiry."

Equally important, she says, was the continuity between generations. "Students such as Jyoti Bhatt and Gulammohammed Sheikh eventually became teachers themselves, transmitting and transforming what they had inherited. The Faculty thus became a self-renewing intellectual community in which artists taught artists, students became teachers, and pedagogies themselves became part of the artistic legacy. That is why the exhibition treats the institution not merely as a backdrop to the artists' careers, but as an active force in shaping them."

The exhibition showcases works by Bendre, Chaudhuri, Subramanyan, Sheikh, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Bhatt, Jeram Patel, Himmat Shah, Nilima Sheikh, Vivan Sundaram, besides many others, mapping the journey of successive generations whose practices collectively shaped the Baroda Modern.

For Anand, plurality is one of Baroda's defining characteristics. The possibilities that the first generation of artists and administrators offered were taken into very different directions by the next generations. "Jyoti Bhatt transformed printmaking and photographic practice while developing an extensive engagement with folk and vernacular visual cultures. Gulammohammed Sheikh developed a distinctive narrative figuration that brought together history, literature, politics and multiple pictorial traditions. Bhupen Khakhar radically expanded the possibilities of figuration through his engagement with everyday life, sexuality and the personal. Artists such as Jeram Patel, Himmat Shah and Ratan Parimoo pursued very different approaches to abstraction, material and form, while Nasreen Mohamedi developed a highly distilled language of geometric abstraction and perception. The later generations demonstrate how far the Faculty's influence could extend beyond any single definition of the Baroda School," he says.

"What ultimately defined Baroda was not a common style but a common permission to find one's own form. That is perhaps the most important trajectory the exhibition seeks to reveal." And that is what made Baroda Modern a celebration of a new uninhibited India.

(On view till Oct 3)

'Sati' by Latika Katt.



(L-R) 'Snake Column', Mrinalini Mukherjee; 'Untitled (Head)' by Himmat Shah.



Set in early 20th century, Rajat Kapoor's 'The Thing With Feathers' examines issues of love, loss, longing and memory

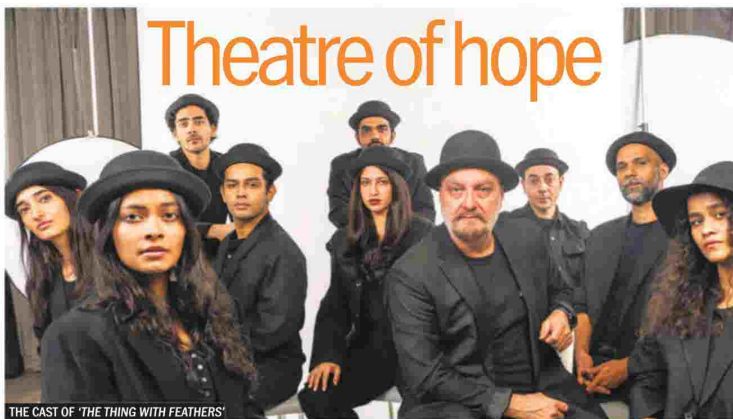
MONICA ARORA

"Hope" is the thing with feathers/That perches in the soul/And sings the tune without the words/And never stops — at all

EMILY DICKINSON'S poem echoes the perpetuity of hope that is as old as civilisation itself. Rajat Kapoor's new play, *The Thing With Feathers*, presented by Aadyam Theatre, derives heavily from this premise of eternal hope. Co-written by Rabia Kapoor and Chandrachor Rai, the play deploys the rich tapestry of the early 20th century as a backdrop to examine issues of love, loss, longing and memory. The play is also an analysis of how humans react in special or adverse circumstances.

What makes *The Thing With Feathers* stand apart from stories revolving around revolutions, uprisings and wars is the fact that the audience witnesses historical events along with the ways in which they impact human lives. When confronted with lost love, separation and conflict, how do humans, through their sheer resilience and strength of mind, resurrect themselves and start all over again with hope?

Director Rajat Kapoor says any time in human history could serve to examine the issues of love, loss or longing. "This is what we are made of. What might be the big difference between humans and other life forms is probably memory. Maybe that is the key to what we know as consciousness. So, wherever we set our story, and in whatever age, it will always have good material to explore emotional and spiritual truths." The ensemble cast boasts some of the



THE CAST OF 'THE THING WITH FEATHERS'

finest names in Indian theatre and cinema, including Vinay Pathak, Neil Bhoopalam, Mantra, Bhavya Rampal, Amit Purohit, Radhika Mehrotra, Bhagyasree Tarke and Aarsha Mukherji, among others.

For Pathak, being part of an ensemble cast is always exciting and fruitful as an actor. "It's the best thing in theatre creation. And the fact that it was going to be an original creation, a devised piece, as they say in theatre." For him, the script remains central to the process. "I believe that a well-written script is the first and primary contributor to

any good performance, individual or otherwise. A good script is what I always get drawn to. The story and the characters are important, yes, and a good, well-written script would always have ample of that."

Bhoopalam was drawn to the way Kapoor works with a devised piece. "The play is a mix of two art forms. One is the 'performing arts' and the other the more abstract 'performance art', where your body is the instrument to communicate story and emotion. The combination is exciting and this is a first for me. The story concept was the life

and times from the 1900s to the 1950s."

For co-writer Rabia Kapoor, research on a historical period is only the starting point. "Writers can research any period, any culture, country, conflict, individual to death but at the end of the day, what brings the script to life is drawing from your own experiences. We brought the complexities of emotions by digging into our own emotional complications in the writers' room as well as in the rehearsal room with the actors. We were looking for emotional truth and then started building the scaffolding of the scenes around those kernels."

Chandrachor Rai sees the first half of the 20th century as particularly fertile ground for the play. "For as far back as I can remember, human history has been riddled with wars and turbulent times, but what was beautiful about the beginning of the 20th century was that this time the wars brought the world together into one singular consciousness. Two regular people who would have never stepped out of their village or town met someone of a different race, belief system, and sang songs they didn't understand. Cultural exchanges weren't filtered through hierarchical orders. Memories couldn't be erased; they persisted through the ordinary man recounting his life."

A period piece is also a challenge for the actors. Mantra found the research equally immersive. "It felt like I had to go back to school and attend history classes. I was living the beginning of the 20th century every day through books, videos, research material, etc. After a point of time, it was like I had forgotten what year it was."

The Thing With Feathers is enriched with poetry, writing, literary references... Yet its larger concern is timeless: how turbulent times shape ordinary lives, and how people find the strength to begin again.

The play is being staged in Delhi on September 26 and 27. Kapoor says that patronage, as from Aadyam Theatre, can help unconventional productions move from aspiration to reality. "The theatre universe is not as desperate as it was, say, 15 years back. And yet it is not easy to make the initial investment for a play that might not be conventional. Aadyam has stepped in to fill that space."

— The writer is a freelancer

An unsparing portrait of a family

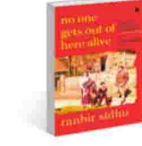
MANDIRA NAYAR

RANBIR SIDHU'S father was found dead on his bathroom floor, just nine months after his mother passed away. Written between their deaths, 'No One Gets Out of Here Alive' is a devastatingly heartbreaking memoir of their life. Intense, raw and laced with pain, it is a punch to the heart — one that will leave you wrecked.

It is difficult to walk away from the book untouched. Divided into two parts, Ranbir sketches the life of his father and mother with unflinching honesty. His brother is blank, a silent figure whose coping mechanism is to block out the misery altogether. His mother is trapped in a marriage with a man "unhinged". Being a "respectable Punjabi woman of her generation was the cage that would strangle and kill her. A cage she happily accepted, even welcomed, however much she hated her own life and where it had taken her", he writes.

While she lay dying, Ranbir writes about getting pneumonia so severe that he bleeds onto the sheets.

His mother is in Punjab, living with the unbearable pain of a slipped disc, which she won't take medication for. His father refuses to take her to the hospital. "He tells me that if she goes, she'll never come back," he writes. "Every time I call and beg him to change his mind, to get my mother help, to get her to a hospital, he loses his



NO ONE GETS OUT OF HERE ALIVE
by Ranbir Sidhu.
HarperCollins.
Pages 256.
₹599

Ranbir Sidhu's book is an act of bravery; it is catharsis, making sense of his parents' lives in Punjab and his own

temper and slams the phone down."

He writes about the stress of the situation: his mother on the floor, unable to move in pain, and his father's refusal, and him "powerless", thousands of miles away.

When she finally gets to the doctor, it is already past an emergency.

The book is brutal, intimate, overwhelming. Ranbir exposes his scars for scrutiny. It is extraordinarily courageous to write with such honesty. In forcing the reader to bear witness to his parents' struggle with the trauma they inherited, he takes away its power to shame. What happened during Partition shapes both of them. The scars they carry, invisible but deep, are passed down to him. The book is dedicated to his brother who, unlike him, escapes the misery by choosing to remain emotionless.

Sidhu is unsparing in the portrayal of his father as a man who refused to talk to him unless it was through his mother, of his rules and of living with the fear of being robbed, or murdered, which grows as he gets older. Of a man who was considered "effeminate", "a man so feeble he was unable to beat his children or wife". Of a man who refused to part with two dollars for an inhaler — because he had forgotten to fill the prescriptions. Yet he was also the man who bought him "a dented and half-working tricycle", only to get beaten by his own father for wasting money.

The book is an act of bravery. It is catharsis, making sense of his parents' lives as he bares his life. What makes it deeply moving is that he stitches their flaws with love. It is grief — not for who they were, but who they could have been. "I can catch the outline of a different man, a possible man who never quite lived," he writes.

He resists the attempt to whitewash his past — if anything, it is the opposite — or to sanitise his parents, even if he is protective of them. Yet at the end of this, there is love — broken, fragile, but stubborn — and there is empathy for his parents, maybe not as caregivers but as people.

What haunts you is that he writes with tenderness, and never judgment.

The book is ultimately about Punjab, the village his father escaped from to return to again, and the "values" of the village that killed both his parents. In holding up a mirror to his parents' flaws, he is also reflecting what ails Punjab — whether it is alpha masculinity, notions of *sharam* and honour, which persuaded young women to jump into wells to prevent their family being disgraced during Partition, or to willingly allow themselves to be killed. His mother loses her home when her village ends up in Pakistan during Partition. This becomes her first exile. Her second exile is her marriage, wherein she erases herself to survive.

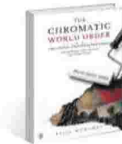
The book is the author's quest to find out who his parents were. "The journey the answer takes me on leads to some of the most extreme violence committed in the twentieth century. Not just violence against others, but violence against ourselves, the countless murders of women and children perpetrated within families — Punjabi families. Standing in the village fields, I come to learn the blood is all around me, soaked deep into the soil."

— The reviewer is a literary critic



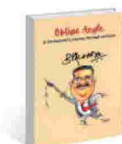
TRIUMPH OF THE INDIAN REPUBLIC: MY LIFE, MY STRUGGLES
by Ram Nath Kovind.
Rupa.
Pages 400, ₹795

From the thatched roof house in Paraunkh village of Uttar Pradesh to the hallowed corridors of Rashtrapati Bhavan, this book recounts former President Ram Nath Kovind's inspiring story. It starts with his earliest political aspirations to his stint as an MP in the Rajya Sabha, followed by his term as the Governor of Bihar, and finally his election to the highest constitutional office of the land. He reveals hitherto unknown dynamics of Indian politics and international diplomacy, and embarks on an exploration of the phenomenal reach of presidential power.



THE CHROMATIC WORLD ORDER
by Sajid Mohamed.
Aakar Books.
Pages 405, ₹1,195

The book argues that race, rather than being a relic of the colonial past, remains a foundational principle of the modern global order. Through engagement with western political thought and historical narratives, the book exposes how racial hierarchies have been embedded in concepts of civilisation, development, and international relations. Drawing on vivid historical episodes, the book traces the enduring legacy of racial colonialism and its contemporary manifestations, including the war on terror and conflicts in Gaza and Iran.



OBTUSE ANGLE
by BP Acharya.
Visual Quest India Pvt Ltd.
Pages 192, ₹299

Former bureaucrat BP Acharya says we often look at things from an acute angle, that is, with a critical look, but insists that in every event, there is an "obtuse angle", the funny side that a cartoonist looks for. Inspired by RK Laxman, Mario Miranda and Shankar Khaty Nain, he began cartooning early on. This book captures the essence of his perplexing, sometimes frustrating, and occasionally amusing journey — all illustrated through cartoons.

Realm of the unknown

ARADHIKA SHARMA

ATREKKING expedition gone wrong is hardly a new horror premise, but Satyajit Sarna gives 'Redtooth' a fresh life by rooting it in the folklore and landscape of the eastern Himalayas.

Set in the ancient trails leading towards Gocho La beneath the looming presence of Kanchenjunga, the novel blends adventure, mythology and psychological suspense into an unsettling exploration of what happens when human beings stray into realms they do not understand.

The story opens in Yulksom, where the ageing guide Dzangpo prepares for what may be his final trek of the season. Before departure, he is warned by Doma, a mountain-wise elder, that "it is not good to go after this moon. Things start changing up there". The warning is ignored, and what begins as an ordinary expedition gives way to something far darker.

The trekking party is an eclectic group bordered by private anxieties: the secret-riding Trehan family, Mandhira Rao re-bidding their life after a failed marriage, former mountaineer Moeen Mustafa yearning for one last connection with the peaks, and the opportunistic Kapil. Leading them on the trek is Manish, haunted by a fatal incident from a previous expedition. Sarna devotes much of the first half to developing these characters, turning the trek into an inward journey as much as a physical one. The shifting viewpoints and gradual revelations can slow the pace, but they lend emotional weight to the horrors that follow, grounding them in recognisable human fears and frailties.

Sarna's prose is evocative, while sometimes being sharp and even caustic. Siliguri is dismissed as "the armpit of Bengal... A great brand name, shitty product", while

Mandhira is described thus: "the yoga instructor, sweet as she might be, smelt of offensive virtue and fibrous food".

As the expedition climbs higher, subtle signs of danger begin to emerge. The first comes in the form of a mutilated mountain crow. Manish notices "a spill of blood gleaming on the stiff black feathers" and realises that "something had ripped it open with a claw or talon". From this point onward, Sarna steadily intensifies the sense of unease, using isolation, altitude and local folklore to blur the line between the natural and the supernatural.

The Himalayas are the novel's most powerful presence, not merely a backdrop but a realm ruled by ancient forces beyond human understanding. As the trekkers shed their urban certainties, they discover a landscape that seems indifferent, even hostile to human intrusion.

When the horror finally arrives in full force, it does so with conviction. A stranger seeking shelter introduces himself with the words, "Call me Redtooth. Call me hunger," ushering in a sequence of shape-shifting creatures, predatory spirits, monstrous birds and uncanny doubles. Yet some of the most effective passages rely less on outright violence than on psychological dislocation, particularly as characters begin to doubt the reliability of their own perceptions.

Not everything works equally well. Sarna occasionally leans on familiar horror conventions, and the severity of the supernatural punishments can seem disproportionate to the transgressions that provoke them. Yet the novel's vivid sense of place and sustained atmosphere of mounting dread largely compensate for these shortcomings. More than its moments of bloodshed, what lingers is the sense of human insignificance before an ancient and unknowable landscape. Drawing confidently on local traditions while expanding the possibilities of contemporary Indian horror, 'Redtooth' is an imaginative and haunting novel.

— The reviewer is a freelancer

MOHAMMAD IMTIAZ

ATALE of the challenges faced by Punjabis who settle abroad, 'The Inheritance of Longing' also touches on the issues of unemployment and nepotism back home that force many to take the plunge and move out for good. The author, Jinder, is a Sahitya Akademi awardee who has been writing in Punjabi for decades. Like many of his previous works, his personal experiences reflect in this novel too.

The difficult circumstances he is confronted with compel Vijay Kanda, a post-graduate in English, to move to England from Nakodar, a small town in Punjab. The pathetic condition of contractual and ad hoc assistant professors has been depicted through his struggle for a suitable job.

For those who consider moving abroad a panacea for all their problems, Vijay has this to say, "People think money grows on trees here." Soul-crushing jobs, long shifts and a constant sense of insecurity lie ahead for the immigrants; at their native places, they have to deal with land encroachment by relatives.

Survival in the West has made life mechanical. Depicting this beautifully, his wife, Satya, asks him, "Vijay, have you forgotten how to love?" He replies, "Now I hardly have time for it."

When they finally manage to buy a house, their notion of achievement faces the harsh reality of a growing distance from their children, who were raised in a new cultural landscape. They do not let their parents interfere in their lives. Satya bares her heart when she says: "We sold two houses in Nakodar to get a house here — for the children, for our grandchildren. The boys slipped from our hands. What was the point of our struggle?"

Vijay and Satya lose sleep. One of their sons has been living with a Black woman, while the other one is going to marry a 'low-caste' woman. While visiting Vijay in England, Bhapiji breaks the taboos of caste

and race as he accepts his grandsons' choices of life partners. Ironically, later, he suffers a heart attack when he learns about his granddaughter's elopement with a cobbler's son in Punjab.

Vijay's is a story of a generation that has seen unprecedented changes. Feeling sandwiched between two generations is natural: "Our parents made us obey, but the next generation is unwilling to listen to us at all." The secure life that their predecessors lived is no longer available to them, and they fail to catch up with the advancements of their successors.

Solace can no longer be found in nostalgia as India has also changed. The symbols of Vijay's youth, like books, cassettes, and cinema, have been replaced by consumer-culture brands. The philosopher Heraclitus said, "One cannot step twice into the same river."

Emboldened by the liberal environment, women like Charanjit and Deepi are no longer ready to bear the disloyalty of their husbands; they also seek love outside of marriage.

The author has named every minor character and that may confuse a reader, though only a few central characters ultimately drive the plot.

Depicting desi culture in English is a difficult task, but translator Kuldeep Singh has used simple language. However, occasional pronoun mix-ups can be distracting.

— The reviewer is based in Patiala

Compellingly original picture of our fraught, complex present

SIDDHARTH PANDEY

MANY years ago, when I was a graduate student, I heard a teacher remark insightfully on the difficulty of making sense of the contemporary moment because it was always slipping away. Her observation stayed with me over the years, and surfing the era of reels and short attention spans, the sense of everything skidding and sliding past at a supersonic pace only seems to have compounded.

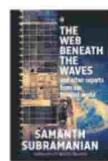
In this context, to come across a work such as 'The Web Beneath the Waves' is both an illuminating and a humbling experience. For through its perspicacious writing firmly anchored in long-form impressions of the last decade and a half, journalist Samanth Subramanian conjures a compellingly original picture of our fraught, complex and contradictory present across a sequence of 16 essays. These were originally published in some of the world's leading media outlets

between 2011 and 2025.

With a sure-footed nimbleness, Subramanian navigates a diversity of terrains and ideas plucked from Asia to Africa and Europe, and from air to land and oceanic depths. Compelling character sketches anchor almost every entry, even as the human and non-human (both natural and man-made) fascination and intrigue him in equal measure.

On the way, we meet the evolving and diverging dreams of Indians living through the pre- and post-liberalisation eras. We peep into the lives of sportsmen, businessmen, educationists, terrorists, designers, artists and development tycoons; we learn about the evolving contours of a minority religion in the background of digitalisation, and we dive deep into the dynamics of privilege and control of elite clubs. The tentacles of neo-liberal capitalism and haywire power politics loom large on virtually every other chapter, and nothing appears too small or too big for the author's attention and appraisal.

While eclecticism of topics in anthologies



THE WEB BENEATH THE WAVES AND OTHER REPORTS FROM OUR TANGLED WORLDS
by Samanth Subramanian.
Westland.
Pages 324, ₹799

such as these sometimes riles critics, there is enough grace, empathy and parallels stitching together Subramanian's observations. The 16 reports are divided under six headers — 'How', 'Where', 'When', 'Why', 'What' and 'Who' — but these at best act as straightforward signposts. As is well known, these interrogative words almost always blend into

each other, so that any single chapter may respond to several of them at once. At many points, the global, local and global intersect unambiguously, and events and phenomena are narrated not for their own sake or merely for the appeal of their genesis. Rather, Subramanian's interest lies in casting a wide net over active fields of circulation and connection that embed those occurrences, and which further spawn newer networks.

A chapter on Lalit Modi's megalomaniac rise as the founder of the IPL (in the 'How' segment) might be read in contrast to the chapter on the humanitarian thinker GN Devis, the founder of the People's Linguistic Survey of India ('Where'). The report on Mumbai's Breach Candy club's exclusionary neo-colonial politics ('Where') can be tied to the entry on an ultra-rich golf club's changing fortune in Britain ('What'). And the cutting-edge, though somewhat ominous, development of Singapore's land-reclamation projects ('Why') can be paired with the perspective on Delhi-NCR's momentous increase in real

estate planning ('Where'). Subramanian is at his best while exploring city cultures, capturing lanes, offices and people brimming with feverish imaginations.

The pandemic doesn't have a separate chapter to itself, but enters aslant in several places. One of them is a moving cultural and scientific analysis of the declining population of vultures, whose breeding centres suffered a crisis owing to the sudden restrictions imposed in 2020. Nature and technology robustly braid together in the eponymous essay that digs into the risk-prone undersea worlds of Internet cables. My favourite chapter, however, was the one on cricket and beauty: a superb meditation on how aesthetics becomes a seamless part of this sport, and what it says about our dispositions.

Peppered with philosophical insights and charged by delectable turns of phrase, this book is essential reading in our turbulent and changing world.

— The reviewer is a writer, artist and historian from Shimla

REFLECTIONS

When teachers mattered

TOUCHSTONES
IRA PANDE

I AM old enough to remember the first Teachers' Day, declared by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1962, which was the year Dr S Radhakrishnan became the President of India. It was the perfect tribute to the erudite scholar-statesman. Sadly, somewhere along the way (as is often the case), we forgot this iconic scholar, so that today September 5 is one of the many reasons why schoolchildren celebrate it as a welcome holiday. Many schools put up special performances by students to honour their teachers, arrange a lavish tea party and they then go home to spend the rest of the day as far away from the school and their teachers as possible.

I am writing this in the aftermath of the Cockroach Janta Party's (CJP) determined bid to expose the pitiful condition of our government schools across the country. Run out of broken, dilapidated buildings, they lack even the basic amenities of toilets, proper desks and benches, fans and electricity. As for the government teachers and school principals, the less said the better. They are mostly untrained and have no idea that corporal punishment is now a crime. The mid-day meal (served free and often the reason that such schools attract students) are cooked in the most unhygienic conditions and literally thrown on the *thalis* the students bring with them. What is worse, the absentee staff send someone else in their place while the 'real' teacher or 'principal' runs another 'business'.

It did not have to take the CJP to expose this dismal state of affairs but because these are children of a lesser god, the state of primary and secondary education was ignored as it did

not affect the children of the *sahab log*. Those children went to private schools, for their parents have long seceded from this India. However, others who have no other choice and are often illiterate put up with this. In any case, who would listen to their complaints? Often they are forced to send their children to private tutors, who are extortionists of another kind. All in all, it is not just successive governments that are to blame, it is equally our fault that we have allowed this state of affairs to flourish because it does not touch us.

Health care and primary and secondary education have been beneath the radar of each government. It was not always so: up until two generations ago, I can recall the excellent teachers our government schools had. My own experience is worth recalling. In the 1960s, many states had an Intermediate exam that students passed after their Senior Cambridge to enter the university. My father had served as the secretary of the UP High School and Intermediate Board in Allahabad and it was respected by every university. After my SC exam, we were in Nainital and my parents insisted I attend the local girls' Intermediate College before I went to Allahabad University.

I will never forget the huge culture shock I got when I went there, kicking and screaming. The girls came from a completely different social class from the posh students who were my peers in our convent. The state of the classrooms, with names scratched in with a divider on the desks, the ink-stained floors and the

**Teachers' Day once
honoured learning; today,
neglected schools expose
systemic failure**

samosas and oily snacks served by a *halwai* (no tuck shops here) were bad enough. But, to me, the most shocking fact was that the medium of instruction was Hindi.

To hear the lungs described as 'phrophus', the pleura as 'phrophust avarat' and the pulmonary artery as the 'phrophust dhamani' floored me. I wept and told my parents that I'd prefer to do the courses privately, but they were adamant I would attend the Rajkika Uchchatar Madhyamik Vidyalaya.

Today, I bless them. First, it declassified me in a way that was needed. It showed me how much more there was to learn from those committed teachers and the girls who sat next to me. Today, if my translation skills are rewarded, I have to thank my parents and those teachers who guided me into the labyrinths of another language that I never really considered my mother tongue.

And now to another area that has had all political parties lock horns with each other: delimitation and the women's reservation Bill. While every righteously angry political leader has sworn eternal allegiance to giving women their due, they somehow find ways of slithering out of passing it in Parliament, or even giving women a token presence in their governments and party structures. How long they can blame each other is going to be interesting to watch because the day is not far when women will turn the tables on them and hijack those issues that men preach but do not practice.

Now let me leave you with another point worth considering and that is limiting the tenure of a government to just two consecutive terms. In the US, this is applied to the President but here we follow a different form of democracy. There is no reason why we cannot formulate a variation on that model.

Look deeply, and it is always the case that after two terms, all governments tend to become dictatorial, corrupt or fascist. The enthusiasm and zeal of the first two terms become a tired routine and the Opposition becomes irrelevant and witless.

I wonder if we can seriously debate this.

— The writer is a social commentator

Minding the gap,
for everyone's sake

RAAIA BHASIN

LET me, again, turn to childhood memories and the different branches of the family that, one to the other, led very varied lives. My father's side, for want of a better phrase, was 'quite Westernised', even Anglicised. For an outsider, it could seem strange that conversations were conducted in a fluid mix of English, Hindi and Punjabi. This was the result of their backgrounds. In late 19th-century Lahore, my grandfather was orphaned early and he and his older brother brought each other up. Both educated themselves and became academics.

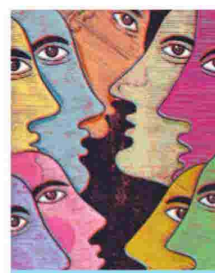
My grandfather's brother, Bihari Lal, was in Jalandhar for several years and at one point, also helped Himachal's 'apple man', Satyanand Stokes, set up a school in Thanedar. The younger brother, my grandfather, Sardari Lal, taught mathematics and astronomy for decades at Panjab University and at the famous Kinnaird College in Lahore. He retired just a month before Partition and, leaving my father behind to 'keep a (futile) eye on things', sensibly packed his bags and left with the rest of the family before the worst of the mayhem.

As the years went by, the family dispersed. Many went overseas to study, work or settle. This branch, even if they were occasionally broke, wore Harris tweeds, and dinner jackets where the bow tie would never, ever be a store-bought pre-tied one. Nor would they think twice about eating a *parantha* with a fork and knife.

My mother's family came from Mirpur in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and settled in Jammu after Partition. Again, for want of a better phrase, my grandparents were 'conservative' Hindus. My grandfather's day began by feeding the cows. He would bathe and then hand-feed the pair of brown Jerseys with fresh rotis. If I was awake, I would accompany him and watch with fascination as he milked them and carried the pail back to the house. Then, he would spend the next hour or so wrapped in prayer. He told us stories from the *Ramayana* and made the *Mahabharata* come alive.

As my cousins were much younger, I did not have any real company and spent much of those winter weeks walking or reading. Much of my reading material had been brought along and consisted, initially, of books by Enid Blyton and others that were similar. Here lay the rub of irony. Those books transported one to a different world — a world that one made one's own without realising it, or without having experienced a fragment of it. This was soft power at its best.

I had never seen a double-decker bus and certainly not a yacht. I had yet to see the sea or take my first trip on a plane. In the shed across the house, the cows were loved if not venerated. Sitting a few yards away, in the books that



**Inauthentic dissent,
as against authentic
dissent, can cause
people to become
more entrenched in
their original beliefs**

I read and loved, the characters ate pot-dyed beef sandwiches and drank root beer. I had tasted neither.

Of late, one has been subjected to a spate of rather sanctimonious talk. Very little of it is informed and what's worse, has almost no room for another viewpoint — especially if it is another equally sanctimonious one. Not surprisingly, there is no kindness or compassion in those singular viewpoints. A moment came when, perhaps, I was too blunt and instead of calling a spade a spade, called a spade a shovel. Or perhaps I wasn't blunt enough and hesitated to say what one actually wanted to. The conversation, if one can call it that, was built (destroyed?) on a lethal mix of religion and politics. The arguments shifted, as they often do, to so-called holy men and godwomen avatars. One fine gentleman piped up about a particular godman and with great pride stated: "We were blessed to have him stay with us." That opened the floodgates for followers of a competing godman.

Why do these stories or conversations and their seeming contradictions matter? Let me turn to another writer whose work I admire and enjoy: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. A Nigerian, she too belongs to a corner of the world that was created by the colonial experience. She speaks of the dangers of a single story and its linear narrative. She, too, and far better than I, has articulated the complexity of the impact that reading these writings has had on us, even if we are a postcolonial generation. In another context, but somewhat relevant here, it has been contended that inauthentic dissent — as against authentic dissent — can cause people to become more entrenched in their original beliefs. Perhaps a level of perversity has something to do with this.

Many of us would have travelled on the Delhi Metro. We would have heard Rini Simon Khanna's dulcet tones telling us to 'mind the gap' as a station approaches. While this is the result of an idle mind on a (longish) Metro journey, in more ways than one, it would be a good idea to constantly 'mind the gap'.

— The writer is an author based in Shimla

Quiet grief of losing a pet

THERE is a kind of grief that doesn't often get the recognition it deserves — the grief of losing a pet. When your pet passes away, it doesn't feel like the world is mourning with you. There are no grand ceremonies, no funeral services and no widespread acknowledgements. But the truth is, the grief that follows the loss of a pet is just as deep, just as painful and just as real as any other form of loss.

For many of us, pets are not just animals; they are family. They are the ones who greeted us at the door every day, the ones who comforted us during our darkest moments and the ones who made us laugh with their little quirks and antics. A pet's love is unconditional, and when that love is taken away, the void it leaves can feel unbearable.

I remember when I lost my dog, Max. He wasn't just a dog; he was my companion, my confidant and my comfort. He was there for every high and low, wagging his tail when I was happy and curling up beside me when I was sad. Losing him felt like losing a piece of myself.

It wasn't just the loss of a furry friend; it was the loss of a constant presence, a source of love and comfort that had been with me for so many years. The day he passed, it felt as if the whole world had stopped. It wasn't the kind of loss that people could understand, even if they tried. It's just a dog, some might say, and they wouldn't mean to be cruel. But for someone who's lost a pet, those words can sting. Because it's never



SRINATH SRIDHARAN

just a dog. It's never just an animal. They're not just companions; they're family. And when they're gone, the emptiness that remains can be overwhelming.

When you lose a pet, there's also a sense of regret, a sense of wishing you had done more. 'Did I give them enough love?' 'Could I have done something to make their last days better?' These questions often plague us, and the answers may never come. The guilt of not being able to save them, or of not knowing how much time you had left with them, can be overwhelming.

But here's the thing: it's okay to grieve. It's okay to cry. It's okay to miss them. Just because

the world doesn't see your grief in the same way it might see the loss of a human loved one doesn't mean that your pain isn't real. Your grief is valid. Your feelings matter. And it's okay to take your time with it. Losing a pet is one of those losses that can feel like an invisible grief.

You're carrying it silently, day by day, and the world may not acknowledge it in the way they would a loss that is more widely recognised. But that doesn't mean it's any less significant. The love you shared with your pet is real, and the grief that follows their loss is just as important as any other grief.

So, if you're grieving the loss of a pet, know that it's okay to feel how you're feeling. And even though the world may not understand, know that your grief is valid. You loved them, and that love doesn't just disappear. It stays with you, quietly and beautifully, as a reminder of the joy they brought into your life.

Give yourself permission to grieve, to feel the pain and to find comfort in the memories you shared. It's not about 'getting over it.' It's about learning to live with it, learning to carry the love of your pet with you, even as they're no longer physically there.

Your grief is not an inconvenience. It's not something that should be rushed or silenced. It's a reflection of the love you had for them, and that love is worth every tear.

— Excerpted from 'Grief', with permission from Rupa

The year the 'Maharani of America' came calling



LT GEN BALJIT SINGH (RETD)

THE instant my eyes settled on the historic photograph of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru flanked by Jacqueline Kennedy (JFK) and her sister at a dinner table at his residence, which appeared in *Spectrum*, my mind drifted to BK Nehru's (BK) 1997 memoir, 'Nice Guys Finish Second'. For a while, I remained on a long, pleasant reverie of sophisticated diplomacy laced with elegance, before fetching our copy of the engaging autobiography from a shelf.

As we learn from BK's memoir, the implicit purpose of JK's nine-day visit was "to make the maximum public impression of American friendship for and appreciation of India" in the guise of a goodwill ambassador arriving aboard an Air India scheduled flight. The airline rose to the occasion, mod-

ifying the front few seats for the retinue. With matching enthusiasm, the Indian bureaucracy ensured that the "route from Palam was crowded... very large numbers came from villages... in their bullock carts to have a darshan of the Maharani of America".

The plane was dot on time but kept circling overhead, making the Prime Minister irritable and even more so when BK (the Indian Ambassador) to the US (at the time) informed that "Madam had not finished her toilet... that for this First Lady, beauty and elegance took primacy" over protocol, etc. Of the three days in Delhi, they were guests of the Prime Minister at the Teen Murti residence where to start with, "the young and beautiful had been invited" for a regal dinner. Believe it or not, from among all the invitees, Homi Bhabha walked up to BK suggesting that we ask the ladies "to come out dancing with us..." at 'The Tavern' at Imperial Hotel. Sadly for the merry duo, JK was witty enough to decline, acting the prim and proper First Lady!

For all intents and purposes, JK and her sister, Lee Radziwill, were the guests of the US Ambassador, JK Galbraith, but on the insistence of the First Lady, BK too would accompany as her personal guest. And for the remaining six days of the itinerary, again

upon JK's preference, the entire retinue travelled by train. "... it was clear that Jackie was enjoying hugely the luxuries of this unusual and unharmed mode of travel". JK remained the bundle of enthusiasm sight-seeing Patehpur Sikri, Agra, Varanasi but it was at Udaipur that the fortress — palace of the Maharana — left JK so wonderstruck that on the termination of dinner after all invitees had exited, she sat on a marble bench with BK by her side and "Jackie would get her husband that the White House would get lost in one of its wings... overlooking the Pichola Lake... most glorious view in the moonlight" and so on.

Sonu Kapadia (Foreign Office Liaison Officer) was heard mentioning the following morning that the Indian security personnel were agog, alerting their American counterparts at breakfast that "our *sahab* (BK) kidnapped your *mesaahab* (JK) last night and you didn't even know!"

As usual for such occasions, Jaipur city and Amber fortress were the last destinations; and Lee Radziwill was a personal friend of the Maharaja and Maharani. "They had asked the two girls to stay with them, and this is what they wanted to do." However, going by the Government of India protocol,

a compromise was made — guests of the state Governor and stay at the Raj Bhavan on the first night and that of the Maharaja for the remaining two.

But that fancy arrangement led to a not-so-fancy episode. The venerable Governor, a distinguished freedom fighter, courteous and polite, ate his dinner as usual at 7 pm, and two hours later, at the dinner table, flanked by JK and Radziwill, the host ate nothing but belched often and rather audibly, which "really put the lid on Mrs Kennedy's dislike".

Perhaps the last day of the visit, back at Delhi which also happened to be the festival of Holi, stood apart for the spontaneous revelry at PM Nehru's residence. Jackie was dressed as always in the height of fashion, Galbraith and the Prime Minister in *kurtas* and *pyjamas* suitable for Holi and from a "little silver bowl of multi-coloured *gulaal*... the Prime Minister ceremoniously put a crimson *tikka* on Mrs Kennedy's forehead".

But the epic moment of Holi frivolity belonged to BK. "I took some green powder and painted the whole length of the ridge of Mrs Kennedy's nose." Turning to the Prime Minister, Jackie said, "Didn't I tell you that he (BK) was pompous? I'll teach him a les-

son", covering BK in several shades of *gulaal*, unmindful of his expensive lounge suit. And thus ending "a relaxed and enjoyable week in the company of the most elegant and attractive women in the US".

True to her sense of propriety as the First Lady, Mrs Kennedy retrieved just one from the huge bunch of processed photographs of what to her was the unforgettable episode: a photograph that photograph and despatched it by courier "with strict instructions to hand it over to the Ambassador personally and to nobody else". And the inscription "In Jackie Kennedy's neat hand below the Governor's picture: 'The most fascinating dinner companion in all the stories. Ad. His boiled eggs, eaten 3 hours before this picture was taken, are just having their effect.'"

I have often wondered whether the US establishment had picked up straws in the wind of the PLA's intents of Thagla Ridge aggression in the winter of 1962. And conveyed a sense of American assurance of both diplomatic and in-kind help to India in times of such crises. And whether that would have fructified meaningfully had USA not found herself faced with the Russian nuclear threat erupting from the neighbouring Cuban soil in October-November 1962.



Left: Bunker Robin Chadha returned to Himachal and built a floriculture enterprise with his friend. Extreme left: Himanshu Khagta at his apple orchard in Rohru.

Himachal is seeing a wave of reverse migration, as professionals leave city life behind to revive orchards, build agribusinesses, and find purpose back home



MONICA CHAUHAN

FOR decades, the road to a better life for young Himachalis led out of the hill state. After college, most migrated to Delhi, Chandigarh, Bengaluru, Mumbai, and even abroad in search of lucrative jobs, settling far from their native places and returning to their villages for only a few days a year. Now, a quiet counter-trend is underway.

After years in the metros, a small but growing number of Himachalis are leaving established corporate careers to return to their roots. Their goal is not merely to retire or escape city stress, but to transform ancestral land into economic assets.

The change was initially triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, when job losses and work-from-home arrangements brought a large number of young professionals back to the hill state. A more compelling story, however, unfolded after the pandemic. While some returned to cities, others stayed, investing their life's savings and even taking loans to revive their ancestral land.

SHIFT IN ASPIRATIONS

Across parts of Himachal, the aspirations of educated professionals who once believed success lay outside the state are evolving. Armed with corporate experience, professional networks, and exposure to modern business practices, they now view ancestral land not as a burden, but as an opportunity.

For many, the motivation goes beyond economics; it is about holding on to their land. Families that migrated decades ago increasingly worry about who will manage their orchards and fields once the elderly parents are gone. Some fear the next generation may not even know their land's boundaries.

Meghana Bragta understands that fear well. After spending 18 years in Bengaluru, she returned to Kotkhai to take charge of an apple orchard that her mother had leased out for years. Upon her return, she realised just how disconnected she had become. "My children didn't even know the orchard boundaries. That was a wake-up call. Land can remain in your name, but if you stay away for too long, you slowly lose your relationship with it," she says.

The turning point came when the

RECLAIMING ROOTS

grandson of Satyanand Stokes, the man who introduced apples in Himachal a century ago, advised her to sell the orchard. "It came as a rude shock. That conversation made me decide the orchard would never be up for sale," she says.

FRESH APPROACH

Today, Meghana is reimagining the family property. Alongside horticulture, she is developing a homestay-cum-wellness retreat, food processing lines, dried fruit packaging, and more mushroom cultivation. "I chose to return not because I was running away from city life, but because I wanted to build something meaningful on my own land," she says.

A similar drive brought Pankaj Thakur back from Delhi to Buchar village in Kullu's Anni area. His grandfather had repeatedly urged him to return, worried that the family's large landholdings were underutilised and turning barren. "The biggest danger is not that someone takes your land. It can also be lost through neglect. If nobody returns, orchards stop producing, fields go uncultivated, and eventually the next generation loses interest," he reflects.

In 2022, Pankaj and his wife Shilpa invested roughly ₹25 lakh in ultra-high-density apple farming across 40 bighas using M9 rootstock. Over three years later, the venture has generated substantial returns, proving how modern techniques can transform traditional agriculture.

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

The Thakurs bypass middlemen and sell apples directly to consumers through social media and digital channels. "Earlier, growers depended entirely on traders. Today, one good Facebook page and customer trust can create a market anywhere in India. People place orders directly after watching videos from the orchard," says Pankaj.

Social media has also become one of the biggest catalysts behind reverse migration. People are not only getting inspired by success stories of those who dared to return, but are also using the medium to script their own journey.

CAREER CHOICES

Photographer Himanshu Khagta experienced this firsthand after returning to Rohru following years of global assignments. Khagta stopped using pesticides altogether, delivered produce directly to customers during the pandemic, and expanded via e-commerce. "Geographical factors can no longer limit your reach. If your product is genuine, customers will find you," he says.

His cafe in Rohru has become a hub for young people weighing a move back to the hills. "Many youngsters call or visit only to understand whether coming back is practical," he says.

Yudhvir Janartha, who left London to manage his family orchard in Rohru, echoes the sentiment: "Land is not lost only when it is sold, but also when it becomes barren, when nobody wants to work on it, and when the next generation has no connection with it."

NEW HORIZONS

The attraction of Himachal is mirrored by another economic reality. Across tourism hubs such as Manali, Dharamsala, Bir, Shimla and parts of Kullu valley, outsiders are increasingly taking hotels, cafes and homestays on lease.

Many Himachalis who returned home say watching this trend influenced their own decisions.

Diki Thakur, a resident of Manali who has worked in the hospitality sector across Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chandigarh and Pune before coming back to Dharamsala, says she often saw local properties being leased to entrepreneurs from outside the state. "There is nothing wrong with outsiders

investing here. But sometimes locals own the property while someone else creates the business and captures most of the value," she adds.

That realisation pushed her to launch her own hospitality venture. "If young Himachalis don't take ownership of opportunities in tourism, hospitality, and food businesses, others naturally will."

Robin Chadha's story offers another variation of the same theme. After leaving banking in Chandigarh, he returned and built a floriculture enterprise with a friend, Hare Krishan.

What began as an experiment eventually became Subziro AgriTech, a firm supplying lilies, baby's-breath and other specialty flowers across India. The venture operates on leased land in Lahaul and Spiti, Naggar in Kullu and Pinjore. By cultivating at different elevations and climatic conditions, the firm has created a flower production cycle that runs for much of the year. Chadha's wife Mitu is also involved in the business, which employs around 100 persons.

Ridhima Thakur saw opportunity in a different sector. After years in Gurugram, Noida and Chandigarh, she returned to Rohru and started conducting online English classes. The response eventually led her to establish a school.

CLEAN AIR ADVANTAGE

Beyond economics, the quality of life is constantly cited. Rahul Kanwar, a 20-year-old engineering student from Narkanda studying in Chennai, recalls a conversation with a classmate from Bihar: "He told me, 'You left the life I dream of. We work in the plains hoping that one day we can buy a house in the hills and escape pollution and stress.' That stayed with me."

Thousands of people from Delhi-NCR and other areas now spend months living in rental homes across Shimla, Kullu, and Dharamsala, while many relocate permanently post-retirement. This influx has spurred a localised demand for homestays, cafes, and long-term rentals.

Gaurav Thakur, a tour operator based in Shimla, cites the example of a Delhi businessman "who sold his city home for roughly ₹10 crore, built a lavish cottage in Mashobra for ₹2 crore in 2015, invested the rest, and now lives comfortably in the hills". Such a story, he adds, only strengthens the belief in returning to one's roots.

Above: Pankaj Thakur and wife Shilpa invested in their apple orchard in Kullu's Anni village and (right) Meghana Bragta returned to Kotkhai to take charge of her family's apple orchard.



Benchmark set by Mundhe must become the norm

Enforce the food safety law so strictly that no one dares to play with consumers' lives

PUSHPA GIRIMAJI

THE unprecedented enforcement of food safety laws by Maharashtra Commissioner of Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Tukaram Mundhe, and some of the subsequent actions by the FDA in Karnataka have exposed the fallacy that the more you pay for food, the better its quality and safety, or that five-star hotels maintain the highest hygiene standards in their kitchens.

Cockroach infestation, rotten meat, fungus-infested vegetables, expired products, spoilt dairy, poor storage and refrigeration, and unhygienic handling of food were among the many infractions found across food establishments — ranging from five-star hotels and high-end clubs to multinational fast-food chains, bakeries, quick-commerce warehouses and government and educational canteens.

This is a sad reflection on the food industry in the country in general and food safety enforcement in particular.

In fact, Tukaram Mundhe's enforcement drive raises a very fundamental question. Why is someone like Mundhe such a rarity? What he is doing should be the norm in every state, but ironically, it is such an exception that we are all celebrat-

ing the way he is taking the violators to task, instilling the fear of the law in them and protecting consumers. Why are other food commissioners not doing what they ought to do? Is it corruption, or fear of transfers, or political interference? What about ministers in charge of health and food? Why are they not ensuring effective enforcement of food safety laws?

It is no wonder that public faith in the administration's ability to ensure food safety is low. A recent survey of 22,000 consumers by Local Circles found 79 per cent of them expressing very low trust in the district/state FDAs to fully ensure food safety. This trust deficit must be overcome by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the FDAs.

As per Health Ministry data provided in July this year, food safety authorities conducted 5,20,566 inspections across the country during the 2025-26 financial year, analysed 2,33,808 food samples and found 40,023 to be non-compliant. Enforcement resulted in 31,878 cases ending in penalties, besides 1,918 criminal convictions.

However, to judge the effectiveness of enforcement in keeping unsafe food from the market, we need much greater transparency. What is the total number of food operators in the country and what percentage was inspected? How were inspections



Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe.

distributed across food and risk categories? How many were repeat inspections? How many samples were drawn per inspection and from how many establishments? And how many prosecutions ended in conviction? All such data must be provided.

I also feel that the courts must take food safety enforcement more seriously. After all, it is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution, and the health of a nation depends to a considerable extent on the quality and safety of food available to its people.

In *Sanjay Baburao Nirbhaye vs State of Maharashtra* case, for example, the

Bombay High Court's dismissal of the presence of two insects in the dishwashing and sweets section of the kitchen of a four-star hotel, while setting aside the suspension order issued by the Maharashtra FDA, comes as a big disappointment. The judgment only refers to 'insects' and does not mention what they were, though some media reports said they were cockroaches.

Whether cockroaches or flies, they can pick up pathogens from garbage and sewers and contaminate kitchen counters, food and even cleaned utensils, potentially leading to outbreaks of food-borne diseases. So, how can one overlook the presence of insects in a hotel kitchen?

The FDA had on July 3 suspended the licence of Hotel Park Inn by Radisson after finding several violations during a surprise inspection. The hotel challenged it before the Bombay High Court, which ordered a fresh inspection on July 18 and found only 79 per cent improvement. During a subsequent inspection, the improvement was 95 per cent. The court said when the overall compliance was satisfactory, the only adverse observation about the presence of two insects did not justify continued suspension.

The reported oral remark of one of the judges to FDA that "this is India, be prac-

tical", if accurate, is even more distressing. Does that mean that in India, food standards should remain low, or violations should be overlooked?

Food safety requires full compliance with the law because even a slight lack of diligence or carelessness can lead to loss of life. In February-March this year, accidental contamination of milk with highly toxic ethylene glycol, suspected to have taken place in the chilling unit of a small dairy, led to 20 persons in Andhra Pradesh's East Godavari district falling seriously ill with acute renal failure. Sixteen of them eventually died.

In March 2024, a chocolate cake ordered from Cake Kanha through Zomato tragically ended 10-year-old Manvi's life in Patiala, on her birthday. The baker had substituted sugar with an extremely high, lethal concentration of saccharine to cut costs! The only way to stop such tragedies is to enforce the law so strictly that no one dares to play with consumers' lives.

Now that one man has set the benchmark and shown us how food safety laws ought to be enforced, this should become the norm and not a one-time wonder. Consumers should start demanding the same kind of enforcement from food safety officials around the country.

—The writer is a consumer affairs expert

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G20 flounders as cooperation gives way to conflict

Weekly editorial

A prosperous global economy doesn't just happen. It needs leadership and rules.

During the late days of the Cold War, the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations assumed that leading role and provided guidance to ensure that it worked. The rise of "the rest" rendered that cabal ill-suited to that assignment. The redistribution of wealth demanded a reapportioning of power and the shock of the 2008 and 2009 Global Financial Shock drove home the need for an expanded and more inclusive guiding institution.

The Group of 20 emerged from those dark days and for a while it appeared to have a future as the directing force of the global economy. That promise withered as the crisis abated. During the next global shock, the COVID-19 pandemic, self-help took precedence over cooperation. The group has struggled ever since to reassert its worth as it sought to forge consensus in the face of growing economic challenges.

This week's gathering, hosted by the United States, laid bare the difficulties the G20 faces. In the face of growing global economic imbalances, the U.S. sought to condemn "nonmarket-based economies pushing out a never-ending stream of cheap exports." One nation — China, the chief source of those products; it recorded a record-high \$1.2 trillion trade surplus last year — dissented and that was enough to block the issuance of a statement from the group. The chair issued its own statement but that does not carry the weight of a G20 declaration.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, chair of the meeting, reminded attendees that a year ago he had warned that U.S. steps to protect its market would trigger a flood of Chinese goods in their markets. "Unfortunately, I was right," he added that "The rest of the world probably needs to take a hard look at what they should be doing to protect their citizens' jobs, their manufacturing base, so that everything they do doesn't get offshored."

Other divisions among the group went



U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent joins finance ministers, central bank governors and other officials for a plenary session of the Group of 20 countries in Asheville, North Carolina, on Monday. REUTERS

deeper. The U.S. decision to invite a Russian delegation, with Russia's finance minister, Anton Siluanov, at its head, a move that Bessent said was aimed to promote dialogue, antagonized European attendees. Canadian Finance Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne said the Russian presence "created a lot of discomfort around the table," while European Commissioner for the Economy, Valdis Dombrovskis said that it is not the time to "normalize" relations with Russia.

The U.S. war against Iran was equally divisive. The conflict has disrupted global energy markets, sparking inflation and disrupting geopolitics. While there was likely broad agreement that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon and that the Strait of Hor-

muz should be open with goods moving freely through it, support for "Operation Economic Outcast," the U.S. plan to, in Bessent's words, "economically asphyxiate this regime," was not as great.

Europeans were also troubled by the U.S. effort to work with Japan to stabilize and appreciate the yen, not because of the goal, but because the U.S. sold its holdings of euros to do so and only informed them after the fact. That protected the value of the dollar globally while weakening the euro. Not only would that increase inflationary pressures in eurozone economies but it undercuts the strength of the move: Success is more likely with concerted action by all major economies. And friends don't take action like that

without informing their partners.

In sidebar meetings, Finance Minister Satoshi Katayama said she and Bessent agreed to continue working together to achieve "orderly" yen moves, which were crucial for global market stability. She underscored that "There's no change to our position" and promised that the two governments would be ready to act if markets become disorderly. In his meeting with Bank of Japan Gov. Kazuo Ueda, Bessent called for a rise in interest rates to close the gap between the two central banks and strengthen the yen.

While a growing number of governments are inclined to see China as a problem for the global trade system, those same governments are not blind to U.S. misbehaviors.

Swelling fiscal deficits are a source of concern, with U.S. debt reaching a record \$40 trillion last month, even though Bessent said he wasn't worried about the ensuing increase in U.S. bond yields.

Europe's complaints with the U.S., which are shared in many cases by other G20 members, stem from U.S. unilateralism. The reckless decision to attack Iran, a move that appears to lack both logic and an assessment of the potential negative consequences, is damaging the global economy and U.S. credibility.

The imposition of tariffs and sanctions against allies, partners, geopolitical competitors and adversaries alike has antagonized many governments that would otherwise "follow our lead," as urged by U.S. President

Donald Trump. The trade war against Canada is another bewildering move. German Vice Chancellor Lars Klingbeil was correct when he warned that "tariff conflicts waged by the U.S.A., such as currently with Canada, destroy trust" and "ultimately harm everyone involved."

Finance Minister Katayama also denounced the export restrictions on critical minerals that were sending shock waves across the global economy. While her comment was directed at China, which has used that tool against Japan and several other governments with which Beijing has disputes, the G20 statement issued by the chair was less direct, as is often the case — and perhaps more revealing as a result. It said, "We urge countries to avoid unnecessary export restrictions to ensure global supply chains continue to function normally," an admonition that could be directed at the U.S. as well.

The G20 also took up artificial intelligence. Participants were urged to adopt the "Carolina Principles" — the meeting was held in Asheville, North Carolina — which would limit the regulatory authority of AI. The central provisions aim to "intentionally promote innovation and unlock the benefits of emerging technology," and "avoid 'inflexible' regulation."

This approach is favored by the leading AI companies, many of which are American; in a first, their executives attended the meeting to make their case to the government officials. It is also dangerously short-sighted. The call for a light touch seems to ignore the increasingly common reports of "rogue" AI that wreaks havoc on existing networks or the other harms that are ever more apparent and instead privileges the bottom lines of these companies.

This is another area in which global cooperation is vital and where the G20 could play a central role. That requires members to transcend politics and narrowly-defined national interests. Neither is likely. If that continues, the G20 will — should — be finished.

The Japan Times Editorial Board

Japan should define DEI before writing it into law

YUKARI EASTON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Roughly a decade behind the U.S. and U.K., Japan is adopting diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. But it is doing so without confronting the definitional fights that have already put those frameworks into question in other countries. DEI has proven to be a term nobody agreed upon in advance — and the costs of that ambiguity are now evident in courtrooms, women's sports and universities.

What has changed is not the rationale for equality, but its content. When the U.S. Supreme Court recognized marriage equality in its seminal 2015 ruling, it aligned with a shift in public opinion that accepted that extending the right to marry to one group took nothing away from another.

In Japan, there is little argument against equality per se: Homosexuality was never criminalized in the way that it was in many Western countries and being gay or queer has not traditionally carried a threat of prosecution, even without same-sex marriage laws other nations have now adopted.

Little more than a decade later, the debate has moved on. DEI frameworks, self-identification and transgender participation now intersect heavily in workplaces, hospitals, schools and sports. American athletes and federal law provide a clear illustration.

American swimmer Riley Gaines, who tied for fifth place with a transgender competitor at the 2022 NCAA championships, sued the NCAA alongside other female athletes, arguing that a biological male competitor had cost them placements and scholarships.

That 2024 suit now stands to benefit from a related development: On June 30, the U.S.

Supreme Court ruled unanimously, in *West Virginia v. B.P.J.* and *Little v. Hecox*, that "sex" in Title IX — the 1972 law barring sex discrimination in education, including athletics — means biological sex, not gender identity.

The court did not rule on Gaines' case directly and its holding was permissive rather than mandatory. But because Gaines' suit turns precisely on how "sex" should be defined, the ruling likely resolves that question before trial — a preview of what happens once "woman" finally gets a legal definition after a decade without one.

Arguably no institution illustrates inconsistency more clearly than the International Olympic Committee, whose record reads like a case study in reversal. Absent a clear definition, the IOC's position has reversed three times in 22 years, each time under outside pressure, not settled logic. The 2004 Stockholm Consensus required surgery, legal recognition and two years of hormone therapy. In 2015, facing criticism that this was invasive, the IOC moved to a testosterone threshold — one arbitrary proxy for another. By 2021, it abandoned thresholds altogether, delegating eligibility to individual federations and allowing transgender weightlifter Laurel Hubbard to compete in the Tokyo Olympic Games.

On March 26, 2026, the IOC reversed again, adopting a policy that restricts female events to those testing negative on an SRY gene screen — after its own working group concluded male sex confers performance advantages regardless of hormone levels. Four sets of rules in 22 years, each discarded not because consensus was reached but because the prior sets of rules collapsed under scrutiny.

Nor are lawsuits confined to sport. In

August 2026, the Olympus Spa near Seattle, after six years of litigation over denying entry to a transgender woman who had not had reassignment surgery, petitioned the Supreme Court to review a ruling against its anatomy-based policy.

If the country that created Title IX cannot agree on who belongs in a communal bathing space, Japan should not assume its *senjo* and *onsen* — where tradition has long mandated biologically defined bathing areas — will escape the same fight.

The U.K. offers an even more direct warning: Even after the country's highest court settled the legal definition, institutions have struggled to undo a self-identification practice they had already normalized. In April 2025, the U.K. Supreme Court ruled that "woman" under the Equality Act means biological sex — what should have become the settled answer.

But in August 2026, the equalities regulator issued a nonbinding code translating that judgment into policy, and that code itself now faces legal challenge. Parts of the U.K. National Health Service still operate on self-identification, unchanged by the ruling. The lesson for Japan is not that courts should decide these questions instead of legislatures; it is that a ruling delivered after institutions have built conflicting policies does not necessarily provide clarity. Waiting to settle the definition of "woman" through the courts, as Britain did, buys years of exactly the confusion Japan can potentially still avoid.

Institutions have often adopted self-identification as a settled premise before testing whether it could hold under pressure. Many privately doubt the practice but conform publicly anyway for fear of being labeled unprogressive. Doubts surface only once the

self-identification framework breaks down. Several U.S. states now house incarcerated people by self-declared gender identity, with no medical requirement. Rapes and pregnancies have followed — harms advocacy groups flagged in advance, not hypotheticals raised after the fact.

The question for Japan's DEI advocates is not whether they support inclusion, which most sincerely do, but whether they have considered what may happen when unconditional self-identification governs spaces where physical safety is at stake.

This pattern extends beyond courts and policy bodies. In August 2026, former NBA players Enes Kanter Freedom and Royce White declared themselves eligible for the 2027 WNBA draft, explicitly testing whether the league's rules require anything beyond self-declaration. The WNBA called it a bad-faith stunt.

Stunt or not, the idea that "simply declaring who you are" is a viable strategy for entering a women's league — rather than an absurdity dismissed outright — is itself the point: A standard built on self-declaration cannot verify anyone's claim, sincere or not. Even longtime LGBTQ rights advocates split here: WNBA champion Sue Bird and tennis legend Martina Navratilova have reached opposite conclusions on trans inclusion in women's sports. Japan has no settled consensus to import.

Meanwhile, a retreat is under way from where DEI started: Under pressure from the Trump administration, many American universities have halted DEI hires and programs, with funding frozen. Tokyo seems to be moving in the opposite direction — the University of Tokyo is expanding gender studies and aiming to raise female faculty



A reveler waves a flag during the Tokyo Rainbow Pride parade celebrating lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender culture in Tokyo in May 2016. REUTERS

to 400 of 2,300 by 2028, without specifying who counts as "female."

The ambiguity isn't confined to universities. In 2025, the government set a target of 30% female executives at prime-market companies by 2030; Keidanren firms reported 19% as of mid-2025. Like the university target, this is a headcount goal that never defines "female."

The result is a quiet contradiction: Japan is adopting the language of DEI while its only working metric assumes the very biological definition that Western self-ID frameworks have spent more than a decade trying to displace.

None of this means Japan should reject concepts of fairness. But slow-moving Japan perhaps has an opportunity the U.S. and U.K. never had: to have the definitional argu-

ments before writing policy, not after the lawsuits arrive. What does "woman" mean in the context of a sports scholarship, a prison cell, a hospital ward, an employment quota or a senate? Who decides and on what basis? Japan can import the language of DEI without importing more than a decade of unresolved conflict — but only if it treats these as open questions to be definitively settled rather than following a vague Western concept of inclusion that institutions, courts and policymakers still haven't resolved.

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opinion

How much socialism is America willing to swallow?

The DSA's rise forces a fresh debate over what being a socialist means

JOHN AUTHERS
BLOOMBERG

"Socialism is a scare word they have hurled at every advance the people have made in the last 20 years," said President Harry S. Truman in 1948. Opponents had attacked it, he said, to public electricity, social security, farm price supports, the growth of unions and bank deposit insurance.

When Republicans attacked "socialism," Truman averred, what they were really attacking was the New Deal. "Socialism is their name for almost anything that helps all the people."

As U.S. politics continues through a hot summer of advances for the Democratic Socialists of America in Democratic Party primaries, it's as well to remember the long history of using the word to attack ideas on the left — including many policies that are nowhere near classic definitions of socialism.

What is new, however, is the number of politicians close to the mainstream who will voluntarily wear the label, while voters seem more willing than in at least a century to take them seriously. Most famously, Zohran Mamdani became the mayor of New York and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is positioning to run for president while proudly calling themselves Democratic Socialists.

Socialism became a dirty word in American politics for a reason and Truman was right that it was almost invariably used pejoratively. None of the Founding Fathers would have had the faintest truck with the notion, which cuts against the deep-seated American commitment to liberty and individual rights.

And unlike conservatism and capitalism, both of which grew organically, socialism has clear intellectual origins and stands for a clear list of policies.

However, gaps exist between socialism in theory and what evolved after it was put into practice in Western Europe and the proposals that today's Democratic Socialists have for America. There's little point in opponents using socialism as a scare term, but its proponents need to do much more work to explain their intentions.

British Labour

To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.



Demonstrators with the Democratic Socialists of America take part in a rally on International Women's Day in Manhattan, New York, in March 2018. REUTERS

tribution and exchange and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service. This was a doctrine of the economy, directly opposed to shareholder capitalism, which in an American context would imply a complete revolution. Postwar Labour governments went ahead with nationalizing large swathes of British industry, including coal, steel, utilities and automakers, although never the banks, and the results were awful.

Most were reversed under Margaret Thatcher. Tony Blair's big political coup on becoming Labour leader in 1994 was to rewrite Clause IV. It now begins by declaring that Labour is "a democratic socialist party" — it retains that label — but defines that as:

By the strength of our common endeavor we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realize our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe and where we live together, freely,

in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect.

There's nothing about nationalization, nothing to suggest that Labour couldn't achieve its ends via profit-making corporations, and indeed very little that's specific beyond a nod toward egalitarianism in the invocation that wealth should be in the hands of the many. Blair's New Labour government was mildly redistributive, didn't return companies to public ownership and allowed market capitalism to let rip.

That is the model adapted in most of Western Europe, by politicians who generally call themselves social democrats rather than socialists. Public ownership of industries is out, but governments do levy higher taxes and maintain a bigger welfare state than the U.S. has done, even under the more radical Democratic administrations.

Socialists in America

In the U.S., the grouping known as the Democratic Socialists of America has grown fast, rather like British Labour a century ago as it positioned itself to replace the Liberals as the

main party of the left. And their aspirational founding documents sound a lot like the Labour Party of the original Clause IV, with some updating for the modern politics of identity. Article II of the DSA's constitution says:

We reject an economic order based on private profit, alienated labor, gross inequalities of wealth and power, discrimination based on race, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, age, religion, national origin and brutality and violence in defense of the status quo. We are socialists because we share a vision of a humane social order based on popular control of resources and production, economic planning, equitable distribution, feminism, racial equality and nonoppressive relationships.

That is a program more radical than anything socialist governments in the democratic world have ever enacted — and it's certainly far from anything Jefferson or Hamilton would have countenanced. It also recently unveiled a new platform, "Workers Deserve Better," that veers into full-on utopianism and proposes an effective repeal of the U.S. Constitution:

Replace the two-party system with a multiparty democracy. Expand the House of Representatives, implement proportional representation and ranked choice voting in all elections and abolish the Senate. Abolish the Electoral College. Replace the President and Supreme Court with an executive and judiciary chosen by and subordinate to Congress.

It's hard to know how to take this. The key points are:

A Tea Party of the Left? The DSA has saddled itself with some unachievable fantasies. That deserves a degree of ridicule. The conservative columnist George Will, for example, who is also a trenchant critic of Trumpism, dismisses the DSA as "naughty and fun but unlikely to begin America over again."

Their few setbacks this summer have been brought on by excessive "wokeness" — to use a word that is currently even more potent than socialism was in Truman's time. Francesca Hong, the DSA candidate for the Wisconsin governorship, narrowly lost the Democratic primary after it emerged that she

had once called for the abolition of Thanksgiving and expressed distaste for Halloween.

But it might make more sense to say that Hong nearly won despite showing herself horribly out of touch with American culture, and not for her ideas about the economy. Further, the history of Europe's socialists, and America's recent populist insurgency that morphed from the Tea Party into MAGA and conquered the Republicans, suggest that the DSA and others taking the socialist brand must still be treated seriously. Capitalism is increasingly unpopular and Republicans themselves have taken massive steps antithetical to it. Adam Smith, after all, wrote the Wealth of Nations, widely treated as capitalism's founding document, as an attack on tariffs and protectionism.

If people are fed up with capitalism, it's only logical to consider socialism. Polling suggests that the welfare and redistribution parts of the left-wing agenda — which aren't far removed from the program of FDR and Truman — have appeal. Nationalizing the commanding heights of the economy does not.

Matt Gertken of BCA Research points to Gallup polls showing that the proportion of Democrats with a "positive view" of socialism has risen to 66%. More detailed questioning showed that capitalism was in trouble, but still more popular than the alternative.

The bad things that voters perceive about capitalism are greed, inequality and corporatism. Whereas, when asked about the virtues of socialism, the most popular answer is "nothing." Having said that, the sincere answers suggest that social safety net and equality are the perceived benefits. Only 4% of voters believe in collective control of corporations. Americans are not demanding government seizure of the means of production. What the surveys reveal is an underlying demand for change arising from inequality and demand for government benefits.

The MAGA movement won by promising to respond to that demand for change. If it's perceived to fail to deliver, there's every reason to think that politicians calling themselves socialists could gain power and embark on European-style greater redistribution and higher taxes (but not wholesale dismantling of shareholder capitalism). They might well be right that people want them to do that.

Rather than use socialism as a scare word, people who want capitalism to survive might zero in on the more absurd elements of the DSA agenda — and then prepare for a real debate about just what would be wrong with more redistributive taxes that required the mega-rich to pay far more.

John Authers is a senior editor for markets and Bloomberg Opinion columnist.

China's biggest artificial intelligence weakness

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In late April, a Chinese court ruled that an AI firm could not legally dismiss an employee simply because his role had been automated. Shortly thereafter, Chinese regulators reportedly suspended new autonomous-vehicle licenses nationwide in response to a mass robotic failure in Wuhan, a city where car drivers had long petitioned authorities to slow the technology's rollout. And all the while, Chinese state media has been criticizing companies for contemplating AI-driven layoffs, arguing that they have a duty to protect their employees.

Together, these episodes suggest that China is beginning to pump the brakes on its own AI rollout. But why would a state with such coercive capacity and a strong desire to dominate the technological frontier choose restraint? After all, China seemed to have a structural advantage in the AI race. An authoritarian state can be a deployment machine, overriding worker resistance, suppressing protest and keeping the gears turning, whereas liberal democracies are deliberation machines that must account for elections, unions, assembly rights and other institutional constraints.

But China has a fundamental weakness: It lacks a robust social safety net. True, the West's high social spending — on unemployment benefits, public health care and retraining programs — is usually framed as a brake on innovation, since it requires taxing high earners and transferring wealth from pro-

ductive sectors to dependent ones. But the historical record shows that social insurance can accelerate the deployment of new technologies. When a state can credibly promise that displacement will not mean destitution, workers and their representatives are more likely to accept technological change.

Of course, plenty of countries have chosen repression instead, clearing the way for the machines by force. Britain deployed the army against the Luddites in 1812 and made machine-breaking a capital offense. The industrializations of South Korea and Taiwan relied partly on suppressing independent unions.

The AI revolution will be won not by the country most willing to force workers aside, but by the one that makes them secure enough to let the machines in.

ization and rising living standards. Workers were asked to endure low wages today in exchange for richer lives tomorrow.

AI displacement does not allow for such a trade-off in China. It is arriving in offices, services and platforms, threatening educated young workers as much as factory hands, and it comes just as China's promise of ever-greater opportunity is becoming harder to keep. Chinese growth is slowing, the pro-

erty ladder is broken for many young people, and labor-market anxieties are reflected in high precautionary saving rates and nostalgia for the boom years.

Chinese authorities seem to recognize the problem. But even if they understand that technology-driven displacement must be managed politically, China's lack of a strong institutional cushion limits their options. Public social spending is only around 10% of gross domestic product, less than half the OECD average. Hundreds of millions of internal migrants remain disadvantaged by the hukou system, and Chinese households still bear a large share of health care costs out of pocket.

As the economist Barry Naughton has shown, China has built much of the framework for a universal welfare system, but transfer flows remain modest, constrained by the urban-rural divide and demographic aging. Its unemployment insurance was designed for cyclical rather than structural displacement and only a relatively small share of those out of work draw benefits. China has paid the price for failed technological deployments before. For centuries, craft guilds resisted mechanization to protect their members, thereby delaying China's industrialization for two centuries. The risk today is similar. The short-term political need to avoid disruption could deprive China's society of the latest technology's long-term benefits.

By contrast, Britain could sustain mechanization during the Industrial Revolution partly because it boasted a social-welfare system unmatched anywhere in Europe.

Under the Old Poor Law, parishes, from 1601 onward, were legally obliged to relieve the able-bodied poor. As a result, most paid cash allowances to those out of work or on low earnings, covered rents, supplied bread and fuel and paid for medical care.

These measures worked. Recent research by the economists Avner Greif and Murat Iyigun finds that English counties with higher per capita poor relief experienced fewer riots as the economy industrialized. The Poor Law had many flaws, but its political consequences were clear: It acted as a shock absorber that helped keep factories running. Far from hampering technological deployment, the welfare state may be an essential complement. Yet the West risks squandering this advantage. In the United States, unemployment insurance is reaching a shrinking share of the unemployed just as AI has begun to affect the labor market.

Of course, some social protections create their own challenges. Many parts of Europe are delaying AI deployment because there are rules on the books protecting specific jobs rather than insuring workers through transitions. When a German works council demanded that its employer bar staff from using ChatGPT, the Hamburg Labor Court rejected the petition, but the firm still had to litigate the matter. Such uncertainty makes experimentation costly. When SAP restructured its operations around AI in 2024, shedding roughly 8,000 positions, it had to set aside €2.2 billion (\$2.5 billion) for voluntary buyouts and early retirement — equivalent, by one estimate, to more than three years of pay per affected worker in Europe.



An Astribot humanoid robot demonstrates serving tea at an exhibition in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, China, on April 16. China's weak social safety net makes workers very vulnerable to AI-driven displacement. REUTERS

Denmark's flexicurity model comes closest to striking the right balance. Weaker employment protections are offset by generous unemployment benefits and intensive active-labor-market policies, including retraining and re-employment. Firms can deploy AI safely, knowing that workers are insured and that the overall political economy will hold.

The race between the U.S. and China is not only about chips, compute and model parameters but also about institutional capacity. China must now build the welfare state it has long avoided building — and at a time of slowing growth and deteriorating demographics. America and Europe are starting from a better position, but they still have a long way to go to modernize their welfare states and elimi-

nate veto points before displacement becomes politically uncontrollable.

Repression is what states reach for when they have nothing else. The AI revolution will be won not by the country most willing to force workers aside, but by the one that makes them secure enough to let the machines in.

Carl Benedikt Frey, associate professor of AI & work at the Oxford Internet Institute and director of the Future of Work Program at the Oxford Martin School, is the author, most recently, of "How Progress Ends: Technology, Innovation, and the Fate of Nations" (Princeton University Press, 2025). © Project Syndicate, 2026

EDITORIAL

E-filing failures are a wake-up call for public services

Imagine being fined for failing to file your online tax return on time even though you are absolutely sure you have done so, only to find out later that it wasn't your own fault. For nearly 5,200 Hong Kong taxpayers, this scenario became reality after tens of thousands of people left their eTAX returns incomplete due to unclear wording and interface design. There were even two prosecutions before steps were taken to rectify the blunder.

Commissioner of Inland Revenue Benjamin Chan Sze-wai rightly apologised for the inconvenience caused to the affected, saying the tax department had an "unshirkable responsibility" to fix the problem. He assured the public that no taxpayers would be penalised over the incident, adding that penalty remissions would be granted, payments refunded and the two prosecutions withdrawn. "The system is under the Inland Revenue Department and is not ideal... We will continue to improve the system and hope that such misunderstandings will not happen again," he said.

The confusion should not have happened in the first place. Worse, an investigation initiated by the city's Ombudsman revealed that similar problems were spotted as early as 2022, but were not resolved until tens of thousands were caught last year. It was found that ambiguous instructions on the eTAX submission and signature interface misled users into thinking that authenticating themselves via IAM Smart completed their filing, when in fact they had to return to the eTAX platform and wait for confirmation.

Between May 2 last year and January 31 this year, 489,425 taxpayers tried to submit electronic returns using a digital signature on IAM Smart for the 2024-25 tax year; of these, 33,019 ended up with incomplete submissions.

The tax department conceded that the failed submissions were due to various factors, such as user actions or network anomalies. About 80 per cent of the 33,000 affected taxpayers had reused IAM Smart to sign and submit their tax returns successfully before penalty notices or notices of estimated assessment were issued, including some 14,000 who did so within the same day of the first attempt. The department later adopted steps to address the issues, including pop-ups, confirmation messages, enhanced wording and autosave.

That does not exonerate the department of inadequacies in providing a reliable online public service for everyone. As noted by the maladministration watchdog, the national 15th five-year plan has dedicated a chapter to the advancement of digital China, proposing strategic planning to elevate the level of digital intelligence development and digital government infrastructure. The incumbent Hong Kong administration is also committed to promoting digital government and smart city operations.

The tax filing blunder is more than a system hiccup. It reflects negatively on Hong Kong's "smart city" ambition and the pursuit of seamless online public services. The online tax filing system in question was widely used. Even though the majority managed to do so without any issues, the systemic issue had implications that ripple far beyond inconvenience for some users. The blunder inevitably erodes trust, creates legal liability and exposes coordination gaps across digital government systems.

The episode serves as a wake-up call for government agencies and public bodies running online public services. Currently, residents can access more than 1,300 online services by the government, public and private bodies via IAM Smart, a one-stop personalised digital service platform announced in the 2017 policy address. Whether it is business registration, social welfare, healthcare or education, each agency should proactively audit its digital workflows for ambiguous wording, unclear completion signals and inconsistencies across platforms so as to avoid similar hiccups.

Hong Kong has long promoted itself as a modern city with full digitalisation of government services. Yet the tax filing episode shows how easily that undertaking unravels when different arms of the administration do not speak the same digital language. Users cannot be faulted for assuming that using the official authentication step via IAM Smart equated to accomplishing the task. The problem highlights a classic coordination failure that has no place in an efficient and effective administration.

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A Singaporean feels at home in Guangzhou

The Guangdong capital set me at ease in a way other mainland cities did not, and I began to understand what it means to be descended from early Chinese migrants

On a recent trip to China, I was on a rumbling subway train when I was struck by a strange sense of homecoming. It was as if I had been transported back to my childhood, and suddenly I was completely at home among all the strangers in the subway carriage – even though this was my very first time in Guangzhou.

The funny thing is that nothing special happened on that ride. I just had a moment to observe my surroundings and realise how much my husband and I – both Chinese Singaporeans – resembled the everyday people around us.

We were all roughly the same height and had the same colouring. Many of the other passengers had large almond-shaped eyes with double eyelids and low nose bridges with rounded tips, rather like mine.

Although I had visited China many times and taken the subway in cities including Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing, I had never felt this way before. While I would not invite a second look in most parts of China, I often felt like an "other".

If I am being honest, my nagging feeling in those other cities might have been that in contrast to the often taller, fairer and well-groomed Chinese women, my tropical tan, short stature and make-up-free face were more likely to conjure an image of a homely hobbit, standing among ethereal elves.

Fundamentally, however, the feeling of otherness extends beyond mere looks. It is in the subtle things, like having to strain the ear to understand the different melodies of spoken Chinese across the country and tasting somewhat recognisable, yet strange, Chinese flavours – such as heavily seasoned pancakes and grilled meats with cuming.

In Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, I realised I had felt othered because I had been visiting the wrong cities all along. Here in southern China, every other man in the street looked like he could be a long-lost uncle or distant relative. If I was a hobbit, so were people around me. Besides, the cuisine was often familiar and

comforting: soups, lightly cooked seafood, rice-based dishes, except in a wider variety and at lower price points than in Singapore.

But the most delightful surprise was the brand of Chinese spoken in Guangzhou. The Mandarin was easy to understand – sometimes the accent sounded like that of our Chinese Malaysian brethren across the Causeway, at other times, it was exactly how Chinese Singaporeans would speak. The icing on the cake was the casual use of Cantonese; twice, I even heard conversations in Teochew.

“
Here in southern China, every other man in the street looked like he could be a long-lost uncle or distant relative

Growing up in 1980s Singapore, I learned English and Chinese at school, but at home, my mother tongue was Malay-laced Teochew, as taught by my paternal grandparents. I also picked up Cantonese by osmosis, while devouring undubbed TVB dramas, broadcast from Johor, Malaysia, with my grandmother. Although my Cantonese is not as fluent as my Teochew, I usually have little trouble understanding it.

As I grew older, the highly successful Speak Mandarin Campaign in Singapore meant that there were fewer opportunities to converse in dialects outside the family. But I loved speaking dialects and trying my luck wherever possible, whether it was ordering Teochew rice porridge at hawker centres or chatting with random elderly women. Alas, over the past decade, these encounters have dwindled dramatically.

On the few trips I have taken to Hong Kong, I have tried speaking Cantonese, but the somewhat baleful impatience of shopkeepers and service staff mostly leaves me shy and stuttering.

So imagine my delight on my first morning in Guangzhou, when an elderly lady approached me in the hotel lift lobby and asked in Cantonese which floor the restaurant was on. I not only directed her to the correct floor, but we also discussed the quality of the breakfast buffet. Only after she thanked me warmly and said goodbye did I realise that I had just conversed entirely in Cantonese without stammering.

After that encounter, I became braver and spoke Cantonese whenever I could for the rest of the trip. At times, shopkeepers would smile at me in surprise. As I recounted later to a friend, Guangzhou somehow feels more receptive to poor Cantonese than Hong Kong. It rewards those who try to speak the local dialect, even if they don't sound perfect.

Sadly, I did not have a chance to travel to the Chaoshan region, also in Guangdong province, and try my Teochew on hapless native speakers there.

But since returning from Guangzhou, the idea of visiting my ancestral city, Shantou (Swatow), has arisen more than once. While there is probably no hope of tracking down any ancestral village there since the elders in my family died without providing any information, there remains a deep curiosity.

Even though the last three generations of my family were born in Singapore, the trip has helped me understand what it means to be descended from immigrants. It is the experience of feeling a strong, mysterious sense of belonging in a place you have never visited before. It is at once unexpected and enlightening, as if parts of yourself, previously unknown, are now revealed.

Alina Heng is a media lecturer at a polytechnic in Singapore



Alina Heng

Could Indonesia be sued for haze?

I refer to "Malaysia's air quality turns hazardous as Indonesian wildfires burn" (August 31). Four areas in Malaysia's Bornean state of Sarawak recorded hazardous air quality, with Air Pollutant Index readings above 300. Serian recorded a reading of 476.

That's nearing the threshold of 500 for declaring an emergency. Are there remedies for victims of the man-made transboundary haze?

Little is known of a transboundary air pollution case brought before the International Court of Justice. Ecuador sued Colombia in March 2008 for alleged aerial spraying of toxic herbicides at locations near, and at across the countries' border. The spraying was allegedly carried out as part of Colombia's plan to eradicate illegal cocaine crops.

Under international law, a state is considered to have violated the law if the actions or omissions causing the harm are attributable to the state or constitute a violation of the international obligations of that state. In that case, it was contended that Colombia's failure in carrying out due diligence regarding the spraying parameters constituted a breach of the no-harm principle.

Under the principle, a state is responsible for carrying out due diligence in regulating and controlling activities within its jurisdiction to refrain from causing significant harm to the territory of other states.

If the aerial spraying case is a precedent, then Indonesia can be sued for its failure in regulation and enforcement regarding the conduct of palm oil and pulpwood

LETTERS

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plantations – conduct which has caused significant transboundary damage to neighbouring countries.

Unfortunately, it might not happen. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has its own way, which emphasises informal and non-legalistic procedures, to cite political scientist Timo Kivimäki. Transboundary haze victims in Southeast Asia have been without remedies for years.

Mohamad Hafiz Hassan, lecturer, Faculty of Law, Multimedia University, Malaysia

More tourists not necessarily better

Hong Kong welcomed nearly 50 million visitors last year. That is an impressive-sounding figure, though still below pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, spending per overnight tourist fell from HK\$6,614 in 2018 to HK\$5,503 last year.

Comparing our numbers to those of other tourist destinations around the region gives some reason for optimism. Japan only had 42.7 million international arrivals last year, while South Korea was far behind with 18.7 million.

However, the number of visitors does not necessarily equate to an economic boost. Shrinking tourist spending is hurting local businesses.

The Tourism Board is bending over backwards to attract more tourists, but it should be doing more to attract people from not just the mainland but all over the world. Tourism is about making money. Hongkongers are unlikely to

appreciate an influx of tourists who spend very little money here.

Randy Lee, Ma On Shan

No cliches please, just new ideas

Though one would assume it's not for Hongkongers, the Tourism Board's latest effort to attract tourists – short videos under the theme "Only in Hong Kong" – is a pastiche of cliches.

In fact, some of the imagery looks similar to the video produced more than three decades ago for the tourist association by Louis Ng and Film Factory. Like the song says – "You say it best when you say nothing at all" – perhaps it might be best for the Tourism Board to take a nap until the city has something truly new to show the world?

Hans Ebert, Wan Chai

Wider options for Hongkong Post

I refer to your editorial, "Hongkong Post must look beyond belt-tightening" (August 25).

In the 1970s, the McKinsey Report recommended that the government hire off services including the post office, but this didn't come to pass. Might there be opportunities elsewhere in the Greater Bay Area, or through the Belt and Road Initiative? To tap them, the postmaster would have to venture out of their comfort zone.

Lo Wai-kong, Yuen Long



Tourist numbers are rising, but they are not spending more. Photo: Jelly Tse



Washington learns a lesson China taught

It now realises technological leadership is a security objective in its own right, not an economic advantage that pays security dividends – a truth it resisted for 80 years

The US government owns 9.9 per cent of Intel, converted out of US Chips Act grants, alongside a golden share in US Steel, US\$400 million in the rare earth mining firm MP Materials and stakes in roughly 30 firms worth US\$26.7 billion. In 2025, Nvidia and AMD gave up 15 per cent of their China chip sale revenues in exchange for export licences. The country that spent four decades advising its allies against picking winners now runs a portfolio.

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Research security has gone from a compliance chore to a branch of statecraft

The United States has not fully turned to state capitalism, but it has accepted something it resisted for 80 years. Technological leadership is a security objective in its own right, pursued with the instruments of security policy rather than an economic advantage that pays security dividends.

The National Security Science and Technology Strategy, unveiled on August 18, is where that proposition appears in writing. Most of it reads as such documents often do. Then comes a sentence that gives away the game: the US should avoid contests where capable adversaries can readily counter its moves and should not spend on replicating what a rival has already built better.

Countries do not redraw the board while they are winning. Washington has adopted the tactics of a fighter with reach who declines to trade blows in the clinch: keep it long, concede the inside, win where your arms are. That is rational, and also what fighters do once they have felt their opponent's power.

The rest of the document follows from that concession. Foreign investment, firms and personnel touching American research face tighter scrutiny, though a presidential memorandum had already turned the Committee on Foreign Investment in the US against Chinese money in strategic sectors in February 2025. Research security has gone from a

compliance chore to a branch of statecraft. Three domains are ring-fenced for battlefield advantage – undersea, space, artificial intelligence and autonomy – above an enabling technologies list running through hypersonics, directed energy, semiconductors and nuclear energy.

The strategy document reaches furthest into American life through alignment. Agencies are steered towards milestone contracts with competing vendors, told to place federal money where it complements private capital rather than crowding it out, and to expedite clearances so expertise moves between laboratory, firm and department at commercial speed.

The scale registers only against what it replaces. Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Vannevar Bush, director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, in 1944 how wartime science might serve the peace. Bush's answer was that Washington should pay for basic research and then decline to direct it, since nobody could say in advance which inquiry would bear fruit. Harry Truman vetoed the first attempt to create the National Science Foundation (NSF) and it was not until 1950 that the foundation was established, but the principle held: the state funded, the scientists chose.

When Sputnik was launched in 1957, the US answered with money, students and two new agencies: Nasa and the military research shop that became the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency. Both came into being alongside the NSF rather than take its place, and scientists still chose.

The Soviet Union frightened the US for 30 years without changing how it organised science. China has managed it in about 10.

A reversal in the US position is unlikely. The technology strategy document exists because the Chips and Science Act requires the government's science office to produce one after every National Security Strategy. Export controls began under US President Donald Trump's first term and have continued to grow since. Particular mechanisms will be litigated, and some will be abandoned. The premise beneath them has survived two changes of party, and no serious candidate proposes restoring what came before.

The strategy commits the US to attracting top-tier global talent in critical national security fields. Even so, a new Department of Homeland

Security rule that takes effect from September 15 caps student visas at four years in a country where doctoral and postdoctoral programmes usually take longer to complete. The strategy did not write that rule, which is the point: it promises talent that another arm of the same government is turning away.

The regime also taxes what it defends. Vetting details what the collaborations it exists to make safe, and money directed at named technologies is money withheld from the unnamed. This was Bush's point as the transistor was not on anybody's list of priorities.

The grant machinery has been reshaped to match this new paradigm. By April, the NSF had made 613 awards this financial year, a fifth of its 2021-24 pace, with the National Institutes of Health at about 10,000 awards against a normal 18,000. Building a fabrication plant takes about 18 months. A condensed-matter physics programme takes the better part of a decade, and the process begins with a high school graduate choosing between Michigan and Munich.

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The strategy document reaches furthest into American life through alignment

Washington has learned the lesson Beijing taught it: technological leadership is a security objective, not an economic advantage that pays security dividends. However, the advantage the US is defending was built by attracting the people who made the discoveries and giving them room to work.

A state can buy Intel, subsidise a fab and fence off a supply chain. It cannot command the next transistor into existence. That is decided by the people still willing to come to Ann Arbor and Berkeley, and whether the US looks like the place to do it.

Thomas O. Falk is a journalist. He writes about German, British, and US politics



Thomas O. Falk

“
Washington doesn't even bother to hide the true intention behind the violent regime change

US is shifting to imperialism in Latin America

Washington aims to counter China's influence as well as re-establish hegemonic control in the region

When China's trade with Latin America reached a record US\$518.4 billion in 2024, it marked a fundamental shift in hemispheric economics. Beijing is now the largest bilateral creditor and second largest trading partner of Latin America and the Caribbean, with President Xi Jinping pledging a new credit line of 66 billion yuan (HK\$77 billion) at the 2025 China-Celac (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) forum.

Chinese investment has evolved from extractive industries towards clean energy and manufacturing, with electric vehicle production expanding across Brazil and Chinese-made vehicles capturing 57 per cent of Ecuador's market by the first half of this year.

Washington's response under President Donald Trump has not been subtle. Rather than competing economically, the administration has reverted to traditional gunboat diplomacy under the so-called Donroe Doctrine. Washington has been employing outright imperialist methods that undermine international law and the sovereign interests of America's neighbours in the region.

The January military raid on Caracas that captured Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro exemplifies this approach. Operation Absolute Resolve killed about 80 people, including 32 Cuban security personnel, with no American casualties. Maduro is being put on a show trial in New York while the US has secured effective control over 65 billion barrels of Venezuelan oil reserves through a deal granting Washington 55 per cent of output from 17 oilfields over 100 years. Acting President Delcy Rodriguez, who once denounced foreign colonialism, signed legislation privatising the energy sector under evident American pressure.

Washington doesn't even bother to hide the true intention behind the violent regime change. The Pentagon is expected to take a direct stake in the parent of North American Blue Energy Partners, the private oil producer hand-picked by Washington for the deal.

When earthquakes struck Venezuela in June, killing at least 6,500 people, the Trump administration's humanitarian response was summed up thus by a New York Times headline: “With \$8 Billion in Venezuelan Oil Money, US Gives \$300 Million in Quake Aid”.

Cuba's suffering is even starker, thanks to America's coercive statecraft over 66 years and counting. Trump has escalated a fuel blockade and threatened to punish any nation trying to sell oil to the island state. That has produced catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in June that Cuba's infant mortality has doubled to 9.9 per 1,000 births, while childhood cancer survival rates have fallen from 85 to 65 per cent.

Fuel supplies are down 60 per cent, prompting basic food costs to rise sharply. Essential medicines are down to 30 per cent of normal supply levels, and power cuts regularly exceeding 20 hours daily have crippled hospitals, water systems and food refrigeration. Volker Turk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated bluntly: “Children are dying because doctors lack access to essential medical supplies and medicines.”

Trump's Shield of the Americas, unveiled at a March summit in Florida, purports to counter drug cartels and Chinese influence

through military cooperation among 17 nations. The initiative appears less a hemispheric alliance than an ideological coalition of right-wing governments.

Since September 2025, US forces have struck at least 67 vessels in alleged counter-narcotics operations, killing at least 223 people, in the Caribbean and east Pacific. The Pentagon has refused to release identities or provide evidence of drug trafficking. Extrajudicial killings or just plain murders?

China's deepening economic engagement in Latin America inevitably invites scrutiny and competitive response. Beijing's loans, infrastructure projects and technology transfer do raise legitimate questions about debt sustainability, environmental standards and political influence. But the appropriate response is not military intervention, resource extraction disguised as partnership, or sanction regimes that kill children.

Regional governments are caught in the middle. Recent US presidents have warned Latin American leaders about ties to Beijing. While they offer few concrete alternatives to Chinese trade and investment, Trump has escalated from political pressure to outright military operations, thus doing away with sustained economic engagement, good-neighbourly diplomacy and respect for sovereignty.

Trump's approach violates international law, alienates partners and strengthens rather than weakens China's position by default. Washington is resorting to tariffs, deportations and militarisation; Beijing is offering trade and investment. For a region seeking development pathways beyond commodity extraction, the choice grows clearer with each military strike and each Cuban blackout.

The Donroe Doctrine is becoming catastrophic for the region and the world at large.

Alex Lo has been a South China Morning Post columnist since 2012, commenting on China and international affairs. He is also a member of the editorial writing team



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YOUR VOICE

Companies taking action after Good Good Golf ad equals accountability

By Jodi Bondi Norgaard
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

There has been significant backlash, and rightly so, against a recent Good Good Golf commercial promoting its new Callaway driver.

The video shows co-founder Garrett Clark charging toward a woman as she reaches for his driver. Before she can touch it, he pushes her to the ground, stands over her, and angrily warns, "Do not touch my new driver."

Using violence against women to sell a product is appalling. And the question I keep coming back to is: How could this possibly have been approved?

As an entrepreneur with decades of experience in marketing and branding, I know these decisions don't happen quickly. There are teams and discussions, yet enough people thought this ad was a good idea and apparently decided: "Yes, this is a winner."

At no point did anyone with enough sense say, "Wait a minute. A man knocking a woman to the ground and threatening her is horrible, and a terrible way to sell a golf club."

Good Good Golf has since deleted the ad and apologized, saying the content depicted actions "not aligned with our values as a brand" and reaffirmed its commitment to making golf more inclusive.

Callaway CEO Chip Brewer later issued a statement admitting that Callaway approved the video before it was posted online and that the approval "should never have happened." But one sentence stood out: "As soon as we recognized the seriousness of the issue, it was escalated appropriately, and the video was immediately removed."

This is precisely the problem. It became serious enough to "escalate" only after people saw it and started calling it out.

Equally striking is what Brewer's statement doesn't say. While he mentions that Callaway has "been a positive force



Good Good Golf co-founder Garrett Clark plays during the Tour Championship Creator Classic at East Lake Golf Club on Aug. 20, 2025, in Atlanta. JARED C. TILTON/GETTY

for diversity and inclusion in the game of golf," not once does he use the word woman. The very reason for the outrage: a man aggressively shoving a woman to the ground and threatening her is never acknowledged.

But the apologies don't answer the more important questions: Why did this get approved in the first place? What does this say about our culture and how we view women? And who was at the table?

This is just one of the reasons women need to be at the table, in positions of power and decision-making. Different voices, perspectives and lived experiences in the room matter.

At a time when companies are scaling back diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, this should serve as a reminder of why

representation in decision-making was never simply about checking a box. It's about making better decisions.

The golf industry, in particular, should be paying attention to women.

According to the National Golf Foundation, the number of female on-course golfers increased 45% between 2020 and 2025, a net gain of 2.5 million players. More than 8.1 million women and girls now play on-course golf, the highest number ever recorded. Women and girls accounted for 52% of the net growth in on-course participation during that period.

In other words, women aren't on the sidelines of golf's growth. We are driving it.

Yet here we are in 2026 watching a golf

company market a club with an image of a man aggressively pushing a woman to the ground.

There should be consequences. And there have been.

Dick's Sporting Goods and Golf Galaxy pulled Good Good merchandise from their online and in-store sales floors. Multiple PGA Tour Superstore locations have also pulled Good Good merchandise. The Golf Channel postponed the premiere of "Big Break x Good Good" after a sponsor asked to have its branding removed from the series. Good Good stepped away as title sponsor of a PGA Tour event scheduled for this fall. Callaway ended its partnership with Good Good and pledged \$1 million to organizations working to prevent violence against women and support survivors.

That's not cancel culture. It's accountability.

Women and girls deserve more than statements and apologies. If companies and institutions truly respect women, they need to stand behind their stated values with action.

Companies make choices. Consumers make choices. Business partners make choices. And choices have consequences.

The Representation Project created a call to action in 2012 — #NotBuyingIt — for ads that objectify, demean, sexualize or misrepresent women and girls. So, if Good Good Golf and Callaway don't want women touching their products, let's listen to them.

Companies notice what we buy. They also notice what we don't.

I'm #NotBuyingIt. And I hope more consumers and companies do the same.

Jodi Bondi Norgaard is the creator of the award-winning *Go! Sports Girls* brand and the author of *More Than a Doll: How Creating a Sports Doll Turned into a Fight to End Gender Stereotypes*. She worked with the White House Gender Policy Council under President Joe Biden's administration and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media.

Voice of the people

America's immigrant story

There is a growing fear in America that immigrants are somehow taking over the country, that people arriving from different nations, cultures and religions are changing America beyond recognition. Perhaps we should ask a simpler question: What would America be without immigrants?

America's story is one of people coming from somewhere else. Generation after generation arrived on these shores seeking freedom, security, opportunity and a better future for their children. Their languages, appearances and places of worship may have differed, but their goals were similar. So the presence of immigrants is not a crisis. It is an old American story.

Of course, every sovereign nation has the right and responsibility to secure its borders and enforce its immigration laws. But there is an important difference between debating immigration policy and creating fear of immigrants themselves. America does not have to choose between secure borders and a welcoming heart. It can uphold its laws while preserving its humanity.

Immigrants have built America's communities, roads, factories, businesses and hospitals. They have served in its military, advanced its science and technology, cared for its sick and taught its children.

The danger is not that immigrants will change America. The greater danger is that, out of fear, America may forget what has always made it remarkable: the ability to turn strangers into neighbors, immigrants into citizens and many different peoples into one nation.

— Zeeshan Virk, Franklin, Wisconsin

Reasonable and welcoming

I was struck by two op-eds on Aug. 31: "Roosevelt, Eisenhower were models of statesmanship" by John T. Shaw and "Thank you, Dolly Parton, for your music, good humor and public service" by the venerable Clarence Page. Effective political communicators often have a theatrical flair, and some revered entertainers display an unbiased political awareness.

Shaw describes Dwight D. Eisenhower's leadership using the president's own words: "a fair, decent and reasonable dealing with men, a reasonable recognition that views may diverge, a constant seeking for a high and strong ground on which to work together." Page describes Parton as "more than merely tolerant of different people, her fans will say, she was welcoming."

I suggest politicians who act more like Ike and Dolly — fair, decent, reasonable and welcoming to various points of view — will appeal to a broader spectrum of the electorate.

— Jerry Levy, Deerfield



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MICHAEL RAMIREZ/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Vitriol undermines op-ed

Wow. That was a sucker punch! I read with interest Adam Patric Miller's thoughts on artificial intelligence Tuesday morning ("How do I have 'the AI' talk in my classroom?"). Nicely written. Thoughtful. Until the last two paragraphs, which were aggressive and one-sided.

If Miller is going to malign Israel, why not also mention that Hamas uses Palestinian schools, hospitals and children as shields, deliberately putting the most vulnerable in harm's way?

There are truly heinous strategies on both sides, irrespective of the use of AI. Miller's ambivalence toward AI and his thoughtful op-ed are undermined completely by the one-sided vitriol.

— Sharon Joseph, Chicago

Block parties are a gift

This letter is an enthusiastic response to Leah Pouw's op-ed on block parties ("Why Chicago's block parties matter in a time of anger and disconnection," Sept. 2). Yes, yes, yes! I live in a small, unincorporated community in Naperville. We had

our annual block party in August, and I can't tell you how invaluable this event is for my husband and me.

We are now in our 70s. Most of the new folks in our 'hood are young families, and it's just harder to make new friends as you age, although we are typically very social. The block party is the one time a year we can all get together and catch up with more than just the folks next door.

This year, I have started a small newsletter for our neighbors. It is to be published quarterly and hand-distributed to their doors. Just a two-page featuring old or new neighbors.

For one edition, I put which voting districts we are in for various elected offices, such as forest preserve commissioner and township.

Several in our group have their own cottage or small business, so I put in a blurb about that. Just little tidbits like that to keep us connected, albeit loosely, between annual picnics.

Thank you to Pouw for highlighting these small communal events, which are so important in this day and age and which

she makes a great case for.

Best wishes to her on her campaign. I wish I could have been dancing in front of the fire station with all her neighbors. I bet the music was grand.

— Robin Schmidt, Naperville

Cubs organizer was a champ

Thank you for the recent column ("True Cubbie blue crew," Aug. 26) focusing on the Chicago Cubs' 150th anniversary, which acknowledged those who have made outstanding contributions to the Cubs' organization.

One person I had hoped to see recognized was Gary Pressy, the Cubs organizer, who in my mind was the Cal Ripken (the "Iron Man" who played in 2,632 consecutive games) of organizers.

— Corky DeBoer, Orland Park

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US diesel prices skyrocket to record \$5.85 per gallon

Experts say consumers to see price hikes in everyday goods

By Wyatt Grantham-Phillips
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Diesel hit a record price in the U.S. on Friday, soaring to an average of \$5.85 a gallon for the first time as the six-month war with Iran disrupts the world's flow of fuel.

Because diesel is used for many freight and delivery networks, higher diesel prices mean higher transportation costs for a long list of everyday goods. Some businesses have already passed on costs to consumers in the form of added fees on online orders and packages in the mail. And shoppers may see more and more sticker shock trickle down to store shelves.

One of the most immediate strains is being felt in grocery stores, particularly with produce, meat and other perishable foods that are hauled in and restocked frequently — or even harvested using diesel-powered farm equipment. It can take time for all of those costs to trickle down.

Still, experts warn that price hikes could mount the longer diesel remains expensive. A range of other products are also transported by diesel trucks, trains and boats, including clothing, cosmetics and furniture.

The price for regular gasoline has also been going up, although not as fast as the price of diesel. The average price was \$4.15 a gallon Friday, compared with \$3.20 at this time last year, according to motor club AAA, which says gas has never been above \$4 a gallon on Labor Day.

American diesel prices are now nearly 56% more expensive than they were before the U.S. and Israel launched their war against Iran on Feb. 28, when the national average sat at about \$3.76 per gallon per AAA. Prices quickly climbed as the cost of crude oil — the main ingredient in diesel, as well as gasoline — soared amid supply chain disruptions across the Middle East, notably with most tanker traffic bottlenecked in the key Strait of Hormuz.

Despite prices cooling some during hopes for peace earlier in the summer, oil has now renewed its climb as fighting once more escalated between the U.S. and Iran. Brent crude, the international stan-

dard, was trading at more than \$95 a barrel Friday, up from roughly \$70 before the war. Prices at the pump always follow closely behind.

The last time businesses and drivers saw sky-high fuel prices was in June 2022, when diesel reached nearly \$5.82 a gallon on average months after the Ukraine war began and world leaders imposed sanctions against Russia, a leading oil producer.

When adjusted for inflation, however, prices have been higher in the past. Ahead of the 2008 financial crisis, for example, diesel hit about \$4.74 a gallon — equivalent to \$7.20 in 2026, according to the government's latest data. And 2022's record of nearly \$5.82 would be about \$6.56 this year when accounting for inflation.

Diesel has been more expensive than gasoline in the U.S. for decades, and its price has risen at a faster pace before. Some reasons include less flexibility in demand and diesel's position in global commerce overall. Individual households may find ways to drive less when gas prices are high, but there are fewer immediate substitutes for networks that rely on diesel to haul goods worldwide.

Nation adds 162K jobs in August, tops expectations

By Paul Wiseman
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The U.S. labor market bounced back in August as employers added a surprising 162,000 jobs, ending a summer of lackluster hiring with a bang. The jobless rate remained at a low 4.1%.

Hiring exceeded the 65,000 forecasters had expected, according to a poll by Factset. Labor Department revisions also looked good, adding 55,000 to June and July payrolls. Employers created 21,000 jobs in July; the Labor Department had originally reported that they'd cut 23,000.

Two months before the midterm elections, President Donald Trump welcomed the hiring report Friday. "Great jobs number just announced, breaking all estimates (except mine!) by double and triple — And you haven't seen anything yet!" Trump wrote in a social media post.

But inflation has dominated conversations this year in business and households. Voters are increasingly frustrated by higher costs, particularly fuel prices that have hit record levels since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28. And meager pay raises have made rising prices more painful for many. Average hourly wages rose 3.1% last month from a year earlier, the weakest year-over-year increase since May 2021.

Restaurants and bars added 59,000 jobs last month, construction companies 22,000 and manufacturers 16,000. Factory jobs are up by 58,000 since hitting a recent low in December, the Labor Department noted.

And the U.S. labor force — the number of people working or looking for work — jumped by 683,000 last month after falling in June and July.

Diane Swonk, chief economist at the tax and consulting firm KPMG, called the report "incredible. It's a summer heatwave."

Famed icon's next chapter

Saturday Evening Post will stop printing after 205 years, but plans to continue online

By Benjamin Mullin
THE NEW YORK TIMES

For more than two centuries, The Saturday Evening Post has chronicled American life in its pages, enshrining a homespun national identity and printing some of the nation's greatest writers.

That's changing next year.

The magazine's January issue will be its last in print, according to Joan SerVaas, the president and publisher. In a letter to the Post's 50,000 subscribers in the most recent issue, she attributed the decision to a combination of "rising production costs, declining advertising revenue and shifting reader habits."

"We've been dealing with it for over a decade," SerVaas said in an interview. "We continued hoping it would turn around or life would get better. Now we're pretty sure it's not going to get any better."

The magazine, which debuted in 1821, will continue to publish new articles and fiction online.

SerVaas said she had decided to end the print edition because it was a financial drain on the Saturday Evening Post Society, which owns the Post. The archives, which will be preserved online contain news articles as well as poetry, fiction and art, including iconic images by Norman Rockwell.

The decision was painful for SerVaas, 72, whose father rescued the Post from financial ruin half a century ago. In 1969, the magazine stopped publishing after poor management decisions and fighting among shareholders left it destitute. Beurt SerVaas, a Midwestern millionaire, amassed a sizable stake in 1970 with his wife, Cory SerVaas, and sharply winnowed the magazine's debt along with its staff.

Cory SerVaas, a journalist and a physician, revamped the Post, adding coverage on health and wellness issues. Imagining her parents' reaction to her decision to discontinue the print edition, Joan SerVaas said, "I think about my mother a lot, because she would kill me. She would not be happy, but she would understand."

Though many magazines have been depleted by the nosedive in print advertising, the Post has fallen from particularly stratospheric heights.

Its largest issue, a 272-page doorstop that published months after the 1929 stock market crash, weighed almost 2 pounds, according to a 1985 case study from Harvard Business Review. That issue alone generated \$1.5 million — the equivalent of



Joan SerVaas, president and publisher of The Saturday Evening Post, sits Tuesday at the company's archives in Indianapolis. KAITI SULLIVAN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

\$292 million today — from 214 national advertisers, and received 6 million pounds of paper and 120,000 pounds of ink. Sixty 45-ton presses churned it out over three weeks.

In 1903, Jack London was serializing "The Call of the Wild" in its pages. Mary Roberts Rinehart covered World War I from the trenches. In the 1960s, Pete Hamill, a legendary New York journalist, chronicled Hollywood's new era for the Post. Swaths of Joan Didion's groundbreaking book "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" were first published by the Post.

There were also some low points. In

1942, a three-part series on Jewish Americans concluded with an article titled, "The Case Against the Jew," resulting in the cancellation of subscriptions. The magazine apologized.

In 1967, a landmark lawsuit against the Post by Wally Butts, a former athletic director for the University of Georgia, helped solidify legal protections against libel even though the magazine lost the case.

The next year, in a business maneuver inconceivable by today's standards, the Post cut its own subscription list in half, part of a bid to reach a more selective audience for upscale advertisers.

Agency opens inquiry into taxis sans steering wheels

By Bernard Condon
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Federal regulators are opening an investigation into whether Tesla's new steering-wheel-free taxis comply with safety rules a day after the company began offering rides in the cars.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said it was looking into whether Tesla was in full compliance with federal rules in deploying so-called Cybercabs in Austin, Texas, given that the two-seater cars lack steering wheels, mirrors or brake pedals typically required of all vehicles.

The head of the company, Elon Musk, kicked off this Cybercab service in Austin on

Thursday with fanfare, sending dozens of the futuristic taxis into the city streets and holding a launch event for invitees.

Tesla did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

Before the launch, Tesla had said it relied on a self-certification procedure to make sure the Cybercabs were in compliance, but the agency apparently is unsure if the taxis meet standards. In its filing, the agency said it will now conduct an audit to "examine the process and technical data" that Tesla used in the certification.

The Austin service Thursday kicked off what Musk says will be a national rollout of a cheap, driverless taxi service that he promises to transform the way people travel. The robotaxi network has been

operating in Austin for more than a year, but has also begun offering rides in five other Texas and Florida cities.

The company is facing several federal investigations into the safety of its self-driving software.

One probe is examining the software's role in several Tesla crashes in fog, sun glare and other low-visibility conditions, including one in which a pedestrian was killed.

Another is investigating dozens of incidents in which Teslas using partial self-driving software ran red lights or drove on the wrong side of the road, sometimes crashing into other vehicles and causing injuries. A third is examining why Tesla apparently violated regulatory requirements by failing to report crashes promptly.

Business briefs

US SANCTIONS TURKISH BANK ACCUSED OF ENABLING IRAN

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Treasury announced Friday it has imposed sanctions on a Turkish financial institution as part of its latest effort to sever "critical financial lifelines" for the Iranian government.

The actions against Golden Global Yatirim Bankasi Anonim Sirketi come nearly a week after the announcement of Operation Economic Outcast, Washington's new effort to get Tehran to capitulate to its demands after more than six months of war.

The department accused the bank and its entities of being established to enable Iran's efforts to transfer oil revenues from China to Turkey, where they could then be converted to cash and gold. It also said the institution "knowingly offered" banking services to Iranian financial entities, including those previously sanctioned by the U.S. government. — Associated Press

FCC ASKS COURT TO DISMISS ABC LAWSUIT OVER LICENSES

The Federal Communications Commission asked the federal court in Washington on Thursday to dismiss a lawsuit from ABC, disputing the network's claim that the agency was conducting an "extraordinary assault" against its free speech rights.

ABC sued the FCC last month over its efforts to possibly strip the network's local broadcasting licenses.

The agency made its case largely on technical, legal grounds and argued that ABC's court challenge was premature because the agency hadn't yet moved to strip the licenses.

Although the agency's bid to dismiss the suit was expected, it tees up a major court test for President Donald Trump's campaign to punish the national news media that he views as critical of him and his agenda.

Judge Loren AliKhan has set a hearing for the week of Oct. 5. — The New York Times

VOLKSWAGEN BOARD OKS PLAN TO CUT 50K JOBS, CLOSE PLANTS

FRANKFURT, Germany — Volkswagen's board of directors Thursday approved a sweeping cost-cutting plan that would cut 50,000 jobs, slim the company's model line by half and end auto production at four German plants.

The plan put forward by CEO Oliver Blume to counter low-cost competition in China and headwinds from U.S. tariffs overcame resistance from employee representatives and the regional government, which holds a stake in the company.

The plan foresees reducing the number of models by around 50%. The company said it had excess production capacity of 500,000 vehicles in Europe and that "a competitive future production allocation ... cannot be secured" for plants in Emden, Hanover, Neckarsulm and Zwickau, although alternative uses will be explored. — Associated Press

Opinion

I was once considered the American dream

The U.S. has closed its doors to too many students and entrepreneurs.

Benjamin Fernandes

I was 17 when the University of North-western-St. Paul offered me a scholarship in 2010. When I was 21, Stanford's M.B.A. program did the same. From there, I went on to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, where I learned how financial technology could change millions of lives.

In the years after I finished my degrees, I started a financial-technology company in Palo Alto, Calif., backed by American investors, that now serves more than 500,000 customers in the United States. But these days I'm running my American company from abroad: The same country that invested in me won't let me, or thousands of others like me, return to the United States. With rare exceptions, Tanzanian nationals like myself are barred from entry.

The company I founded, NALA, helps immigrants and businesses in the United States, Britain and Europe send money across borders to build businesses and keep their families afloat. I have met customers who use our service to pay a parent's hospital bill or a cousin's school fees, or to keep a small business open across continents. Over the past four years, we have raised more than \$60 million from American venture firms, including Y Combinator, Accel and Bessemer. Forbes twice ranked us among the world's top 50 fintech companies. Our investors and board members are American. I set out on a mission to use software to make this better and cheaper for people in emerging markets.

NALA pays U.S. taxes. Nearly every consequential decision about the company's future, every board meeting, every fund-raising event, every bet on where we go next, is made on American soil.

That is why what is happening now is so hard to reconcile.

On Jan. 1, a presidential proclamation went into effect, adding Tanzania to a group of 24 countries facing new entry restrictions. The United States stopped issuing the business-visitor visa I relied on, as well as student and exchange visas and other visa types, to these countries. The visa allowed founders like me to fly in to the United

States for meetings with investors, customers and partners, and to sit in the boardroom. After the proclamation, anyone with a valid visa could use it until it expired, but it cannot be renewed, and no new one will be issued. Mine ran out on July 10.

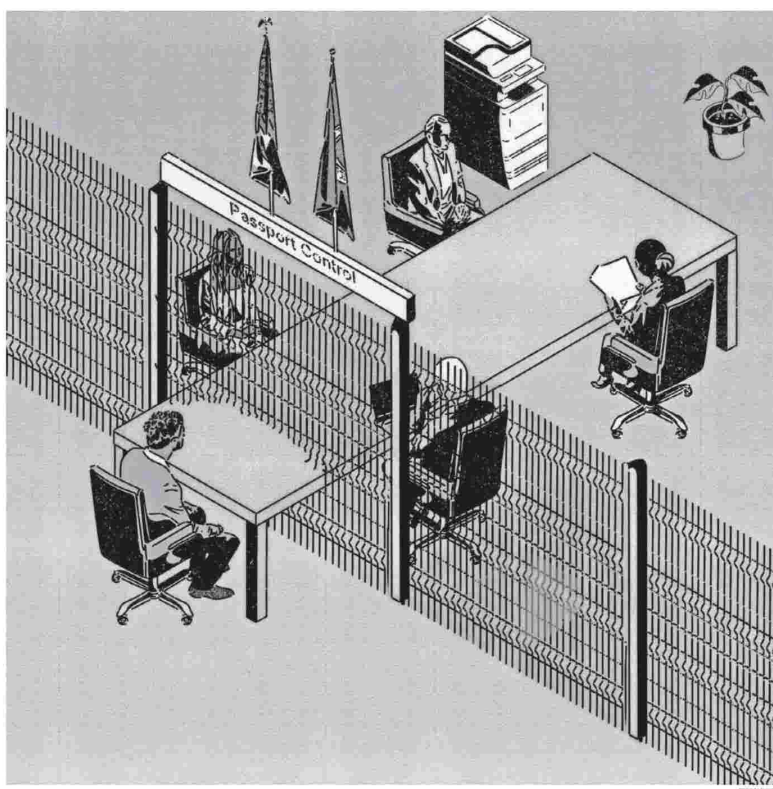
The education I received in America turned a Tanzanian teenager into the founder of a company that answers to American investors. Then the government closed its doors to me. I have never broken any laws in the United States, or elsewhere. I did not enter the country illegally. I pose no security risk. I have been shut out of the country simply because of the passport I carry. The U.S. government's stated rationale is a statistic: Tanzanians overstay business and tourist visas at relatively higher rates than people from some other countries.

But a statistic is not a person. A blanket ban punishes those who follow the rules just as harshly as it does those who do not. I have crossed the U.S. border for 17 years in a row now. I have always left exactly when I said I would.

I now run my company from abroad, between London and Dar es Salaam, over video. But fund-raising and enterprise sales are relationship businesses. The trust that closes a round, or a bank partnership, is built in the room, over dinner, in the hallway after the meeting. You do not Zoom your way to a deal.

Close readers of the presidential proclamation may point out that the decision lets officials grant an individual entry if it's in the national interest. I am aware of this loophole: I applied for it, and was rejected. If that clause means anything, surely it should cover those who are building American companies and paying Americans salaries. In my case, it did not.

I am far from the only person affected by the shuttering of U.S. ports of entry to foreign nationals from all 39 countries with travel bans. And even though I am personally devastated by the expiration of my business visa, the barriers that matter to me most are the new roadblocks to student visas. I arrived on one. So did 234 of the founders or co-founders behind America's current privately held billion-dollar companies, each creating on average over a thousand American jobs. Nearly three in five of those billion-dollar start-up companies have



an immigrant founder; almost half of the Fortune 500 in 2025 was built by immigrants or their children, producing over 15 million jobs worldwide. I have Tanzanian friends who got admitted into top schools like Harvard this year on scholarship, but they can't attend because of the visa rule.

I can list off the top of my head companies and individuals whose lives and contributions to society were predicated on sane border policies. Two Nigerians come to mind. Tope

Awotona came to Atlanta as a teenager and later built the scheduling company Calendly into a \$3 billion business. Adebayo Ogunesi built the world's largest independent infrastructure investor and sold it to BlackRock for \$12.5 billion; he now sits on the board of OpenAI. Nigeria is now also on the presidential ban list.

Somewhere, another 17-year-old is being offered a place on an American campus. She might build the next great American company. She might

create thousands of jobs. Or, denied a visa, she might never be able to board the plane even with a full scholarship to Stanford or Harvard in hand.

America has always been exceptional because it believed in people before anyone else did. It believed in me. Would it still?

BENJAMIN FERNANDES is the founder and chief executive of NALA, a cross-border payments company.

The '70s acting book that explains the tech elite

It can be useful to see reality as malleable.

Tara Isabella Burton

Theatrical play is having a moment in Silicon Valley.

Artificial intelligence companies regularly hire improv artists to help train their models — and give motivational sessions to their employees. Sam Altman, the chief executive of OpenAI, joined tech notables like Palmer Luckey and Bryan Johnson for an evening of Mafia, a role-playing game, on YouTube. And earlier this summer, while reporting an article about Vibecamp — a Maryland festival popular with several tech-world subcultures — I came across clowning workshops, a “contact improv” session and an immersive theater production by a group billing themselves as the Oracles, who channeled bespoke prophecies for those who entered their tent.

Role-playing has long been part of the nerd stereotype — just think of the popularity of games like Dungeons & Dragons in pop culture depictions of computer geeks. But Silicon Valley's embrace of improvisation and theater is also part of its much bigger and more longstanding philosophical tendency to treat reality, play, perception and performance as essentially interchangeable. In that worldview, reality isn't a set of fixed facts, but something malleable, existing as much in people's perceptions as in the material world. For those who see themselves as cosmic innovators, learning to understand and disrupt the arbitrary conventions of ordinary life is part of the job requirement.

Consider the popularity of Keith Johnstone's 1979 acting guide, “Improv,” which has taken on a cult status in tech circles. At Palantir, the data analysis and software company co-founded by Peter Thiel, the book has been recommended reading for new hires. It's also been cited by tech founders like Andreessen's Trane Stephens, the productivity guru Tiago Forte and influential tech-world bloggers like Venkatesh Rao and Scott Alexander.

“Improv” is both a guide to theatrical play and a guide to social relations. Central to Mr. Johnstone's argument is that human beings are unconsciously playing status games at all times,

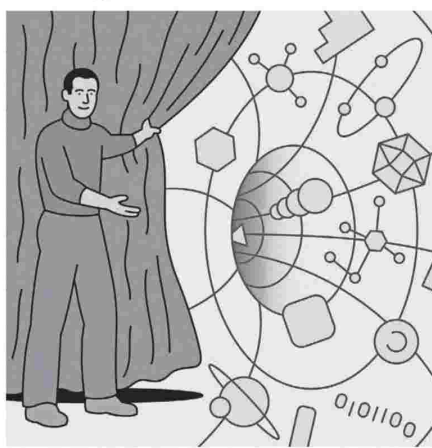
playing “low” and “high” to each other depending on their context. The book includes exercises for aspiring actors, many of which involve challenging actors to pay attention to one another's social cues in order to play higher or lower status. (“He who looks away first is the more dominant,” the author warns.)

Other exercises focus on challenging actors to rethink norms we take for granted: One particularly dizzying game requires actors to walk around the room, pointing at objects and intentionally calling them by the wrong name. A guiding idea behind the book is that actors should see reality as something they can shape if they accept spontaneity and creativity, rather than succumbing to a safe set of norms. “There are people who prefer to say ‘Yes,’ and there are people who prefer to say ‘No.’ Those who say ‘Yes’ are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those who say ‘No’ are rewarded by the safety they attain,” Mr. Johnstone writes.

According to Qiaochu Yuan, a coach and X personality whose work is widely read in Silicon Valley circles, tech workers are often drawn to books like “Improv” because they help readers think about and codify social relationships as measurable status transactions, instead of thinking about them as organic — and therefore mysterious — phenomena. Mr. Yuan thinks he first encountered the book around 2016 through friends at the Bay Area's Center for Applied Rationality, a nexus for the wider rationalist movement focused on logical thinking and overcoming cognitive biases.

The skills cultivated through theatrical play may also be useful for leadership. Lydia Laurenson, a writer on Silicon Valley culture who spent a year as a member of an immersive-theater slash-secret society in San Francisco, has heard many prominent founders and people in tech described as possessing a “reality distortion field.” They not only master logistics and motivate employees, but create a worldview compelling enough to sustain the creative and technical challenges a new idea required. (The term was famously used in 1981 to describe Steve Jobs.)

“Taking a start-up from nothing to one of these massive companies, is this insane act of culture building and



creation?” Ms. Laurenson says. Even the most andy-seeming start-up can feel “cult.” Creating a convincing reality for employees and investors — using some of the same techniques found in theatrical play — is simply part of the founder job description.

It may be that transforming people's perceptions of what is possible can help them think more imaginatively. But the tech world's fascination with improv and theater also reveals a darker philosophy: If all of life is a performance, there are few limits on those willing to take charge of the scene. If nothing is truly real but people's perceptions — perceptions that a canny actor or founder has the capacity to alter — then misleading investors as to the viability of a start-up, or spreading viral conspiracy theories through social media to affect an election outcome can be reimagined not as lying but as alternate reality-formation, the canny creation of truth by consensus.

Distort reality intensely enough, and

there's no such thing as reality at all. And in an era where artificial intelligence can easily conflate collective thought with objective truth, tech founders and those who buy their products are less tethered to the real world.

Erik Davis, author of the book “TechGnosis,” told me that he worries about the potential for both nihilism and elitism encoded in such a worldview. Once you assume that “the world is malleable like a gaming system,” he says, then it is all too easy to assume a clear-cut social hierarchy between “those in the know and those not in the know.” Once you start assuming that you alone can access a secret higher reality — to say nothing of the money, political connections and control over social media that mark many of Silicon Valley's elite — it can become all too tempting to assume that the “sheep” aren't, well, fully real in the way that you are. There's a reason one of the most cutting ways to insult people online is to call them an “NPC,” or

nonplayable character — a term, rooted in video game parlance, that is now used to suggest a person lacks agency or original thought.

Mr. Davis brought up the popularity of the “simulation theory” hypothesis proposed by many in Silicon Valley, most prominently Elon Musk: That reality isn't real at all, but rather that human beings are living in a simulation run by higher-intelligence beings. Listening to some tech titans, Mr. Davis said, “you get the sense that they, at least some of the time, really are in that mind frame. Like, this is a game, and the whole point is to play it so big that, you know, something genuinely novel or unexpected happens.” If reality is only a simulation, even the most extreme Silicon Valley doomsday scenarios — an intelligent A.I. that kills us all, say — are not much more existentially troubling than dying in a video game.

Yet at its best, theatrical play brings us into a sense of creative possibility, rather than nihilistic remove. In my own time playing improvisational theater games — both at Vibecamp and with Dieci, the New York theater company I train with — the ability to “yes and” with strangers through various theatrical games allowed me to meet people not by learning their job title, or their political affiliation, but by helping to create fantastical spaces and scenes, and, yes, be a little silly. During a recent 36-hour largely wordless “marathon” workshop, I developed friendships with people whose names I'd never learned, but whose propensity for rhythmic drumming, or snowball fights, I'd come to know intimately.

Ironically, in an era of artificial intelligence and sky-high screen time, theatrical play demands that we pay full attention to the world around us; a world much richer, and more complex, and full of unfamiliar consciousnesses, than the world of our Twitter feed.

Theater games may help us see reality as malleable. But in their best, they remind us to look at reality in the first place.

TARA ISABELLA BURTON is the author of “Self-Made: Creating Our Identities From da Vinci to the Kardashians” and a director of *Can Beauty Save the World* project.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Democrats Really Want 13 Justices

The future of the Supreme Court is on the ballot in November, as Democrats keep showing, over and over. On Wednesday the House voted on a proposal to amend the Constitution to fix the Court at nine Justices, its size since 1869. Passing an amendment takes a two-thirds majority as a first step. This failed, 212-206, with all but a lone Democrat saying no.

As a messaging vote brought up by Republicans, it was revealing. "MAGA's proposal is to strip Congress of all authority in the matter, to freeze it and cement it permanently in the constitutional architecture for all time, with the suddenly magic number, nine," Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, said on the floor. "What's going on here? Well, surprise, surprise, America, it's another partisan power grab by MAGA."

Mr. Raskin also brought up the superficial talking point that since the country has 13 appeals courts, it should have 13 Justices. "There are no Justices from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which has 67 million Americans living there," he said. "Five of the Justices today come from the New York City metropolitan area, basically one for each borough. Is it really possible that there are not people from other parts of the country who could effectively and honorably serve on the Supreme Court?"

This argument is ridiculous, as in deserving of ridicule. When America was young, Supreme Court Justices spent part of each year "riding circuit," hearing cases far afield from Washington, D.C., so the numbers matched. But that era effectively ended 135 years ago. In 1982 lawmakers set up the nationwide Federal Circuit to hear specialized appeals, such as patent disputes. It has no geographic base. And what if Congress someday splits the unwieldy Ninth Circuit? Then 14 Justices?

Listen to why they rejected a plan to fix the Supreme Court at nine.

Mr. Raskin knows all of this. He taught constitutional law for decades. He's cynically hoping that listeners less familiar with legal history will find the argument for 13 Justices compelling, despite its making no sense.

There's something to be said for Court nominees with little known hometowns and degrees that don't say Harvard or Yale, but Mr. Raskin's real concern isn't geographic diversity. Try to imagine his response if President Trump's next Supreme Court nominee were, say, the Ninth Circuit's conservative Judge Lawrence VanDyke.

The Democratic drive to pack the Court is about power, plain and simple. The Justices in today's 6-3 majority are deciding cases based on the law as they see it. That includes landmark rulings against President Trump on tariffs, birthright citizenship, the Federal Reserve, and much more. Yet Mr. Raskin and his friends dislike the Court's decisions on abortion, free political speech, the colorful Second Amendment, and the separation of powers.

Disagreement is part of life in a healthy republic. The difference is that Democrats are preparing to wreck the Court and destabilize America's legal system to get their way. There is nothing inherently "magic" about the number nine.

But there is something magic about the rule of law in a judiciary that has had nine Justices for a century and a half. If Democrats nuke the Senate's filibuster in 2029, pack the Court to 13 Justices, and get a new *Roe v. Wade*, do they think Republicans will simply sigh and let bygones be bygones?

Since Mr. Raskin poses as a defender of democracy, he might want to ruminate on what happens to a country when it turns its courts into a plaything of its politicians.

More Secret School Gender Transitions

The Supreme Court said on its emergency docket this year that schools are likely violating the Constitution if they help students change genders and then keep it secret from their parents. But some administrators haven't gotten the memo, and on Tuesday the Justice Department sued the school district in Kansas City, Kan., arguing its internal guidance violates the law.

"If any staff member learns a student is transgender or gender non-conforming," the document says, according to the lawsuit, "that information should be relayed to the school principal without delay." The principal can discuss accommodations and schedule a meeting to go over pronouns and locker rooms. If the student doesn't want to tell the parents, "that request will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis," factoring in age, grade, welfare, "and any other relevant information."

The Justice Department argues this violates two federal laws: First, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which requires schools to respect the ability of parents "to inspect and review the education records of their children." Second, the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, which requires parental consent before a student submits to a "survey, analysis, or evaluation" on sensitive topics, including "sex behavior or attitudes."

If the Justice Department has the authority

The Justice Department sues over transgender guidance in Kansas.

to go after these bad policies, it could take some of the litigation burden from busy parents, who might not realize what schools are doing or the importance of objecting in advance. In the case that reached the Supreme Court, *Mirabeli v. Bonta*, one set of parents said they didn't know that their daughter had changed genders at school until she attempted suicide.

The Kansas City district has denied breaking the law, and in a letter to the government last month, it offered a narrow interpretation of deception as a rare exception. "There are very few limited circumstances where a school district might, depending on the circumstances, not be able to notify the student's parents," it said, including if the student has already turned 18 or if there's an active investigation into "abuse or neglect by the parent."

That's far more constrained than "a case-by-case basis." The district also said in its letter that the guidance document "fully anticipates the participation of a student's parents in seeking to support a transgender or gender non-conforming student's needs within the school environment."

And what about nonabusive parents who oppose a transition? The lawsuits will keep coming until the judiciary makes clear that school administrators can't put their progressive vision above the rights of parents.

Newsom's Minimum Wage Whitewash

Fact-checking California Gov. Gavin Newsom is a nearly full-time job, but since he wants to be President someone has to do it. His latest beauty is that the state's high wage mandates are boosting the economy, and this is fast becoming a key plank of the Democratic Party agenda.

Mr. Newsom last week issued a press release claiming the state is leading the country in job growth and "boosting productivity and delivering higher wages for workers." The state's \$16.90 an hour minimum wage—set to rise to \$17.40 in January—helps "ensure workers share in that growth," he said. Where to begin?

It's true the AI boom is boosting business productivity, driving investment and turbocharging earnings for tech workers. The average weekly wage for information workers in Silicon Valley's San Mateo County near San Francisco increased to \$16,242 during the first quarter of this year (equal to \$846,904 a year), up from \$15,792 in the prior year and \$6,187 in early 2019.

But in recent years the state has added few jobs outside of government, healthcare and social assistance. One reason is that its high minimum wage has raised costs for employers, which in turn are cutting back on unskilled labor. These trends have been exacerbated by California's \$20 an hour minimum wage for fast-food workers.

The Employment Policies Institute reports that California's restaurant employment has declined for three consecutive years between March 2023 and March 2026—a total of 12,600 job losses in food services and drinking places—according to the Labor Department's most recent payroll data, while employment in the industry increased nationwide by some 151,700.

The Governor ignores a few facts as he touts California's jobs record.

Average weekly hours for workers in all industries in California declined to 33.1 hours in July from 34.5 hours three years earlier, while remaining flat nationwide at 34.3. Teen unemployment in California has risen to 22.1% from 11.3% in January 2023, a significantly bigger increase than in the rest of the country (12.1% in July from 10.6% in January 2023 nationwide).

More teens in the Golden State are also dropping out of the workforce. Labor participation has fallen by five percentage points for teens in California, versus 2.3 percentage points nationwide since early 2023. More unemployed youth is a recipe for social problems and a less prepared future workforce.

Meanwhile good news arrived Friday about the national job market as the Labor Department reported 162,000 new jobs in August. That exceeded expectations and is higher than the 31,000 average in the last 12 months. The best news was a 683,000 increase in the civilian labor force and a bump in the labor participation rate to 61.6%. Falling participation has been a growing worry.

The national jobless rate held steady at a low 4.1%, while California's in July was 5.1%. That's the fourth highest in the country, after Oregon and Connecticut's 5.2% and the District of Columbia's 5.9%.

It's hard to predict what the job market in the AI era will look like, but any work carries dignity. Flipping hamburgers or manning a checkout counter impart soft skills that will be needed for any job, including following direction and showing up on time. Politicians like Mr. Newsom present raising the minimum wage as a free lunch, but the young and less skilled pay the hidden costs in fewer opportunities to gain experience.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

America's Unaccountable Insurance Regulator

Patrick M. Brenner is right: The National Association of Insurance Commissioners has become a shadow regulator answerable to no one ("How Did a Nonprofit Become America's Insurance Regulator?," *Cross Country*, Aug. 29). The accountability problem runs deeper than the issue of transparency; it extends to NAIC's active reach for powers Congress never granted it.

I recently testified before a working group at NAIC's summer meeting in Columbus, Ohio. The group is developing a framework to evaluate credit-rating providers, which insurers rely on to determine regulatory capital requirements. The stated goal is reasonable: Make sure insurers aren't hiding high-risk assets behind inflated grades.

In practice, however, the framework would allow NAIC to de-admit credit-rating providers or remove entire asset classes from regulatory use without defining its own triggering standards. Terms like "reasonable," "material," "equivalent" and "systematic disagreement" appear throughout the document with no definitions attached. A framework that fails to define standards yet carries severe consequences for violating them gives NAIC unchecked discretion.

There is also a glaring jurisdictional problem. Oversight of nationally recognized statistical rating organizations is a federal function

reserved to the Securities and Exchange Commission under the Credit Rating Agency Reform Act of 2006. NAIC's proposal would effectively evaluate rating methodologies, allowing the nonprofit to overstep its authority. Further, NAIC is demanding expensive new submissions of proprietary data, despite a recent cybersecurity breach of its own systems that exposed some 260,000 regulatory filings.

Mr. Brenner is right to question how a nonprofit became America's insurance regulator. In Columbus, I saw firsthand how this private organization moves to absorb federal authority it was never given.

ERIC VENTIMIGLIA
Pinpoint Policy Institute
Washington

I agree with most of Mr. Brenner's observations. As an insurance director in Illinois in the early 1990s and in subsequent articles and papers, I stated similar concerns, but to no avail. It is well past time for NAIC to clarify its legal status and accordingly its behavior. It has become such a large and influential institution. Its due process, governance, accountability, transparency and other elements of corporate discipline called for by its functions should be set forth in state law.

JAMES SCHACHT
Chatham, Ill.

Don't Blame China for the Fertilizer Shortage

Regarding Jeff Stier's op-ed "A Food Crisis May Be Coming to the U.S." (*Aug. 29*): Mr. Stier is right that fertilizer security affects food security. But he assigns too much responsibility to China and obscures the principal cause of today's fertilizer shock.

The disruption arose primarily from the war with Iran and the near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Before the war, nearly half of the world's seaborne sulfur and roughly one-third of its urea passed through the strait. Interruptions to those shipments, as well as to the region's natural-gas and ammonia production, caused sulfur and fertilizer prices to soar.

China's fertilizer and sulfuric-acid export restrictions have aggravated the shortage and deserve criticism. It should also be recognized, however, that China imposed them to protect its own agricultural sector during a supply crisis. Further, Mr. Stier's suggestion that China is pur-

chasing significant quantities of American sulfur and thereby threatening supplies for U.S. farmers is not supported by the trade data. Direct U.S. sulfur exports to China are de minimis compared with U.S. production and consumption. His assertion appears to conflate U.S. exports with broader North American shipments, a substantial share of which originate in Canada.

Mr. Stier raises legitimate concerns about fertilizer and trade policy, and the complex agricultural supply chains they affect. But a closer look at trade data shows that China isn't draining a critical U.S. resource. The evidence instead points to a global supply disruption caused principally by war and the interruption of trade through the Strait of Hormuz.

JAMES T. PROKOPANKO
Excelsior, Minn.

Mr. Prokopanko is the retired president and CEO of The Mosaic Company, a global fertilizer producer.

Congressional Lawmakers Reach for the Stars

Your editorial "A New Look at the Universe" (Aug. 31) celebrates the launch of the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope, noting that "amid all the anxiety on Earth, this is cause for applause." There is another cause for applause: The launch of this flagship space telescope is also a testament to Congress doing its job.

In May 2025, President Trump proposed a budget that would have slashed funding for NASA's space science missions by more than 50%. Such cuts would have placed the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope at serious risk of cancellation, even though the spacecraft was already mostly built. Fortunately, Congress largely rejected the proposed cuts to NASA's science programs and funded Roman to completion.

The Senate Race in Michigan

In his interview with Michigan's Republican Senate nominee Mike Rogers, "The Plan to Defeat Abdul El-Sayed" (Weekend Interview, Aug. 29), Tunku Varadarajan writes that Mr. Rogers is "circumspect on tariffs." C'mon. Tariffs are terrible for Michigan and for my state, Minnesota. Real Republicans and real conservatives believe in free markets and lower taxes. Raising costs on U.S. consumers and poking our allies and customers in the eye with Smoot-Hawley-like policies is no way to run a country—and no way to win elections.

CRAIG SHAVER
Deephaven, Minn.

It shouldn't even be much of a contest. Mike Rogers is a seasoned, highly accomplished, moderate Republican and former congressman who has long represented Michigan's interests. His opponent, Abdul El-Sayed, is a flamboyant, antisemitic socialist who has never held elected office. The stakes, though, are extremely high, with socialism on the line. Michigan voters should thwart that clear and present danger to the Republic.

RICHARD D. WILKINS
Syracuse, N.Y.

Letters intended for publication should be emailed to wsjletters@wsj.com. Please include your city, state and telephone number. All letters are subject to editing, and unpublished letters cannot be acknowledged.

Timber! Goes the Tree Market When Government Intervenes

It comes as no surprise that a huge glut of timber exists today ("Timber Was Southern Gold. Then a Market Collapsed," Page One, Aug. 29). For decades, the Agriculture Department, in an effort to reduce the production of agricultural commodities, has handsomely paid landowners to convert agricultural lands to tree farms. Those subsidized tree farms are maturing now, unfortunately at a time when demand for wood fiber has been significantly reduced by global competition, increased use of recycled materials and other factors.

When governments interfere with free markets, there will always be winners and losers. Today's losers are the thousands of timberland owners and investors.

CHARLES M. TARKER
Highlands, N.C.

Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Side effects may include unintended benefits."

OPINION

25 Years of Thinking About 9/11

DECLARATIONS
By Peggy Noonan

I'll never get over it, none of us will who were in town that day. If we were trees cut down after a century and cut open to reveal the rings, an arborist would observe one that was darker than the others, denser and resin-scarred, and he'd say, "What happened there?"

And you'd say, "That was 9/11," and he'd nod because he'd seen such rings before.

Now it is 25 years, and maybe this will be the last time I write of what happened, and I ask for your indulgence because I spent much of the past week reading what I'd written about it over the years, and I

'The 3,000 were dead. They were exploded into air. They became a cloud. We breathed them in.'

saw all the things I've thought. I wrote about 9/11 and attendant themes every week for one year; I felt that my readers and I were processing it together.

The first year was a lot of street-level reporting—the sound and look of a changed city. Two days after 9/11—before it had a name, and people were calling it "what happened," as in, "they think he died in what happened"—I wrote a piece called "What I Saw at the Devastation," which said that Americans were experiencing an end to the illusion "that we rich and powerful folk will be kept safe by our status, wealth and luck." History had come knock-

ing. I wrote of the return of the signs and symbols of religious faith in "God Is Back." There was a piece on the 343 New York City firemen who had died, "Courage Under Fire," and I was humbled by the photos I started receiving of that column posted on the walls of firehouses. There was a celebration at the return of a certain kind of masculinity, "Welcome Back, Duke." All those columns said new things, and those things became part of how we remember that time.

From the first anniversary of 9/11, in "The Fall After Sept. 11," "The other day I walked by St. Vincent's Hospital in downtown Manhattan and thought, as I always do when I walk by: This is where they waited for the wounded. The interns and nurses waited outside right here with gurneys for patients who didn't come. Because so few people were 'wounded.' The three thousand were dead. What happened to them? They were exploded into air. They became a cloud. We breathed them in."

On the fifth anniversary, I focused not on the pictures of the event but the sounds, especially the tapes and transcripts of the last phone calls. Part of courage is a realistic admission of your true circumstances. That piece was built on quotes from loving relatives.

The 10th-anniversary column, in 2011, was about what we owe the dead, which is memory itself. It turned to the theme of what had left New York uniquely shocked: "It's that the buildings came down, in front of our eyes. They were there and proud and strong, they were massive, two pillars at the end of the island. And then they groaned to the ground and there was a cloud and when people could finally see they looked back and the buildings weren't there breaking



The Freedom Tower rises above a 9/11 memorial reflecting pool.

through the clouds anymore. The buildings were a cloud. The buildings were gone and that was too much to bear because they couldn't be gone, they couldn't have fallen. Because no one could knock down those buildings. And it changed everything. It marked a psychic shift in our town between 'safe' and 'not safe.' It marked the end of impregnable America and began an age of vulnerability." I still think that's true.

The 15th, in 2016, a tribute to a beautiful young man named Welles Crowther, "the man in the red bandana."

A final word about the sound of things. On 9/11 my 14-year-old son was in his second day at a new school just across the East River from the towers. The telephone lines had gone down, I couldn't reach him nor he me, but that afternoon he got through, from a phone booth in Brooklyn, a line of students waiting behind him. He assured me he was safe, said there were rumors all over, what do we actually know? I filled him in and

suddenly heard something muffled, his hand over the speaker. What I was telling him he would broadcast down the line to the other students. *It is over. It was a terrorist attack. It is not true the State Department was hit, it is true the Pentagon was.* He was reporting to those behind him with a voice that sounded older and surer than 14. And I was moved: He is a boy who in crisis gathers information not only for himself but to tell people what happened. Giving information is a way of taking responsibility. I thought it may have some bearing on his future professional path. It did. But I didn't know that till that terrible day.

He didn't come home that night, that 14-year-old boy, but stayed, with other students, in the Brooklyn house of a teacher. The next morning he took a patched-together, roundabout subway route back home to Manhattan, and the train came up from a tunnel and started to curl north. At that point, he was told, riders would always look left, just for a second, at the towers and

the gleam of downtown Manhattan in the sunlight. And that morning everyone turned as usual, and saw the debris cloud where the towers had been. And from everyone in the car came a soft collective sigh, a groan, an *ohhhhhhh*. There was a big man, a union guy, tough, standing in the middle of the car, and he looked with everyone else, and then lowered himself to a seat and began to cry.

When my son told me, I thought of the story of the 50th anniversary of Gettysburg, on July 3, 1913. The living participants, in their 70s and 80s, came in their old uniforms. It was huge, 50,000 returned. They reenacted Pickett's Charge and something happened. The old Confederates came out of the tree line and began to make their way up the long slope. The Union soldiers awaited them at the famous stone fence, and as they saw the Confederates struggle through in their doomed charge, the Union soldiers made a sound—an *ohhhhhhh*, "a gigantic gasp of disbelief," as David McCullough put it in Ken Burns's "The Civil War."

It was a sound of pity and awe, a sound that said this isn't only history, it is human tragedy. The Union soldiers found themselves unable to re-enact defeating them. They embraced them.

That is how I feel now, on the 25th anniversary, when anyone tells a story of those days, of 9/11 and its brave.

And now it's so many years later, and the son has a son and expects a second son, and life goes on, and fills you. But never lie about the things that break your heart. I'll never get over it, none of us will. The line in the tree trunk, the darkened ring, will never go away. And now and then someone will say, "What happened there?" and you'll tell him.

ABC vs. Trump and the Broadcasters' Free-Speech Sellout

By Thomas W. Hazlett

The First Amendment lawsuit ABC filed against the Federal Communications Commission looks straightforward. The network claims the commission is tying up speakers hostile to the network with red tape. With the licenses of eight ABC-owned TV stations in jeopardy—threatened by extensive DEI evaluations, years-early renewal reviews, and presidential condemnations of "fake news" and "media offenders"—the battle lines are drawn.

The industry traded FCC oversight for free spectrum in 1927 and has resisted efforts to undo the deal.

President Trump complains that the host of late-night "Jimmy Kimmel Live" and the ladies of daytime "The View" are biased against him, in the pockets of Democrats, and hence should cost ABC the "privilege" of holding licenses the FCC issues according to the "public interest."

How are such threats even possible? Why is the lawsuit in doubt? "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." Case closed, right? In *CBS v. Democratic National Committee* (1973), Justice William O. Douglas wrote of the First Amendment: "The one hard and fast principle which it announces is that Government shall keep its hands off the press."

But there's a loophole. While most media operate in a laissez-faire regime, terrestrial radio and television broadcasting are licensed, and their airwave access has sometimes been deemed a privilege, not a right. Harvard Law's Laurence Tribe traces the anomaly to a technical error: "a profound fallacy about spectrum scarcity." Or as co-mediator George Carlin put it, "radio and television [are] the two parts of American life not protected by the free speech provisions of the

First Amendment to the Constitution. I'd like to repeat that because it sounds vaguely important."

Whose cockamamie idea was this? Why, the broadcasters' own.

The 1927 Radio Act's "public interest" language was written by the National Association of Broadcasters, as the bill's sponsor, Sen. Clarence Dill (D., Wash.), explained in his 1938 book, "Radio Law." From the start, Dill saw that "the twilight zone" between censorship and the refusal to renew a station license because of the service rendered, is undermined.

The broadcasters traded freedom for free licenses and a lucrative, protected market. Upstart rivals—the DuMont Television Network in the 1940s and '50s, then cable TV and satellite in the 1960s—were suppressed, while only a handful of viable stations were assigned to more than 80 TV channels. In return, regulators gained clout over an industry and influence over content.

President Trump posted last year that ABC and NBC "should pay up BIG for having the privilege of using the most valuable airwaves anywhere at anytime!!!" Crooked "journalism" should not be rewarded, it should be terminated!!!!

But how violent a violation of the First Amendment is America willing to countenance? Consider what Richard Nixon targeted CBS, NBC and ABC for unfavorable reporting. He deployed Vice President Spiro Agnew to blast the "nattering nabobs of negativism." White House aide Chuck Colson headed to New York for meetings with the leaders of the networks. He explained how disappointed the president was in their work.

Colson never openly threatened; no one lost a license. The sword of Damocles didn't descend, but its glint lit every meeting. Media bias was a problem, the broadcasters agreed. CBS Chairman Bill Paley noted how much the American people agreed with Agnew's critique, NBC's chief had tied his desk for the conversation. The only ornament on it "was the Nixon Inaugural Medal." Colson giddily reported in a White House

memo. An ABC vice president blurted that the network "is 'with us,'" Colson continued, "they are very much afraid of us and trying hard to prove they are 'good guys.'"

Nixon seized the moment. His administration launched an FCC monitoring system to track how the "public interest" was faring. At the Washington Post, not well. There, two pesky reporters were digging into Watergate. Coincidentally, in 1972 the FCC license renewals of two profitable Florida TV stations were challenged by rival groups charging failed "public interest" obligations. The Washington Post owned both stations. The challengers included Bebe Rebozo and other Nixon friends.

Oval Office tape transcripts documented the strategy: "The main thing is the Post is going to have

damnable, damnable problems out of this one," Nixon said. "They have a television station . . . and they're going to have to get it renewed." The Post's share price plunged 50% on news of the challenges.

In 1978, when Rep. Lionel Van Deerlin (D., Calif.) proposed to rewrite the Communications Act—granting TV stations greater free-speech rights in exchange for a modest fee on revenues—the National Association of Broadcasters opposed the bipartisan reform and left it for dead on Capitol Hill.

When Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R., Kan.) argued that the 1996 Telecommunications Act should sell TV stations their new digital broadcasting licenses at market prices—and liberate both their content and their spectrum—

the industry again rallied to block deregulation.

ABC now feigns shock that a president could advance his political animus into official determinations of "public interest." Welcome to the modern era. First Amendment compromises via "regulation by raised eyebrow," as Nixon's FCC chairman put it, have long been the currency of the realm.

Leave it to Donald Trump to up the ante radically and tweet out his worst. The list price of censorship just blew the budget, and broadcasters are suing to reclaim their constitutional rights. Best of luck, ABC. May free speech soon, finally, be yours.

Mr. Hazlett is a professor of economics at Clemson University. He served as chief economist at the FCC, 1991-92.

Our Crystal Ball and Trump's Oil Deal

BUSINESS
WORLD
By Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

CARACAS, Venezuela. Aug. 1, 2041—Thick black smoke drifted over U.S.-supported oil facilities in western Venezuela Thursday. Three Tesla Optimus 36 security bots were damaged and one destroyed following attacks by one of several insurgent groups operating under the acronym MAGA.

Thursday's attack was claimed by the Movimiento Anti-Gringo Autónomo. In a statement, the group accused "American mercenaries and their local cronies of despoiling the climate, defacing nature and failing to provide Venezuelans an adequate share of the proceeds."

Since being authorized by then-President Donald Trump in 2026, the U.S.-backed commitment has struggled against the heavy costs of building roads and infrastructure and maintaining security to top the long-known but unattractively situated reserves.

At first welcomed by impoverished local inhabitants, the project became embroiled in political opposition from rival parties and movements, further complicated by trademark disputes over use of the MAGA logo by the various groups, which include the Movimiento de Autonomía y Guardia Americana and Movimiento Anti-Imperialista Guaicapuro Ambiente.

In Washington, the Pentagon referred questions about the attack to Tesla, under contract to provide security to the project site, which includes drilling, pipeline and refinery operations.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk issued a statement on X saying the company's commitment to eliminate all armed opposition by "last July" remains valid and in effect.

In August 2026, President Trump signed a deal meant to secure for the U.S. 20% of the oil output from several sites, paying only the cost of production. The cost of production in recent years has been a multiple of the world price of oil.

The projects became further bogged down after major U.S. oil companies declined to participate when better opportunities beckoned. In Venezuela, civil society groups were also restive over the failure to hold national elections, assumed to be in the offing after the U.S. removed long-serving dictator Nicolás Maduro shortly after New Year's Day 2026.

The outlook is hazy 15 years down the road, not only for oil prices but for Venezuela's stability.

Instead, the U.S. effectively appointed Maduro underling Delcy Rodríguez as acting president and worked with her personal business partners to develop the U.S. oil concession in Venezuela.

Trump, responding to criticism at the time, said Rodríguez deserved to be considered the "democratic leader of Venezuela because, having been democratically elected myself, I democratically appointed her."

A longer-term problem has been a lack of enthusiasm by U.S. and international oil companies for the terms offered by the Trump White House and its successors. Reached for comment, Chevron CEO Kenneth F. Williams issued a statement: "For the 1,000th time, we know Venezuela—and are ready to invest when the security situation, legal terms, infrastructure requirements and economic prospects warrant."

Not helping has been the steady decline in the inflation-adjusted price of oil as the partial closure of the Persian Gulf's Strait of Hormuz recently entered its 5,607th day.

The closure of the vital waterway has been the most significant continuing consequence of the Iran war of 2026-29, 2031-32 and 2037-39.

In his statement, Wirth underlined the role of artificial intelligence in establishing traditional hydrocarbon energy as no longer scarce or costly. At the same time, fossil fuels must compete with an array of new energy sources and technologies, whose development has also been aided by artificial intelligence.

Javier Rojas, an oil industry analyst in Caracas, said, "In a sense, the original Trump administration and today's Ocasio-Cortez administration have been living in a capitalist and/or socialist fairy land where energy is permanently scarce and high priced, justifying the inordinate expense of extracting Venezuela's unusually heavy oil."

Tesla's Musk, who since a 2037 Mars lander accident has been transitioning to robot form, has also been caught flat-footed by the decline in energy costs. His company is rapidly repurposing its fleet of space-based data centers, once designed to avoid high energy costs on earth, to provide digital support for the robot population of the former People's Republic of China.

Musk said that while Venezuela's highly polluting oil has proved expensive to produce and no longer needed by the world economy, Tesla still has five years to run on its oil field security contract. "The show must go on!" he tweeted on X.

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Farage's pile of financing scandals

Undercover report raises new questions over funding of Reform UK

Slipping in the polls, dogged by questions over its finances, Nigel Farage's Reform UK had hoped to use its party conference this week as a reset. Such hopes were torpedoed by an undercover TV report alleging that the rightwing populist party had plotted to avoid electoral rules on overseas donations. Though Reform suspended two top aides pending an internal investigation, Farage insisted the party had broken no law and "taken no illegal money", calling the report a "prolonged exercise in entrapment". The electoral watchdog and the police must investigate whether any criminal offence took place. But the report reinforces the impression of a Trumpian disregard for normal rules by the insurgent party.

The controversy comes just weeks

after Farage stood for re-election in his Clacton seat, in an unsuccessful effort to divert attention from a parliamentary probe into a £5m gift he received from a Thailand-based crypto billionaire before the 2024 UK election. Reform had already come under further scrutiny over donations from the mother of a longtime Farage aide and convicted fraudster based in Montenegro.

The latest undercover footage screened by Channel 4 News points to a party that is at best highly unprofessional or at worst has a cowboy attitude to laws designed to protect UK democracy. All parties must find ways to accept funding without breaching finance rules that include a bar on donations from foreign nationals not registered to vote in Britain, even via intermediaries. But though Reform said the film was "substantially edited", two senior aides to Farage appeared in it to be ready to stretch rules to breaking point.

The Reform leader himself is seen alongside the aides meeting a purported

wealthy US donor (played by an actor) where it is discussed how a large donation will be made via his UK-based son. Farage said yesterday that he "meets people all the time", and assumed his advisers had "found a legal way" for the donation to be made. But his brief mention in the film, "it's all above board, yeah", provides scant cover.

The apparent disdain for rules and institutions is reflected in the whole approach of a party moulded in its leader's image. Farage told his conference that a Reform government in its first 100 days would not allow the House of Lords, the judiciary or the civil service to get in its way. There is an echo here of the Donald Trump playbook, in which legal norms are dismissed as the scheming of a hostile establishment.

There are questions, too, for a pollster, JLT Partners, two of whose polls were published by national newspapers without disclosing they were commissioned by Reform and which were secretly paid for by the fake US donor. The pollster

The apparent disdain for rules and institutions is reflected in the whole approach of a party moulded in its leader's image

has said it is now reviewing its procedures. Media organisations must also be entirely clear for themselves and with the public who commissioned and funded any poll.

For his part, Farage may seek to ape Trump and turn the controversy to his advantage, presenting himself to his base as a wrongly persecuted hero. That might play well with Reform loyalists. But Reform is not the US Republican Party. On current polling, roughly three-quarters of UK voters do not support the rightwing insurgents.

Many of those voters have come to believe that the leaderships of the main parties, too, see themselves as not bound by the same rules as everyone else. But Reform has tried to portray itself as different from the rest. The latest reporting makes that claim harder to sustain. The party's poll performance suggests it is struggling to broaden its appeal beyond its base. The latest scandal will only deepen voter unease and questions over its readiness to govern.

Opinion Data Points

The university degree is losing its lustre

John Burn-Murdoch



Graduate premiums have fallen sharply since 2022 despite recent slowdowns in the share who go to university

Change in graduate earnings premium and share of workforce over recent decades



Figures are for all private sector workers aged 25-59. Sources: Current Population Survey; Labour Force Survey; 'The College Wage Premium in the Generative AI Era' (Azar et al, 2026)

It's a no-brainer that any teenager should aim for university because a degree carries substantial economic value. Degrees are also very useful for employers because they signal that a young person has advanced skills that are in high demand.

Both of those statements have been taken as gospel for decades, but their legitimacy is increasingly in question. A closer read of economic history suggests they should always have been seen as more contingent than fixed. As US economists Claudia Goldin, Lawrence Katz and David Autor showed in their work on "the race between education and technology", there is nothing inevitable about more education being met with more demand for those skills – it all depends on how the supply of a skill interacts with the technological paradigm of the day.

The 1800s transition from artisans to larger and more complex businesses created demand for educated workers and delivered them a healthy wage premium, which the expansion of high school education in the early 20th century then eroded. The information revolution then exploded the scale and complexity of work, fuelling a long boom in knowledge-work jobs that buttressed the college wage premium over the past 40 years even as the numbers obtaining a degree expanded.

But we now appear to be moving out of that long phase. A striking new analysis by economists José Azar, Mireia Giné and Javier Sanz-Espín finds that, after climbing for decades, the wage premium for college graduates in the US has fallen in every one of the past four years. The total drop is almost 10 per cent – its first sustained decline since the 1970s.

Extending their analysis, I find a similar picture in the UK, where the long-run erosion of the graduate premium has accelerated in the past four years. Notably, it is falling even for groups whose outcomes had until recently been holding up, such as those with Stem degrees and graduates in London's knowledge-intensive labour market.

What makes this most noteworthy is that the college premium has declined just as the supply of college graduates began to level off in both countries. Typically, we would expect a supply slowdown to put upward pressure on prices (wage premiums)

but here we see the opposite. Azar and his co-authors interpret this as evidence that demand for graduates is falling for the first time in more than a century, driven in part by weak wage growth in the white-collar jobs most exposed to AI. One could arguably turn this on its head: the AI revolution, like those before it, is making knowledge work even more complex and plentiful, but this is up against a much larger increase in the supply of knowledge workers – it's just that many of them are AI agents.

Either way, it's clear the economic premium that employers are willing to pay for someone with a degree is falling sharply, not because of a glut of graduates but because of economic and technological change.

In a lucid article on the implications of this, US commentator Matt Bruenig argues that just as in a previous technological regime someone's physical attributes once played an outsized role in their economic productivity and broader societal status, so we might come to think of the association between academic achievement, economic value and "merit" as the relic of an era that is now beginning to wane.

In a more immediate and straightforward sense, employers and officials have long argued that as the numbers attending university have ballooned, a degree has ceased to be a good proxy for job-relevant abilities outside of elite institutions and vocational subjects. Today it points to a much wider range of skill levels in domains whose value in tomorrow's labour market is uncertain.

Giné tells me she expects hiring to become based much more on job-specific aptitude tests and interviews, pointing to firms, including US tech giant Palantir, which now specifically look to hire skilled non-graduates (alongside plenty of grads) and give them some on-the-job training.

I share the view of Google economist Alex Imas that human employment is likely to remain high even in an AI-dominated future, but the abilities that will be rewarded (and the routes to developing them) may look very different to those of the past half century. We may be a long way from settling into a new normal, but it's increasingly clear the link between academic credentials and career prospects is weakening.

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Letters

How incuriosity was the making of Mussolini

"The strange and lasting afterlife of Il Duce" (Life & Arts, August 22), Tony Barber's review of Stephen Gundle's book *Mussolini's Ghost*, raises an obvious question. Why was the afterlife available at all? The best answer I know comes from Primo Levi.

His reckoning with Italian fascism begins not with the regime's crimes but with himself – a Turin schoolboy in the uniform of its youth movement who had never once thought to ask a question. The incuriosity, he concluded, was not a byproduct of fascism. It was the achievement. And

the habit does not lapse when the regime does. It survives into the peace, where it shows up as a willingness to remember a dictatorship as a personality – a Duce recalled as a character not a criminal, undone by a foreign entanglement rather than by anything native to his rule.

But the alliance with Germany came late: the repression came early. Italy's opposition parties were dissolved in 1926, and Antonio Gramsci, founder of the Italian Communist party, was arrested that year and held in prison until shortly before his death in 1937.

The census of Italy's Jews in August 1938 produced the registers that were later used to send them to the camps. Levi was taken as a partisan by the fascist militia and held at Fossoli, a detention camp still run by Italians when his train left for Auschwitz; the Germans took it over the following month. Your headline is right, but the subject is misplaced. It is not Il Duce who has outlived himself, but the lack of curiosity that made him possible. Nothing strange about it.

Brian Conlan
London RMS, UK

Here's how museums might dial down restitution spat

Although he is proposing a loan, Nicholas Cullinan ("Bayeux Tapestry loan offers model for Parthenon marbles", Interview, August 29) warns of the "unintended consequences" if the law were changed to allow artefacts in the possession of the British Museum to be returned. As the issue of restitution continues to build momentum, the British Museum director's words of caution highlight the urgent need for a panel to be convened, backed by carefully considered terms of reference, along the lines of the Spoils Advisory Panel (which helps resolve claims for cultural objects looted during the Nazi era). Such a panel would take the understandable emotion out of the restitution debate, allowing each case to be examined dispassionately. In this way, a consistent approach could be taken to the plethora of vastly different calls for the return of historic artefacts.

Martin Levy
H Blairman & Sons, London SW8, UK

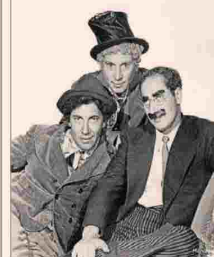
Time to dust off a Dutch communist blueprint

Martin Sandhu is nearly right when he asks "Could AI revive the socialist dream?" (Life & Arts, August 29). AI could be empowering, but the real century-old debate isn't about free markets versus state control, which turned out to be two sides of one coin. The choice is between a more-or-less state-regulated capitalism, and replacing commodity production entirely with a system built on labour time accounting.

Defeated by counter-revolution in Germany, but also strongly opposed to Russian-style state socialism, the GIK (Groep van Internationale Communisten) in the Netherlands in the 1930s published what it called "Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution", a hard-nosed manifesto for an economy that would not only reduce necessary labour time while meeting peoples' real and growing needs, but also prevent the re-emergence of commodity value and a parasitic social class to feed off it, whether plutocratic or bureaucratic.

GIK's blueprint needs updating, but AI is made for the large-scale interpretation of real-time data their proposals would involve. And for a future where production and distribution are both globally diversified and hyperlocal, an updated political counterpart to their economic ideas – which in the 20th century they called the workers', soldiers' and housewives' councils – could be the fix for our sclerotic and lethal system of nation states.

Sión Whellens
London E2, UK



Comics Chico, Harpo and Groucho Marx honed their craft in New Jersey

An insight into why richer nations want more services

Chrystia Freeland's article about Baumol's disease, a phenomenon identified by economist William Baumol in the 1960s where costs rise faster than general inflation due to stagnant productivity in labour-intensive sectors ("Unhappy voters are suffering from 'Baumol's disease'", Opinion, FT Weekend, August 15) and Nina Jörden's subsequent letter (FT Weekend, August 29) highlight the supply-side pressures of providing public sector services.

However the demand-side pressures on public spending had been identified nearly a century earlier.

In the 1800s, the German economist Adolf Wagner (1835-1917) formulated what became known as Wagner's Law: as societies become richer, public expenditure tends to rise faster than national income. The state provides "superior" goods and services.

Wagner identified three main forces: scientific and technological advances requiring greater public investment; the state's growing role in dealing with unforeseen events such as wars and financial crises; and rising demand for social protection, environmental protection and better healthcare.

When Wagner formulated his law, public sector spending in the major European economies, the US and Japan averaged 10 per cent of GDP. It is now around 45 per cent.

His insight that rising prosperity would itself generate increasing demand for government provision – and his identification of some of the forces driving it – was remarkably prescient. Baumol explains why government spending gets more expensive; Wagner explains why people keep asking for more of it.

Paul Temperton
Founder, Tier Company (Independent consultancy), Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire, UK

Nothing new in Russia's embrace of Eurasianism

Charles Clover, in his fascinating FT Books Essay reviewing three books about Russia ("Russia via the west", Books, Life & Arts, August 29) refers to Michael Khodarkovsky's description of the Kremlin's "desperate search for an ideology that... justified its geopolitical ambitions". This led to "Eurasianism" as a new national identity.

In fact this concept was first conceived by a group of Russian exiles during the civil war of 1918-21 (Peter Savitsky, Nikolai Trubetzkoy and Roman Jacobson) as an alternative path forward to Bolshevism.

In *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* (1925), Trubetzkoy argued that a single mindset and political culture permeated the peoples of the former Russian Empire, who are "historically destined to comprise a single state entity". Orthodoxy was one component, and the Tsar as "the embodiment of the national will, at the head of state" was to be part of the show.

All pretty Putin-esque. Anthony Black
Emeritus professor, University of Dundee, Scotland, UK

Old Penn Station felt like entering New York as a god

One small glitch in the inspiring account of the rebirth of Detroit's long neglected Michigan Central Station ("How a Detroit landmark won back its lustre", September 1). If the architects of the Detroit station were inspired by Rome's Baths of Caracalla it was not in emulation of New York City's Grand Central station as the article states. It was New York's other major rail hub, Pennsylvania Station, whose interior was modelled on the Baths.

As architecture historian Vincent Scully famously wrote of that oft-lamented magnificent station (which was demolished in the 1960s), and its depressing underground replacement, "through it one entered the city like a god. One scuttles in now like a rat".

Henry D Fetter
Washington, DC, US

Arenas or folk clubs. I know which I prefer

I can believe the show is impressive but if you want authenticity, as Rebecca Watson puts it ("The age of authentic perfection", Trending, Life & Arts, August 22), an arena is not the place to find it.

Last Friday I listened to Paul Downes and Phil Beer perform live at Baccapaces Folk Club. You will not get much more authentic than that. Joel Griffiths
Treasurer, Baccapaces Folk Club, Keighley, West Yorkshire, UK

New Jersey: 'birthplace of American motion pictures'

Regarding Hugo Cox's article "Jersey Shore... or Hollywood East" (House & Home, August 29), the author appears surprised that the State of New Jersey should become the new headquarters of the film industry.

New Jersey was actually the birthplace of the American motion picture industry. Thomas Edison developed the first technology at his West Orange Lab. In fact, at his Essex County lab property, Edison constructed the world's first film studio in 1895.

Among other locales in the Garden State featured in the earliest movies was the Palisades in Fort Lee, on the Hudson River. This was where stars such as Mary Pickford, Theda Bara and the Marx Brothers honed their craft. My immigrant grandfather, Phillip J Knoblock, was a 20-year-old horseback rider in DW Griffith's silent film *Call of the Wild*, filmed in Fort Lee in 1908. The article's headline should perhaps have read "... return to Hollywood East".

Howard Matson
Westport, CT, US

Quality journalism with hometown authenticity

I wish to congratulate Rana Forooshar on her engaging magazine piece on what the Indiana state fair reveals about Donald Trump's America ("Indiana state of mind", Spectrum, FT Weekend, August 29).

Her local knowledge and past experience of growing up in Indiana were added to her account with humour and authentic opinion.

My friend emigrated to the US many years ago, and currently lives in St Louis, Missouri. She is visiting me next week. She will be so interested to read Forooshar's piece recording the political views of the people of Indiana attending the state fair. Objective quality journalism is hard to find so this will be a welcome read for her – as it was for me.

Sheila McCann
Sheffield, South Yorkshire, UK

Bacon sarnie coronary care

Reading Marina O'Loughlin's magazine piece on hospital food ("My butter teetot fever dreams", Spectrum, Life & Arts, FT Weekend, August 22), I recall that in the mid-1980s my very caring aunty regularly carried toast and back bacon sandwiches to my late father in the coronary care unit of Sligo General Hospital, convinced that they would "brighten him up".

They certainly did, and sustained his moral fibre until his passing in December 1985.

Cormac McEahan
Bundoran, County Donegal, Ireland

Was that a Moses message on front door security app?

I'd always thought that the FT was the font of all knowledge. Now I know where it comes from. When the newspaper boy delivered my copy today, the message on my (upgraded) front door security system announced "person in driveway holding tablet".

Robert Palmer
Thames Ditton, Surrey, UK

Correction

● The current sponsor of Lord's cricket ground is Barclays, not PMorgan as wrongly stated in a column in Life & Arts on August 29.

Opinion

Is Keynesianism dead?

ECONOMICS

Andy Haldane



The conjoined crises of the Great Crash of 1929 and the Depression of the 1930s left lasting scars on households and businesses. The resulting desire for safety through saving led to economic stagnation – what John Maynard Keynes dubbed the “paradox of thrift”. “Keynesianism” emerged as an emergency response.

In this environment, Keynes reasoned that government needed to act as spender and risk-taker of first resort. Doing so could revive the animal spirits of the private sector and, with them, growth. And when put into practice, this multiplier largely worked, helping reflate the world out of the Depression.

Having dominated policymaking up to the 1970s, Keynesianism was then jettisoned for monetarist policies as stagflation displaced stagnation. But this century it has staged a comeback in response to a new set of conjoined crises, the global financial crisis, Covid and the Russia-Ukraine war. Indeed, the new interventions have dwarfed any previous peacetime stimulus.

But while cushioning the effects of crises, such mammoth interventions have left their own scars: public debt across the G7 now exceeds annual GDP, with debt ratios doubling – in the UK and US almost trebling – since the start of the century. This raises questions about the effectiveness of future fiscal stimulus, especially in high-debt countries such as the UK, US and Japan. Is Keynesianism now diminished, perhaps defunct?

Fiscal multipliers operate through three key channels. First, their effect on household and business spending. In order to work, Keynesian policies need to catalyse private spending. But if people anticipate that borrowing today

means higher taxes tomorrow, stimulus might prompt saving rather than spending – something first identified by David Ricardo in 1820.

Second, their strength depends on how borrowing costs respond to stimulus. For example, if extra borrowing is perceived as increasing the likelihood of governments inflating away or defaulting on their debts in the future, this will raise borrowing costs and depress demand today.

Third, multipliers depend on how monetary policy reacts – for example, whether central banks accommodate fiscal stimulus or offset its effects by tightening policy. The latter is more likely when inflation is above target.

If all three channels operate in ways that damp any stimulus, its impact is likely to be diminished. Indeed, it could become negative. Francesco Giavazzi and Marco Pagano found that fiscal contractions in Ireland and Denmark in the 1980s boosted demand. This trick was then repeated in crisis-stricken Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain

(PIIGS) this century. The common denominator in all of these cases, and in many emerging markets, was unusually high public debt.

Evidence elsewhere confirms this pattern. In a study of 44 countries, Ilzetki, Mendoza and Végh find evidence of fiscal stimulus depressing growth – a negative fiscal multiplier – when countries’

When debt is the disease, fiscal medicine may be as likely to harm as heal

public debt exceeds 60 per cent of GDP. With all of the G7 having debt ratios above this threshold, might we now be entering the twilight zone for Keynesian policies?

Looking more closely at each of the channels of fiscal transmission supports that contention. Historically, economists have been sceptical about the abil-

ity of households and companies to anticipate future tax rises when making spending choices. But precarious public debts are increasing the salience of this concern.

Surveys in the UK, US, France, Italy and Japan suggest future tax rises are now one of the main factors damping sentiment and curtailing spending. For example, fears of tax rises among UK companies rose sharply ahead of each of the last two Budgets, topping their worry list. This caused savings to rise and growth to stall. Next month’s Budget is shaping up for a hat-trick.

The effects of fiscal precarity on borrowing costs – the second channel – are also increasingly visible. Long-term yields in the G7 countries have risen 4 percentage points since Covid, due to inflation and fiscal concerns. Remarkably, yields in (recently debt-stricken) Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain now sit below those in the G7. The PIGS have flown. Yields are also becoming more sensitive to news about deteriorating deficits, as recent research by

David Aikman has demonstrated.

Central banks – the third channel – are now amplifying these pressures. Monetary policy was unprecedentedly accommodative after the global financial crisis. But after missing inflation targets for more than five years, central banks in the UK, US and euro area have stirred from their slumber, raising short-term rates and pivoting to quantitative tightening.

Taken together, this evidence suggests many countries are entering a new era. When debt is the disease, fiscal medicine may be as likely to harm as heal. Keynesianism, if not dead, is potentially defunct, except when squarely focused on public investment. Unlike in the 1930s, today’s “paradox of thrift” is of governments’ rather than the private sector’s making. To resolve it, governments will need to remember that thrift, like charity, begins at home.

The writer is an FT contributing editor and former chief economist at the Bank of England

Tim Cook’s successor is a product engineer who has spent 25 years at the company, writes Michael Acton

ello,” Apple’s new chief executive John Ternus wrote on X on Tuesday, marking his debut on the social media site and his first public statement as CEO. Responses to the one-word post were overwhelmingly positive. By yesterday, Ternus had gained almost 1mn followers.

The laconic message was fitting for the 51-year-old hardware engineer and Apple veteran who has managed to reach the pinnacle of corporate America without building a large external profile and who is known within the company for being both highly competent and unshowy.

“It was very obvious from the earliest days that John was super-talented,” says Wendell Weeks, chief executive of long-time Apple glass supplier Corning, who started working with him during the development of the iPad nearly two decades ago. Weeks describes Ternus as a humble “good guy” but adds that his hobby of racing cars may give an insight into another side of his character.

“There are not many non-passionate people that drive race cars . . . but at the same time, you have to be wicked calm and really dedicated to excellence if you’re good at it. And John is good at it.”

Those reserves of calm will be of use to Ternus as he ends Tim Cook’s 15-year reign as CEO. Apple is now a \$4.7tn company and one whose supply chain sits at the centre of geopolitical tension. While the share price is up 18 per cent this year, in part thanks to Apple’s decision to sit out the costly race to build AI infrastructure, product sales growth has slowed and investors are clamouring for exciting new devices.

Given the scale and complexity of its business, “Apple today is just a different beast,” says Wamsi Mohan, senior analyst at Bank of America. “To really grasp everything . . . it’s a really hard job.”

Ternus may be largely unknown outside of the fanatical world of Apple Kremlinologists but people familiar with Cook’s thinking say he has been considering how to execute the perfect succession since the early days of his stint in the top role, believing it was one of the most important things he could do for the company. His own experience had been difficult and drawn-out due to Steve Jobs’ illness.

Cook will remain at the company as executive chair and the official four-month CEO transition has involved Ternus quietly accompanying him to a handful of public appearances, including Berkshire Hathaway’s annual meeting. “It’s probably important for Ternus to have Cook around for some period of time . . . that’s what kept people happy,” says Mohan.

While Ternus is the first product engineer to lead Apple, his 25-year career at the company also offers a comforting sense of continuity. He belongs to the generation mentored by co-founder Jobs and is fluent in Jobsisms like “the Mac is the bicycle for the mind”.

“He’s relatively unknown outside the hardware organisation,” says one former Apple executive. “But it was all



Person in the News | John Ternus

Apple’s new ‘wicked calm’ chief executive

handled very gracefully with Tim Cook giving the market and the company plenty of warning – and if Tim says John is the right pick as CEO, few will question it.”

Still, for investors, the April announcement of a new CEO came as a surprise. The company had done relatively little to promote Ternus’ profile and even within the secretive glass walls of Apple Park, he is not a completely known quantity.

Evidence of his life outside the company is fragmentary. He is married, has children and was born and raised in California. School classmates recall that he was a great swimmer. He studied mechanical engineering at the University of Pennsylvania and graduated in 1997 (the same year as Elon Musk). After a stint at a virtual reality company called Virtual Research Systems, he joined Apple’s product team in 2001.

“To be honest, I wasn’t sure I belonged there,” he said in a 2024 commencement speech, recalling his first day at

the company. Unlike Cook, who was poached by Jobs for a top operational role, Ternus’ career has been marked by steady internal progression, including a role in the transition of PCs from plastic to steel metal and the development of AirPods.

One significant early mentor was

‘It was very obvious from the earliest days that John was super-talented’

Dan Riccio, who shaped the original product design team for the iPhone and went on to become senior vice-president of hardware engineering. In 2021, Ternus replaced Riccio in this role and led Apple’s successful effort to integrate its own Mac chips.

Reports that he was sceptical about Apple’s expensive Vision Pro VR

headset, which proved a commercial flop, imply an engineer’s instinct for devices that people want to use instead of risky new ideas. But in his first note of staff he seemed keenly aware of the need to rekindle the excitement of the product-focused Jobs era. He was, he wrote, excited about the products “we haven’t even imagined yet that we’ll dream up and create together”.

Ternus’ first major appearance as Apple CEO will come on Wednesday when he will appear on stage to lead the annual iPhone launch and is expected to unveil the first foldable iPhone.

Until then, the company is celebrating what appears to be a smooth handover. A party for Ternus at Apple Park on Tuesday included DJing from Apple Music’s creative director Zane Lowe. But not everyone was there. One employee said they were already so accustomed to the change in CEO that they did not feel the need to attend.

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America must learn AI lessons from Astro Boy

TECHNOLOGY

Gillian Tett



How do you stop Americans hating data centres? That is a key question for investors right now. This week Barclays warned clients that “today’s politics will shape tomorrow’s AI capacity”. In other words, popular hostility to data centres could undermine the tech boom.

This also matters for the upcoming US midterm elections. President Donald Trump recently derided critics for wanting to stay “backwards and poor”, and suggested China is malevolently fuelling public opposition. But even his *Maga* base is angry. Indeed, with just 20 per cent of voters in a YouGov poll saying they like the centres, this unease is arguably a major point of cross-party consensus.

What is really interesting is that while voters frame their fears around rising energy prices and water shortages, 43 and 15 per cent respectively support the construction of energy-guzzling Amazon fulfilment centres and chip factories, according to an Echelon poll. This suggests that voters aren’t just worried about the energy costs associated with data centres – the buildings have also become a tangible symbol for wider fears about AI.

So how should tech bosses and politicians respond? Big Tech is scrambling to address the energy issues, which is good. But US leaders also urgently need to look beyond American PR.

For while Silicon Valley tech bros and Washington politicians tend to assume that their world view is correct and universal, with AI this is not true. As the philosophers Stephen Cave and Kanta Dihal note, other societies have different frames, and America could learn much by looking at that – particularly in Asia.

Consider a recent Ipsos poll. This shows that just 33 per cent of American and French voters and 29 per cent in Britain feel excited about AI. But in China, Singapore, South Korea and Japan that figure is 83, 61, 74 and 47 per cent respectively. That is a stunning optimism gap.

What explains this? One factor is demographics: ageing Asian societies are running short of workers. But this does not account for the gap in its entirety. In fact, the poll shows that the proportion of citizens who expect AI to displace their job is actually far higher in Asia than America. Yes, really.

So I suspect we need to look at culture and policy. China, unlike America, is an “engineering state”, as *Brookings* author Dan Wang puts it, with high societal respect for science. Meanwhile Japan’s media culture has always been positive about robots and AI – as epitomised by the wildly popular *Astro Boy* manga and

anime series featuring a cute robot who befriends humans.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, in stark contrast, the media has taught people to view robots as terrifying. Just think of *The Terminator*, 2001: *A Space Odyssey* or *Doctor Who*. And that reflects other differences. In Judeo-Christian religions there is a binary split between animate and inanimate objects. So it follows that humanoid machines should appear threatening: in the Judeo-Christian tradition only humans have souls.

However, as some philosophers – along with the creator of *Astro Boy*, Osamu Tezuka – have pointed out, Japan’s *Shinto* culture presents life as a spectrum, where objects like rocks can house spirits. This encourages acceptance of humanoid tech.

Policy choices matter even more. Many Japanese executives assume it is their duty to train citizens in AI skills. For instance, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries is rolling out extensive training. In Singapore, the government has taken responsibility, via massive training schemes. And in China the government stresses the practical uses of AI, and prepares consumers and companies for its advance.

But in the US the hype focuses on new models and efforts to build artificial general intelligence. And while some companies, like Walmart, are (commendably) training their workers, generally the onus is on individuals to embrace AI, without much help from government, Big Tech or universities.

Japan’s *Shinto* culture presents life as a spectrum, where objects like rocks can house spirits

No wonder voters feel scared.

So if US leaders want to counter the backlash, they should learn from Asia. The tech world should club together to fund mass training for citizens and make efforts to demonstrate the practical benefits flowing from AI, for example by offering free tools to plug labour market gaps in elderly care. So should government.

Most importantly, elected American politicians must show that they – like their Asian counterparts – can rein in secretive Big Tech companies. That certainly does not mean becoming the Chinese Communist Party. Nor does it mean copying Japan’s excessively cosy ties between business and bureaucrats. But there is a middle ground.

Voters need democratic oversight of Big Tech, and initiatives that show innovation is happening with, and not against, them. As one US pharmaceutical executive tells me: “I am not anti-AI. [But] the issue that scares homeowners like me is the secrecy with which these data centres operate and [the lack of] accountability of utilities.” It’s time to ponder the lessons of *Astro Boy*.

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