



The political cost of UCT schemes

Since 2020, Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) schemes have become an important electoral strategy in India, particularly to attract women voters. Some examples of such schemes include the Kalaigarn Magalir Urimai Thittam in Tamil Nadu, the Lakshmi Bhandar in West Bengal, and Gruha Lakshmi Yojana in Karnataka. Yet, despite increasing the amount of cash before the 2026 elections, some governments which implemented these schemes were defeated. One possible explanation for the loss could be the political cost associated with UCTs.

UCT schemes are well-intentioned as they provide financial support to women. They partially advance SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) 5.4, which calls for a recognition of women's unpaid domestic and care work. According to the Ministry of Finance's latest Economic Survey, States are expected to spend about \$18 billion on UCTs in 2025-26, much of it targeted towards women.

Critics, however, argue that these schemes function as electoral "freebies." Their financing often requires expenditure switching or larger fiscal deficits, and reduces resources available for productive investments, including employment generation and self-employment programmes. Moreover, once households become dependent on UCTs, withdrawing them is difficult as political parties encourage competitive welfarism.

Targeting challenges
A fundamental challenge in targeted UCT programmes is beneficiary identification. Since governments cannot



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directly observe incomes for most workers in the informal sector, they rely on proxy indicators such as land ownership, electricity consumption, or household assets. This inevitably produces both inclusion errors (benefits reaching ineligible households) and exclusion errors (eligible households being left out). These targeting errors, whether real or perceived, can impose significant political costs.

The Kalaigarn Magalir Urimai Thittam scheme illustrates this challenge. Although the ruling party at the time promised ₹1,000 per month to all women-headed households before the 2021 election, fiscal constraints led the government to restrict eligibility based on income, land ownership, and other criteria when the scheme was launched in September 2023. Initially, about 1.13 crore women were covered. Following widespread complaints from women who believed they met the eligibility criteria, another 16.94 lakh beneficiaries were added in December 2025. The scheme cost ₹13,807 crore in 2025-26.

Despite the expansion, dissatisfaction persisted. Many women who considered themselves unfairly excluded reportedly became even more aggrieved when eligible beneficiaries received an advance payment of three months' entitlement along with a special summer relief payment. Although the precise electoral impact cannot be measured, even modest shifts in voter preferences can influence outcomes in closely contested constituencies.

These experiences highlight an important

feature of targeted welfare programmes. Political costs arise not only from actual errors but also from perceived ones. Individuals who fail to satisfy official eligibility criteria may nevertheless believe that they have been treated unfairly. Likewise, households that legally qualify may be perceived as undeserving because they appear relatively affluent. Such perceived targeting errors can be as politically consequential as actual administrative mistakes.

This reveals an inherent tension between economics and politics. Economics favours targeted programmes so that scarce public resources reach those most in need. Politics, however, rewards broader inclusion because voters evaluate governments not only by the benefits they receive but also by those they believe were unfairly denied. Consequently, targeted UCT programmes carry an unavoidable political cost.

Conditional cash transfers and other incentive-based welfare programmes offer a more sustainable alternative. Linking benefits to socially desirable outcomes produces broader developmental gains. Tamil Nadu's Midday Meal Scheme illustrates this principle. Since participation depends on school enrolment, self-selection reduces grievances.

The broader lesson is that welfare programmes tied to education or other desirable behaviours can achieve developmental objectives with lower political costs. In contrast, UCTs remain inherently vulnerable to inclusion, exclusion, and perceived targeting errors.

India's unemployment data dilemma

The government has finally found a way to measure the statistical elephant of unemployment; however, it may be incomplete – much like the blind men who touched different parts of a pachyderm and mistook it for the whole truth.

The challenge in measuring the unemployment rate using the Current Weekly Status (CWS) approach – where a person's activity status is determined based on the preceding seven days – is to assess not only whether people are employed, but also the nature of their jobs, the frequency and regularity of their payments, and the overall quality of employment. In an economy where a vast majority of the population are involved in informal work, employment cannot be analysed through a headline rate of high frequency indicator, if it can be called so.

India's decision to transform the quarterly/yearly unemployment data into a monthly indicator is economically desirable, even if its credibility is questionable given the nature of its database, which seldom takes into account circular migration.

Efforts have been made to strengthen India's database comprising EPFO (Employees' Provident Fund Organisation) and ESIC (Employees' State Insurance Corporation) payroll data, GST-based enterprise information, income tax records, corporate payroll data, gig economy employment data, and rural wage indicators but at present, even these sources remain fragmented. Unlike a



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mature labour market – comprising payroll surveys, unemployment insurance records, formal contracts, and extensive administrative databases – India's large informal employment market is difficult to track.

Most advanced nations count unemployment using a Labour Force Survey based on the definition of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The U.S., Japan, EU and the U.K. have decades of household survey data with detailed information on full-time versus part-time jobs, hourly wages, job duration, labour mobility, and unemployment spells.

A leading indicator

The latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) says that India's unemployment rate for those aged 15 years and above marked a four-month low of 5.1% in July. The review period coincided with the peak of kharif season, when demand for agricultural labour rose for land preparation, transplanting, and allied activities. Since construction, agriculture, small trade, logistics, and local services see seasonal fluctuations, it is likely that July's decline reflects increased hiring in these segments rather than a broad-based expansion in formal sector jobs.

Monthly unemployment should at the best be a leading indicator, not a comprehensive measure of labour market health.

India has a labour market where various reports suggest that 90% of the population are involved in the informal sector; agricultural employment remains seasonal, with wage payments negotiated informally and where

underemployment/disguised employment is widespread. Indicating limited granularity, data is rather sketchy on wage growth, hours worked, job quality, occupational shifts, and sector-wise employment trends. Therefore, monthly unemployment data reflects seasonal movements rather than structural improvement. A fall in unemployment may indicate distress-driven entry into low-productivity jobs rather than genuine employment creation.

The overall decline in unemployment was owing to rural areas, where unemployment declined to 4.5% from 5%; but it should not be read as a major improvement in the job market. Independent labour studies estimate that there are between 30 to 35 million seasonal labourers moving across India annually, forming the invisible backbone of urban construction and infrastructure.

The July data saw an increase in the labour force participation rate, a positive supply-side signal, but stronger investment and job creation prefix sustainable employment recovery. The challenge is to convert this participation into stable, high-productivity jobs.

The revamped PLFS is a significant improvement over earlier low-frequency labour statistics but its success ultimately depends on whether it gauges the reality of the job market – not merely measuring it more frequently. A credible labour market barometer is the need of the hour to capture the livelihoods of millions of workers.

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18 centuries: tracing Smriti Mandhana's journey to the top

With her record-breaking century at the Asia Cup, Smriti Mandhana surpassed Mithali Raj to become the highest run scorer in women's international cricket

DATA POINT

Devvyanshi Bihani

When Smriti Mandhana scored her 18th international century against Hong Kong at the Women's T20 Asia Cup in Dubai on September 3 – in just 57 balls – she set a new record for scoring the highest number of centuries in women's international cricket across all formats. That was not the only record she broke in that match.

By the time she was run out for 124, she had overtaken her former captain Mithali Raj to become the highest run-scorer in women's international cricket. She had taken her career tally to 10,880 runs, 12 more than Mithali's record of 10,868. Her score was also the highest in the history of the Women's T20 Asia Cup, surpassing Chamari Athapaththu's 119 not out from 2024.

Her seven sixes took her career tally to 95, making her the leading six-hitter for India in women's T20Is and the fourth-highest in the world. Smriti also became the first Indian woman to score more than one century in the T20 format, and while doing so, she equalled Mithali's record of 93 fifty-plus scores in international cricket

Mandhana's century-making was a slow burn before it became a sprint. Her international career began with a T20 match against Bangladesh in April 2013, three months before she turned 17. She waited for three years to taste her first century, in her 32nd international innings in 2016 against Australia. But it took 115 more innings and five years to reach her fifth, and another 92 innings to get to 10. Then, the sprint started. Ten of her 18 centuries came within the last two years, and at a notably higher strike rate (**Chart 1**).

Winning streak

That acceleration becomes even more striking when compared

with the other top five century-makers. Australia's Meg Lanning reached 10 hundreds in 123 innings, just about half the number of 239 innings that Smriti took to score hers. All the other four crossed the milestone of 10 before their 200th innings. In contrast, Smriti's performance has soared after she crossed her 200th (**Chart 2**). Of Smriti's 18 centuries, 14 came from ODIs, two in Tests and two in T20Is.

In ODIs, she has scored 5,411 runs with an average of 47.88. In 16 Test innings, she scored 788 with an average of 52.53 and in 167 T20I innings, she scored 4,681 runs with an average of 30.65. Across all three formats, she has 10,880 runs, 75 fifties and an average of 38.86, showing that her record is built on consistency as much as several spectacular peaks.

Moreover, the pace at which she has accumulated her runs really sets her apart.

While she had already become the fastest woman to reach 10,000 runs in just 281 innings, she has now become the highest run scorer in 303 international innings – fewer than the other four players with more than 10,000 runs, all of whom, except Stafanie Taylor, are now retired from international cricket (**Chart 3**).

This pace is reflected in how Smriti clearly stands out with her overall strike rate of 99.57. It is nearly 10 points higher than Suzie, the next fastest among the five. Batting average is the only indicator where she lags among the five, but that too only against her compatriot and inspiration Mithali (**Chart 4**). She is in the same league as the other three.

A few years back, she had said that her mother taught her to persevere – “to go on till reaching the top”. Smriti had also said that she wanted to be the best batter in the world. At just 30, she may have already realised that ambition. But, as she said in the press conference after her records-breaking Hong Kong match, “it is just the start”.

Gearing up for higher peaks

The data for the charts were sourced from Statsguru, the searchable cricket statistics database available at cricinfo.com. All the figures are as of September 4, 2026, when the data was collected

CHART 1: Ten of Smriti's 18 centuries came in the last two years. Her centuries have also been accompanied by a higher strike rate

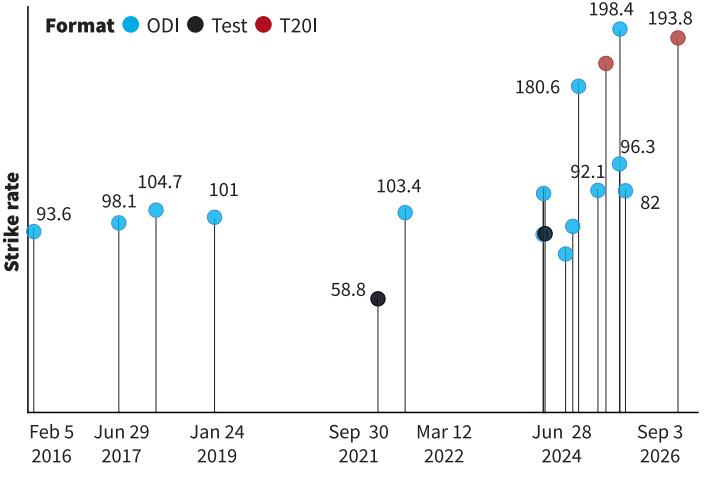


CHART 2: Most of the centuries of the other top scorers came before their 200th innings. Smriti became prolific after crossing her 200th

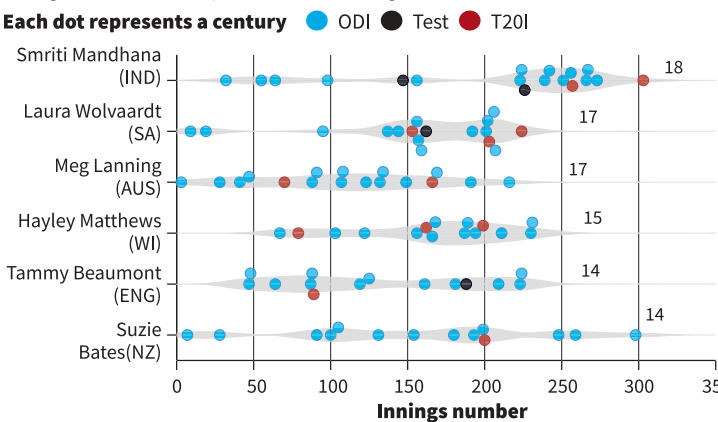


CHART 4: Smriti took fewer innings to become the top scorer with a higher strike rate while Mithali holds the highest average

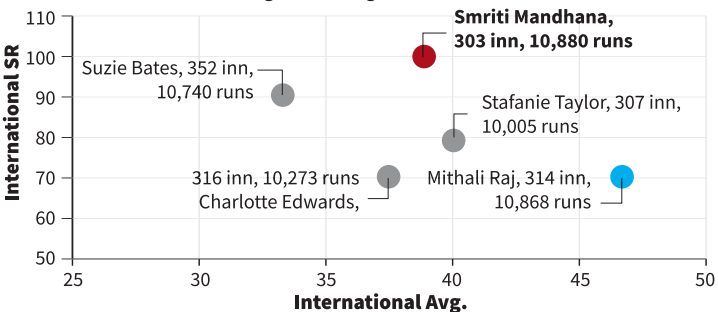
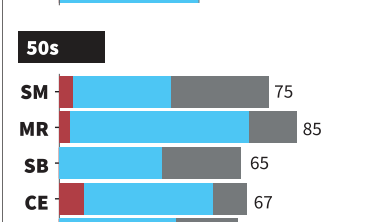
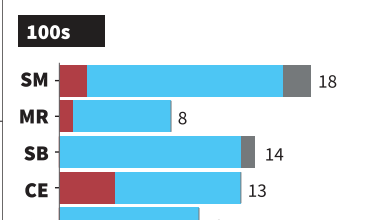
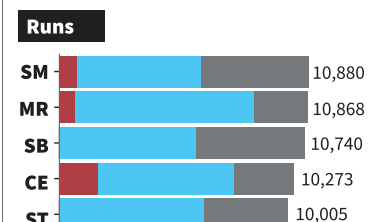
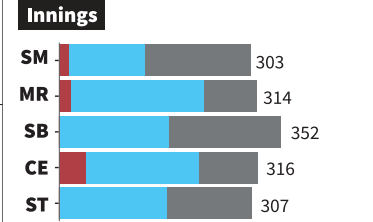


CHART 3: Smriti's innings, runs, centuries, and fifties, in comparison with the other four players who have scored over 10,000 runs in women's international cricket

Mithali Raj - **MR** (IND), Smriti Mandhana - **SM** (IND), Suzie Bates - **SB** (NZ), Charlotte Edwards - **CE** (ENG), Stafanie Taylor - **ST** (WI)

● Test ● ODI ● T20I



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 7, 1976

Snake boats to be standardised

Kottayam, September 6: A scheme has been prepared by a Government-sponsored Committee to standardise the snake boat which is the main attraction in the boat races in Kerala.

This Government Committee conducts the Nehru Trophy boat race. The existing boat races are losing their charm because the competing snake boats are of different lengths, and the capacity of rowers differ.

Many of the snake boats in Central Travancore like Pacha, Payipad and Kodupunna can carry between 70 and 80 rowers, while the snake boats like Karichal, Kalooparamban and Jawahar Thayankari can take in over 100 persons. Because of this vast disparity in manpower, the snake boats like Karichal and Kalooparamban alone are now winning the trophies in most of the races. In the light of this, a scheme has been prepared by the Nehru Trophy Boat Race Committee to standardise the snake boats with equal length and strength of rowers.

The Committee is also considering the grant of loans to help this standardisation. According to a tentative scheme, a loan of Rs. 10,000 will be given to each boat.

Four major boat races will be held in various parts of Central Travancore this weekend. The Sree Narayana boat race will be held on September 8, while the Vembanad boat race will be conducted on September 9.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 7, 1926

Railway extension in the Punjab

Lahore, September 6: In accordance with the new policy of railway extension in the Punjab, a reference to which was made by the Governor while inaugurating the Kangra Valley Railway in May last, two other lines Shahdara Narawal and Sirhind Rupar Railways have been sanctioned which are the type of those cross connections to which the Governor referred as being essential for the comfort and convenience of passenger traffic. The first is a line between Lyallpur and Jaranwala, which will pass through the rich tract irrigated by the Lower Chenab Canal. The other will link up Rohtak, Gohana and Panipat forming a direct connection between the Delhi-Ambala line of the North-Western Railway.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Goal speed of Indian Railways’ hydrogen train

110 in kmph. The Indian Railways is working to operate the country’s first hydrogen-powered train at speeds of up to 110 kmph after completing trials at 120 kmph, Railway Board Chairman and CEO Satish Kumar said. He said consultations were under way with all stakeholders to decide the rail sections on which the new hydrogen train could be operated. PTI

Number of people dead in Israel strikes in Lebanon

4 Lebanon said four people were killed on Sunday in strikes that Israel said it carried out after Hezbollah had launched drones at its soldiers in south Lebanon, the latest escalation amid a fragile truce. Lebanon’s Health Ministry reported two people killed in south Lebanon’s Nabatieh al-Fawqa and two women killed in nearby Arab Salim. It said 20 other people were wounded. AFP

Number of people affected by floods in Bihar

19.57 in lakh. Over 19 lakh people across 11 districts of Bihar have been affected by floods. Due to the rise in water levels of various rivers in the State, people in 330 gram panchayats across 11 districts — Patna, Bhojpur, Saran, Vaishali, Bhagalpur, Begusarai, Buxar, Samastipur, Munger, Katihar and Araria — have been affected, the officials said. PTI

Flights affected by Indonesia volcanic eruption

209 Indonesia halted operations at its main international airport outside Jakarta on Sunday after ash spewed from the Anak Krakatoa volcano more than 150 kilometres away, impacting thousands of passengers. Mount Anak Krakatoa erupted on Saturday, producing a fountain of lava and booming sounds that could be heard up to 700 kms. AFP

Percentage of voters deleted in Sikkim in SIR exercise

11 in per cent. A total of 52,551 electors were deleted from Sikkim’s electoral roll during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), reducing the number of voters by around 11.16%, a statement said. The final roll has 4,18,467 eligible voters, compared with 4,71,018 in the pre-SIR voters’ list, the Chief Electoral Officer’s office said in a statement. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Does inflation targeting work in India?

India’s Phillips curve is found to be flat, while households’ inflation expectations remain consistently higher than the RBI’s projections; this suggests that inflation targeting can lower output and employment without a commensurate reduction in inflation

ECONOMIC NOTES

Rohit Azad
Indranil Chowdhury

India has just completed a decade of inflation targeting (IT) as a formal policy framework of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Under this framework, the RBI is supposed to contain inflation at 4% within a band of (+/-) 2 percentage points. In this piece, we explain the theory behind inflation targeting and test it against the Indian experience.

Managing demands

The RBI seeks to control inflation through two channels: controlling demand and influencing the public’s inflationary expectations. The RBI flexes its policy rate of interest (called the repo rate), which is increased when inflation kicks in. This pushes commercial banks’ lending rates up.

Households become wary of taking home or consumer loans, while businesses postpone decisions to build factories. Demand comes down and, as a result, so does inflation.

The second route works through anchoring the inflationary expectations of the public at large. The assumption is that high expectations about inflation tomorrow influence inflation today because capitalists build these expectations into their current pricing decisions and workers into their wage decisions. Inflation is a self-fulfilling prophecy. So, if the RBI can somehow tether these expectations to its projected path of inflation, it can contain this prophecy. Both these routes work through a relationship called the New Keynesian Phillips curve (NKPC).

This curve describes a relationship between the level of GDP and inflation in an economy. It is proposed that a rise in output leads to an increase in inflation. Prices are a markup over costs. For simplicity, let us assume wages are the only costs in an economy. Workers demand wages; capitalists add a profit margin to determine prices. If wages rise, prices follow suit. But why should wages rise with output?

The wage-price negotiation process provides the key to understanding the NKPC. Consider a worker who would like to buy 5 kg of rice during a month for her family. Since she will not receive a sack of rice as her wage, she will have to settle for a money wage with which she can buy that amount of rice.

The time difference between fluctuations in money wages and the purchase of rice makes expectations a key factor in the process. For example, if she expects the price of 1 kg of rice at the time of purchase to be ₹100, she would negotiate for ₹500 as wages to buy those 5 kg. But if she expects the price to be ₹200, she would ask for ₹1,000. Wage costs would go up (for the same bundle of wage goods), as would prices.

A rise in output and employment, this framework argues, makes workers stronger and enables them to demand more rice – say from 5 kg to 6 kg – for the same number of hours of work. Thus, the wage demand curve rises with output (see panel (a) of **Graph 1**). Since prices are nothing but a markup over costs, the price curve (NKPC) has the same upward-sloping shape. On top of that, if the price expectations for rice were to change from ₹100 to ₹200, the wage demand curve, and the corresponding NKPC, would shift up for every level of

Off the mark

Ten years into inflation targeting, the Indian experience raises questions about its underlying assumptions

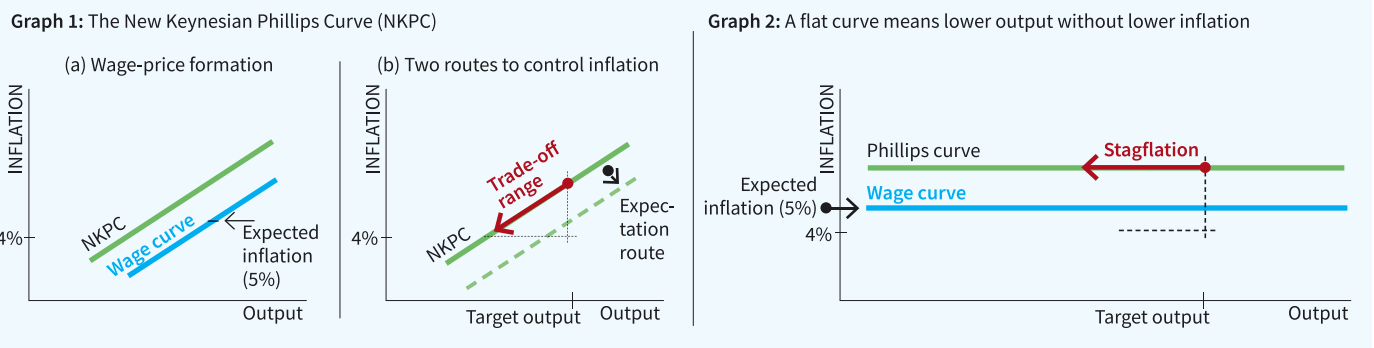


Chart 1: Testing the Phillips curve in India April 2012 to March 2026

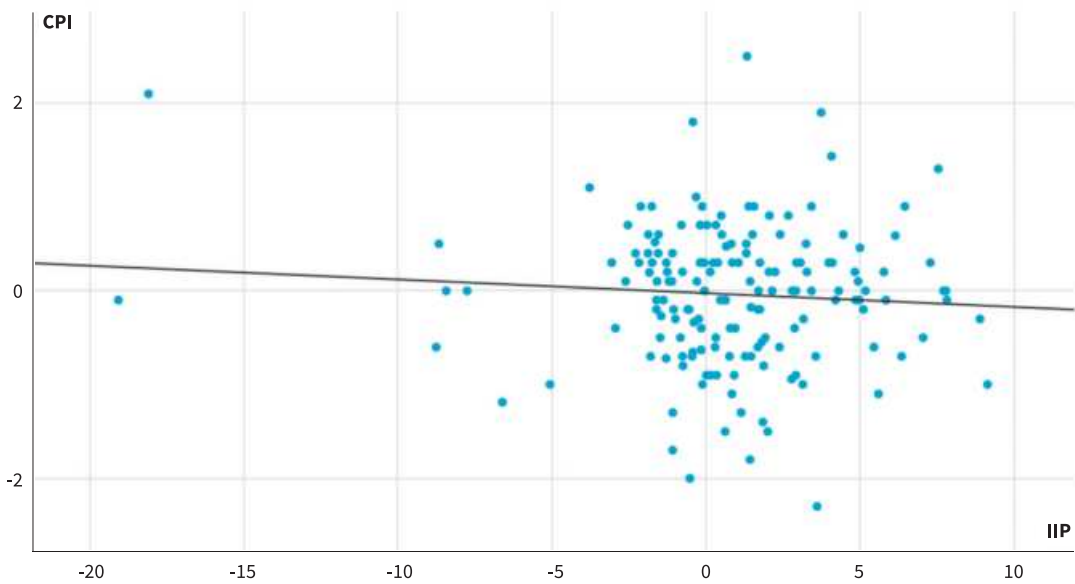


Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Database on Indian Economy, RBI



Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Households’ Inflation Expectations Survey and Monetary Policy Statements, Various Years, RBI

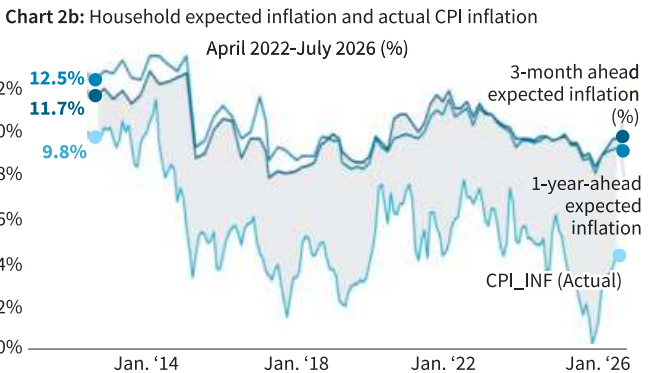


Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Database on Indian Economy, RBI

output/ employment. In other words, the position of the NKPC is determined by expectations, and its slope by the bargaining power of workers and capitalists.

If the economy were to behave in this manner, there are two obvious ways to bring inflation under control (see panel (b) of Graph 1). Slide the economy down along the NKPC curve (the trade-off range marked in the graph where both inflation and output fall) or manoeuvre workers’ expectations to a lower level across the board, so that the wage demand curve, hence the NKPC, shifts down, resulting in a fall in inflation with no impact on output. Expectation management is a less painful way of managing inflation. This is inflation targeting in a nutshell.

All of this works well in theory. But what if the real picture of the Indian economy is depicted in **Graph 2**? What if the NKPC is flat and there is no trade-off between output and inflation? Additionally, what if people’s expectations do not match the RBI’s projections of lower inflation in the future – that is, the flat NKPC stays put instead of shifting down? Then, a policy of inflation targeting, which brings output down without lowering inflation at all, leads to a combination of lower output and flat

stagflation (a left-pointed arrow in Graph 2).

Is the Indian Phillips curve upward sloping?

Our academic work published in the Economic and Political Weekly provides a more rigorous test of the Phillips curve, finding it to be flat under multiple configurations and methodologies. For the present purposes, a ‘first cut’ of that story is presented here. **Chart 1** uses monthly data on industrial output, as measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), and CPI inflation between April 2012 and March 2026. The best-fit trend line in Chart 1 shows India’s NKPC is, at best, flat.

But why is there such a gap between reality and mainstream economic theory? Because the basic premise of a rising wage demand curve, and consequently NKPC, as shown in Graph 1, is incorrect. For economies such as ours, an overwhelming majority of workers (around 92%) do not have any bargaining power, let alone fixing wages. They are simply price takers. Wages do not rise with output/employment.

Projections and expectations

Even if the Phillips curve is flat, IT

enthusiasts would argue that shifting it down would still do the job. But for this to happen, people’s expectations should, by and large, match the RBI’s projections. What does the Indian data tell us? The RBI surveys Indian households about their inflation expectations a quarter and one year ahead. These expectations are plotted over this period against the RBI’s own projections. **Chart 2(a)** shows that expectations are consistently higher than the projections, that too, on average, by a margin of four percentage points. Even when expectations are plotted against actual inflation, the gap is similar (see **Chart 2(b)**). So, the expectations story is way off what is claimed to defend IT.

John Maynard Keynes would have asked the RBI: ‘When facts change, I change my mind. What do you do sir?’ Unfortunately, the RBI does the opposite as it tries to force-fit a macroeconomic model to a world where the underlying assumptions of the model do not hold. In the process, it inflicts pain on the common people of this country by forcing them out of employment without any commensurate gain in controlling inflation.

(The authors are a part of the DevMac (Development Macroeconomics) network, which seeks pluralism in Economics)

THE GIST

▼ Inflation targeting works through higher interest rates to curb demand and through managing people’s expectations of future inflation

▼ The theory assumes that higher output and employment strengthen workers’ bargaining power, pushing up wages and prices. However, this assumption does not hold well in India, where most workers have little bargaining power

▼ The inflation-targeting framework relies on macroeconomic assumptions that may not reflect the realities of the Indian economy, potentially imposing high costs on employment and ordinary households

CACHE



Music lovers worldwide are noticing signs of AI tracks in both online and offline spaces, even as they call for greater transparency. GETTY IMAGES

Why Australia’s music industry banned AI music in chart listing

Australia’s ARIA has barred wholly AI-generated songs from its charts while allowing music made substantially by humans with AI assistance; the move has intensified calls for transparent AI labelling and greater accountability from streaming platforms

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far:
Australia’s music industry body – the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) – on August 25 banned songs wholly made using AI, noting such tracks will be ineligible for listing on its charts. The announcement comes after the viral fame of an AI remix of Madonna’s 1989 song ‘Like a Prayer,’ made by Australian music producer and disc jockey Josh Fawaz earlier this year. The AI song enjoyed multiple weeks on the country’s top 20 chart and ranked second on ARIA’s top 20 Australian singles chart, per AP. It also scored over 23 million views on YouTube.

The use of AI to compose the song was not clearly disclosed initially, angering listeners and musicians who want synthetic music to be transparently labelled.

Which songs are banned under the new rules?
The industry body ARIA’s rules do not ban outright the use of AI in music. Neither does it have a zero-tolerance policy for AI in art. Instead, the updated code notes that a recording developed with the help of Gen AI is eligible for listing when it is “substantially human made” and “raises no stream or chart manipulation concerns.” This still leaves a lot of room for artists to create music with Generative AI tools.

In fact, ARIA CEO Annabelle Herd

To truly exclude AI-generated music from human creations, even casual listeners need a reliable way to differentiate between the two; for this, transparent labelling standards are required across platforms

insisted that the chart listings should evolve to “keep room for” artists already using AI tools in their work.
“The ARIA Charts will always remain a transparent measurement of the music Australia consumes, but a chart that rewards unlicensed AI output would undercut the very basis of the recorded music we exist to represent,” she said.

What penalties will users and distributors face?
ARIA has stated that it may reject ineligible recordings, apart from excluding them and removing them from charts whenever needed, adjusting chart positions, withdrawing accreditations, or rescinding its awards.
But when considering the global music industry as a whole, there is not much punitive action that original music artists and producers can take against users making AI-generated versions of their songs. The optics of a world-famous singer suing a small creator over an AI remix do not favour the true creators.
Instead, musical artistes and the companies representing them have been taking AI music generation platforms such



as Suno and Udio to court, accusing them of using copyrighted works without permission.
In late August, music publishers including Sony Music Publishing and Warner Chappell sued Anthropic, as well as its co-founders Dario Amodei and Benjamin Mann, alleging digital piracy and the data harvesting of copyrighted works.
Anthropic disagreed with the claims and intends to defend itself in court, reported *TechCrunch*.
Scraping copyrighted content to build AI is still a grey area. However, the 2025 ruling against Anthropic in the authors’ lawsuit that ended in a landmark \$1.5 billion settlement made one thing clear: that U.S. courts may take a more serious view of AI companies pirating copyrighted content for AI development.

Will music platforms be held accountable for AI?
To truly exclude AI-generated music from human creations, even casual listeners need a reliable way to differentiate between the two at first glance. For this, transparent labelling standards are

required across streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music.
Later this month, Spotify users can expect to see “AI Persona” labels that identify artists who were entirely created with AI. In addition to this, Spotify will not include AI Personas in listeners’ editorial or algorithmic recommendations.
The labels will depend on both self-disclosure as well as the platform’s own checking process. Users will also be able to learn if the artist self-disclosed their AI status, or if Spotify had to apply the label.
While this label applies to AI artists, the platform has features such as AI Credits and SongDNA in order to understand if specific tracks were created with AI.
But more users are asking for ways to filter AI-generated or AI-assisted music entirely. A spike in unlabelled AI song tracks on platforms such as Instagram makes it difficult for creators to curate background music for their videos and photos. For example, art-based businesses marketing handmade goods to buyers can face flak over accidentally using AI music in their Reels. Taking down and re-uploading the Reel would cost them views.
Challenges exist offline as well. Music lovers and connoisseurs have complained that AI soundtracks are seeping into more public spaces, as commercial properties such as stores and cafés err on the side of caution by choosing generic AI music over popular licensed tracks they may need to pay for.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Identify these personalities from their Wikipedia page subheadings

Mohammed Hidayat

- QUESTION 1**
Childhood - Public speaker - Pune Ashram - Arrival in the United States - 1984 bioterror attack.
- QUESTION 2**
Early life - Mathematics career - Life in Montana - Mail bombings - Manifesto.
- QUESTION 3**
Early life - Founding a blood-testing startup - Self-made female billionaire - Downfall - Fraud charges.
- QUESTION 4**
Early life - Career - Photography hobby - Later years - Death - Discovery and recognition - Legacy.
- QUESTION 5**
Early religious and political influences - Founding a new religious organisation - Relocation to a South American country - Mass murder-suicide.
- QUESTION 6**
Early life - Led own gang - Massacre - Surrender - Political career - Assassination.



Visual Question:
Identify the African leader and fill in the blank.
Early life - Rise in Army - Seizure of power - Expulsion of _____ - War with Tanzania - Exile - Death - Erratic behaviour, self-bestowed titles and media portrayal. AP

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:
1. What was the name of the feminist magazine she co-founded in 1971 which survives till today? **Ans: Ms. magazine**
2. Steinem said once that she had never wanted children because she already had one. Who was she referring to? **Ans: Her mother**
3. Steinem was part of the second wave of feminism. Name the book credited with launching this wave, written by Betty Friedan. **Ans: The Feminine Mystique**
4. In 2005, Steinem, Robin Morgan, and X co-founded an organisation that “works to make women visible and

powerful in the media.” Name X, an actor who starred in Klute and Coming Home. **Ans: Jane Fonda**
5. In a controversial op-ed, Steinem once defended a U.S. President, saying his behaviour with women may have been reckless, but did not meet the legal definition of sexual harassment or assault. Which President was she talking about? **Ans: Bill Clinton**
Visual: Where did she work, which led to her seminal 1963 undercover exposé, ‘A Bunny’s Tale’? **Ans: The Playboy Club**
Early Birds: Dodo Jayaditya | Prem Nath Tiwari | Rony S. Emmanuel | Sukdev Shet | Tamal Biswas



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Getting him to open up is like pulling teeth

Students urged to think rather than parrot textbook answers

S. Upendran

“It was good to see your mother after nearly three years. Will she be here for some time?”
“Maybe for another two weeks. She said that you’d put on weight.”
“She told me the same thing. I’ve been trying to lose weight for the past six months, but it’s like pulling teeth.”
“Pulling teeth? Getting one’s tooth pulled is not an enjoyable experience. Was my mom saying you’re going to have a problem losing weight?”
“The expression ‘pulling teeth’ has several different meanings – all of them negative. When you say that completing a task was like pulling teeth, it means it was a slow and painful process.”
“There were times when you just wanted to throw your hands into the air, and walk away!”
“That’s right! Trying to have a conversation with Renu was like pulling teeth.”
“How about this example? For many people, getting up early in the morning is like pulling teeth.”
“That’s a good example. My parents had a tough time waking me up when I was in school.”
“Talking about school. Unlike most people I know, you never talk about your school days. Getting information from you about your school days is like pulling teeth.”
“You’ll find that pulling teeth is a lot easier than getting me to talk about my school days.”
“In that case, I will stop asking questions related to that phase of your life.”
“Thank you. So, what’s been...”
“Tell me, what’s the difference between ‘aping someone’ and ‘parrotting someone’?”
“Tell me, what does a parrot do?”
“It flies around and”
“That’s not what I mean. When you talk to your pet parrot which has been with you for a while, what does it do?”
“When I say something, it sometimes repeats what I said.”
“Exactly! It repeats what you’ve said. Doesn’t really say anything new, does it?”
“It’s not capable of saying anything new.”
“Which is why the expression ‘to parrot someone’ carries with it the sense that it is mindless repetition...”
“In other words, when you parrot someone, you are saying things without really understanding what you’re saying.”
“Exactly! The Vice Principal parrots whatever the principal says.”
“My boss hates that. He doesn’t want anyone to merely parrot what he says.”
“Such people are difficult to find. Unlike his sister, Ravi is not very bright. He merely parrots everything she says.”
“So, now tell me, what does ‘ape someone’ mean?”
“When you ape someone, you mimic someone. In this case, what you do is to copy his mannerisms, style, the way of walking, talking, etc. And you do a very bad job of it.”
“We tried to ape our favourite rock band.”
“That sounds good. Children frequently ape their parents.”
“We all do that when we are very young.”
upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Shibboleth:
a favourite saying of a group, organisation, or individual
Synonyms: slogan, motto, idiom, tagline
Usage: *The phrase became a shibboleth among university students.*
Pronunciation: newsth.live/shibboleth
International Phonetic Alphabet: /ʃɪbəlθ/

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Sharpest pictures of sun’s surface reveal previously unseen whirlpools

In all pictures taken of the sun’s surface in the past century, the edges of its convection cells were blurred; for decades, solar physicists wondered if these edges were really frayed or if they could find more detail if they observed the cells using a more powerful telescope; new images have settled the debate

Shamim Haque Mondal

Scientists have used the world’s largest telescope to study the sun to capture the highest-resolution pictures yet of the sun’s surface, revealing small, violent plasma whirlpools moving across it.

The discovery could change how scientists understand the way energy and magnetic fields move through the sun’s atmosphere. These whirlpools seem like an efficient way to move energy and magnetic flux, and could also be responsible for braiding the sun’s magnetic fields at small scales.

Such braided fields are thought to store and release the energy that powers solar flares and other eruptions – and may help explain why the sun’s outer atmosphere is so unexpectedly hot.

The team’s findings were published in *Nature* on August 5.

Details on the edge

The part of the sun that we see is called the photosphere. This is a chaotic environment filled with a roiling mass of superheated plasma. The light we see on the earth is energy emitted by this plasma.

Astronomers have been taking pictures of the sun’s exterior for a long time, and they have always seen a beehive-like structure there. The cells in this structure are called convection cells. Each cell spans up to around 2,000 km – the distance from Mumbai to Guwahati – and lasts for 5-10 minutes before dissipating. The visible features of a convection cell are called granules. All these granules together form the outer visible layer of the sun.

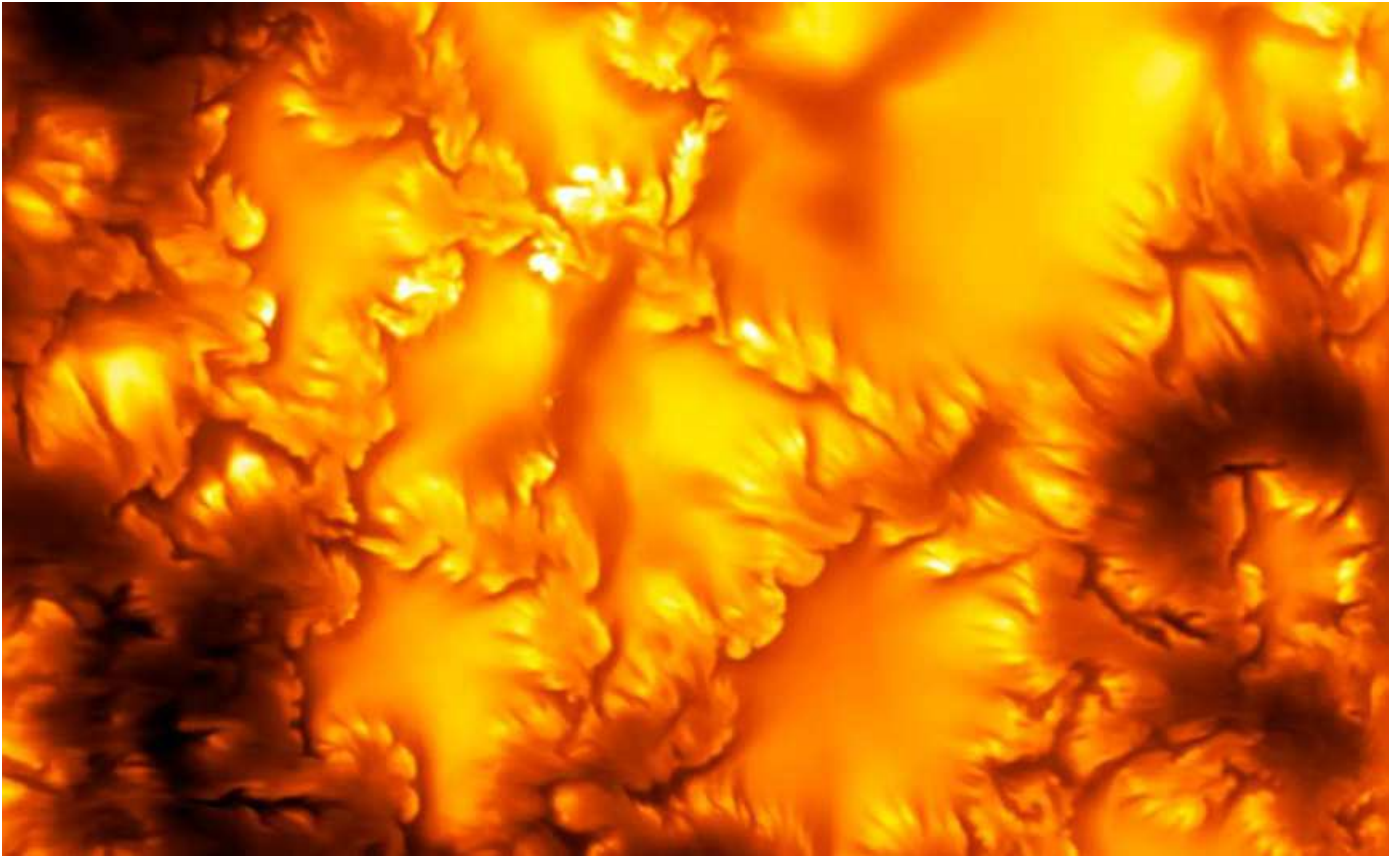
In all the pictures taken of the sun’s surface in the past century, the edges of these granules were blurred. They looked like frayed cotton.

And for decades, solar physicists have wondered if these edges are really frayed or if they will find more detail if they observe them using a more powerful telescope. The new images have settled the debate.

“The weakness is in the telescope’s aperture,” the researchers – from the U.S. National Science Foundation National Solar Observatory (NSO), Germany’s Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research (MPS), and the High Altitude Observatory (HAO) – wrote in their paper in *Nature*.

It seems that with telescopes whose primary mirrors are smaller than two metres wide, it is not possible for physicists to observe the fundamental perturbations on the sun’s surface.

For their study, the researchers turned to the NSF Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope (DKIST) in Hawaii. Perched



The highest-resolution image of the sun’s surface ever captured, by the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope. At the edges of the solar granules, the image reveals fringed-looking structures that display swirling motions. NSF/NSO/AURA/MPS

near the 10,000-foot-high summit of the Haleakalā volcano, the DKIST features a giant four metres primary mirror. It started scientific operations in late 2019.

The team used it to observe a magnetically active region on the sun called NOAA 14060, capturing light at a wavelength of 416 nanometres (which is visible light of a blue-violet colour). They also paired the telescope with a high-speed FastCam camera developed jointly by NSO and MPS. The camera had a exposure time of 100 microseconds, capturing up to 740 frames per second.

With the help of this camera, the researchers took many pictures of the sun’s turbulent atmosphere.

Then, one member of the research team, Michiel van Noort of MPS, used an advanced image processing technology called multi-frame blind deconvolution to remove the blurring that occurs when the sun is photographed from the earth. Then the team combined multiple cleaned-up images to recover a clear image.

Dr. Noort used this technology to capture images of the sun’s surface of dimension 5,800 km x 4,350 km at a resolution of 19 km. This is like being able to spot a 10-rupee coin in Mumbai from Pune. Thus, the team found that the edges of the solar granules are innumerable small coils of plasma, each only 25-170 km long, separated by around

65 km. And they had their own little magnetic fields.

Wind over a river

The researchers also found that these small plasma coils moved along the boundaries of the granules, twisting and interacting with one another. And as they did, they generated whirlpools in the plasma – vortices that spun rapidly and changed shape within seconds.

When a strong wind blows over a calm river, small whirlpools form on the water. Generally, physicists say, a vortex is formed at the interface where two adjacent fluids move past each other at different speeds. The same thing has been found happening on the sun.

Scientists have previously found such whirlpools in the atmosphere of gaseous planets like Jupiter.

This is the first time scientists have seen such a wave moving on the surface of the sun.

These whirlpools in the sun’s plasma also rapidly grow in size. The scientists found that the fastest-growing vortices became 2.7-times larger than their original size in just 18 seconds. Even those that grew a little slower took only 71 seconds to reach this size. They rotated at about 1.6-2.8 km/s.

The scientists found that, over three minutes, these whirlpools constantly

form, merge with each other, and break up again.

A new way

The team confirmed its observations with the DKIST using magneto-hydrodynamics simulations on a computer. In both cases, the vortices’ rotational speed and energy were the same. In other words, these whirlpools are essentially the sun’s engines: they capture the sun’s internal magnetic energy and radiate it out into the universe.

The simulations also suggested the whirlpools lie 100-400 km below the photosphere.

The findings give solar physicists a new way to investigate the boundary between convection and magnetism. The whirlpools generate turbulence and continuously distort the magnetic fields. In doing so, they could provide the small-scale motion needed to braid magnetic field lines and release magnetic energy higher in the atmosphere.

The next step is to determine how much energy these instabilities transport and how the small vortices are connected to the more energetic events of the sun’s atmosphere.

(Shamim Haque Mondal is with the Physics Division, State Forensic Science Laboratory, Kolkata. shamimmondal709@gmail.com)

THE GIST

New images captured by the world’s largest telescope have provided the clearest view yet of the sun’s surface, helping scientists better understand how energy and magnetic fields move through its atmosphere

Scientists used the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope in Hawaii, which has a giant four metres mirror, to capture the sharpest images of the sun’s surface; its advanced imaging capabilities allowed researchers to observe tiny solar features that smaller telescopes could not detect

Scientists found that tiny plasma coils on the sun’s surface continuously move, twist and interact, and create fast-spinning whirlpools similar to those formed when strong winds disturb water. These vortices grow rapidly, merge and break apart within seconds, revealing a highly dynamic process never before observed

BIG SHOT



In this drone photo released by the Geological Agency (Badan Geologi) of Indonesia’s Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Mount Anak Krakatau spews volcanic smoke in Sunda Strait, Indonesia on September 5. AP

WHAT IS IT?

Sulphuric acid: not so deadly

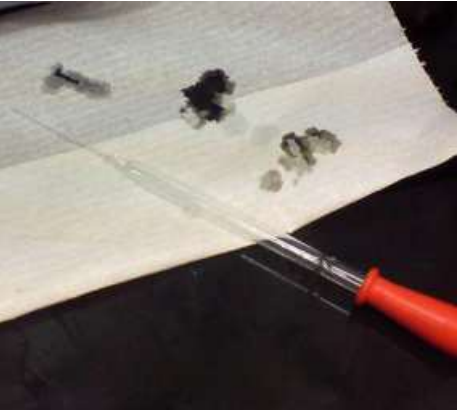
Vasudevan Mukunth

Researchers have found that certain peptides — short chains of amino acids that make up proteins — are not only stable in 98% concentrated sulphuric acid but also fold into the complex 3D shapes required to perform the functions central to life.

Thus, the findings, published *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* on September 4, defy the assumption that concentrated sulphuric acid is a bane for the building blocks of life. Scientists had previously found nucleic acid bases and amino acids to be stable in the same solvent; this is the first time a macromolecule important to biology has been shown to be capable of the same feat.

Normally, strong acids break down peptides in a process called hydrolysis; as the name suggests, water molecules break down one or more important bonds. Since 98% sulphuric acid contains almost no water, the reaction that would normally shred the peptide bonds can’t happen, allowing the peptides to remain stable for several weeks at room temperature.

Using nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, the researchers found that these peptides folded into a specific shape called an omega loop, using the sulphuric acid molecules themselves as a kind of scaffolding to help maintain the shape.



Drops of 98% concentrated sulphuric acid rapidly dehydrate tissue paper, leaving behind carbon, which stains it black. PUBLIC DOMAIN

This is however a significant departure from how proteins behave in water, where they typically form different structures like helices or sheets.

The findings are important for the search for life beyond the earth. For example, Venus is covered in clouds of concentrated sulphuric acid, which scientists previously assumed were too harsh an environment to host any complex chemistry. The new findings question this assumption.



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GDP debate is not about numbers alone. It is about trust deficit



ABHISHEK ANAND, JOSH FELMAN AND ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN

THE RELEASE of new GDP data, always contentious, has again sparked a lively debate. Former finance secretary Subhash Garg has asserted that the Ministry of Statistics and Planning Implementation (MoSPI) headed by Saurabh Garg has vastly overstated growth by reducing the previous year’s output. Who is right? Consider our five-fold assessment.

First, MOSPI’s response is plausible on some technicalities. Subhash Garg is comparing 2026-27 GDP calculated using the new base and the latest methodology to the 2025-26 numbers produced using the old base and previous methodology. This compares apples to oranges. Applying the new methodology to both years yields real growth of 7.8 per cent. MoSPI is also right that value added deflators can rise less than the CPI or WPI; and can even be negative (but, of course, only rarely, when input prices rise sharply relative to output prices).

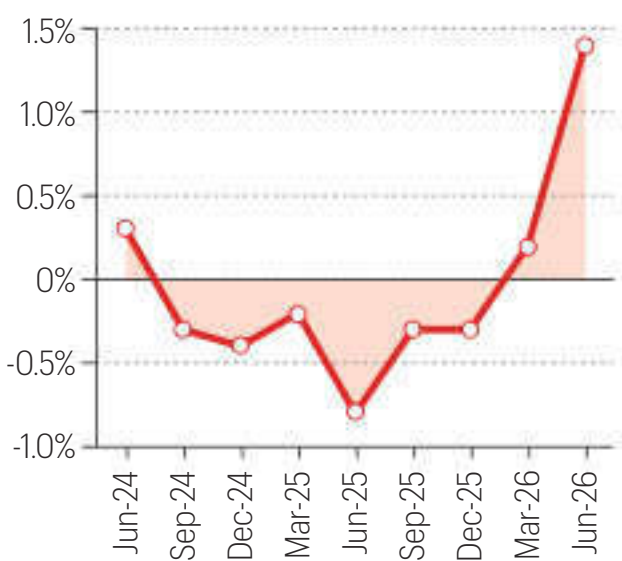
More importantly, there are reasons to believe that growth was good in the first quarter, even if the precise magnitude is open to question. As government spokesmen have pointed out, some of the macro-economic indicators — exports, credit and sales — rose strongly during the period.

So, why all the controversy? This brings us to our second point: The government’s handling of data has created a fundamental trust deficit. Scepticism about GDP dates back at least to 2016-17, when the official data showed growth accelerating to a dizzy 8.2 per cent in a year when 86 per cent of cash was withdrawn.

The problems go well beyond GDP, and include the delayed census, the withdrawn 2017 consumption survey, the understated Covid, and exaggerated claims about open defecation. Unsurprisingly, the public seems to have replaced its traditional “trust-but-verify” attitude

Fig 1: Energy Shock

Year on year percentage change in price of Indian oil imports multiplied by the share of energy imports in GDP)



Sources: Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Ministry of Commerce. **Note:** Energy imports comprise oil, natural gas and fertilizers.

with a “doubt-but-remain-open” approach to the data: The burden of proof has shifted to the government.

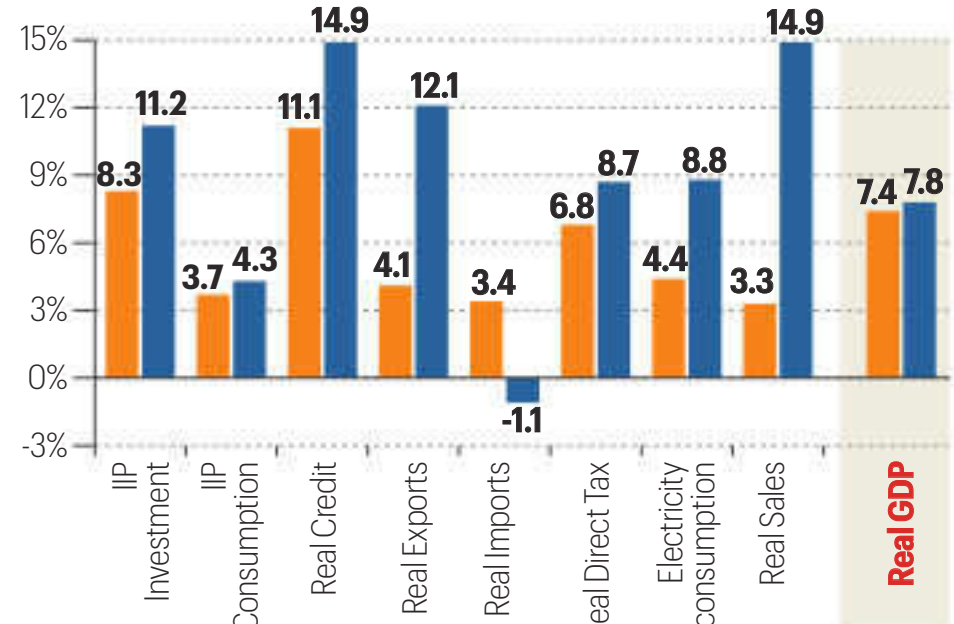
This trust deficit explains why Subhash Garg’s criticism has touched a nerve. Public doubts have been fuelled because the government has done little to dispel his allegation that backward revisions are aimed at boosting current growth rates. It has not explained why first quarter 2025-26 GDP was revised down by 7 per cent when the methodology changed, nor released a long back series that would explain when the loss of growth actually occurred.

Moreover, while MoSPI has addressed many issues with the annual GDP series, challenges remain with the quarterly GDP numbers. MoSPI does not have good, timely information on unlisted firms or the informal economy, together accounting for nearly 45 per cent of the economy. Historically, their performance has been proxied using large listed companies — an assumption our Peterson Institute for International Economics working paper shows has not held over the past decade. The problem may have been acute in the first quarter because the energy shock disproportionately affected smaller enterprises.

Third, the numbers seem de-

Fig 2: GDP Growth & Macro-Economic Indicators

(annual average for FY24-26)



Sources: MoSPI; RBI; and Ministry of Power. **Note:** Real exports and imports refer to exports and imports of goods and services, respectively. Real sales are based on the performance of listed non-government non-financial companies. Real credit, real sales and real direct tax are nominal values deflated by core CPI.

coupled from felt reality and economic reasoning. April and May 2026 were months of fuel rationing, curbing travel and forcing businesses such as restaurants to buy LPG cylinders on the black market or shut down. This came amid long-standing tepid wage growth, poor job creation, a sagging stock-market, and a currency under intense pressure — all contributing to growing anxiety among the young, reflected in the recent student protests.

It is also difficult to understand how the economy accelerated amid such a large energy shock. A decade ago, falling oil prices were rightly seen as a huge wind-fall for Indian growth. By the same logic, the recent rise in energy costs — equivalent to a tax increase of around 1.5 per cent of GDP — should have imposed a substantial drag (Figure 1).

There were offsets, including fiscal stimulus and stronger exports, but these seem smaller than the damage from a 32 per cent increase in import prices. Indeed, the RBI recently estimated that the economy slowed in the first quarter. Merely sustaining growth in these circumstances would have been impressive. Yet MoSPI estimates that growth accelerated by nearly one percentage point.

By way of explanation, some commentators have pointed out that other Asian countries have done reasonably well. But Korea and Singapore are benefitting from the AI boom, while other countries are commodity exporters benefitting from higher prices, none of which applies to India. So, a convincing explanation still eludes.

Fourth, the government must rebuild credibility. It needs to explain, backed by economic research, precisely what caused the economy to accelerate amidst the energy troubles. This explanation should also address some obvious puzzles. If the economy was booming, why did net GST revenue grow just 5 per cent, even allowing for the GST rate cuts? And why did import volumes fall? And how could the manufacturing deflator have been negative when RBI data show that business margins actually improved?

The government should release the complete “Sources and Methods” document, which explains exactly how the GDP is calculated and, importantly, revised; how much double deflation is actually done and what prices underlie that. By making the MoSPI’s new methodology public, independent economists can discover how the numbers were derived and reassure the public that the data indeed make sense.

Fifth, the government must acknowledge GDP over-estimation in the past: The government should be consistent in its claims. It defends the latest numbers by pointing fairly to the performance of a few co-incident macro-indicators, as mentioned above. But the same logic raises questions about the 7-8 per cent GDP growth recorded over much of the previous 14 years.

Figure 2 compares these indicators for two periods: The current quarter and the previous three years, all based on the new methodology. If these indicators support the claim of 7.8 per cent GDP growth today, how can a broadly similar GDP growth in the previous years be plausible when many of these indicators (notably sales, trade, electricity, investment) were so much weaker?

After all, what is sauce for the goose today is sauce for the gander over the past.

Anand is affiliated with the Madras Institute for Development Studies, Felman is with JH Consulting, and Subramanian is former chief economic advisor to the Government of India

The problems go well beyond GDP, and include the delayed census, the withdrawn 2017 consumption survey, the understated Covid, and exaggerated claims about open defecation



SUMANA ROY

IT WASN’T “*shakti*” but “*bhakti*” that I heard when the schoolgirl Jaya Bhaduri sang “*Hum ko mann ki shakti dena ...*” in the film *Guddi*. It must have seemed natural to me that the close-eyed obedience of the student was a form of *bhakti*. Our conditioning in the ritual of prayer is such that we internalise the priest’s instructions, the closing of the eyes, the folding of our hands, the semi-ceremonial opening of the eyes, so that it seems that what was in front of us appears slightly different now. This insight seems to be the ambition of the teacher in the classroom, and it is easy to make an analogical connection between prayer and the classroom period. When I say “prayer”, I’m thinking of the dialogue and discussion with oneself and life that Henri Matisse, in an extraordinary phrase about creative practice, called the “state of mind that approaches prayer”.

We imagine *bhakti* to be close-eyed adoration, the reason we dismiss the blind veneration of a political party with a catch-all phrase like *bhakt*. There are at least two elisions happening here. The first is the Bhakti tradition of literary and spiritual practice — *bhakti*, which originally meant devotion, worship, homage, piety, became critique, a resistance to the caste system, and to a monolingual culture of worship for the Bhakti poets. It was also playful-

Though Nietzsche dances in their classrooms, they ignore texts like ‘Twilight of the Idols’ that criticise this neediness of the teacher to be the recipient of bhakti: ‘Thou seekest followers? Then thou seekest ciphers’

ness, the remnants of which we see in both the student and the teacher comically opening one eye during the prayer song in *Guddi*. *Bhakti* was — this scene reminds us — a critique of the idea of god and *bhakti* itself.

The other kind of elision has to do with the *bhakt* of the personality cult. Those who ridicule the *andh bhakt* are *bhakt*s of another kind — an endorsement by a famous writer, a meeting with a well-known academic, among other teenagerish things, mark their behaviour. There’s an important difference between these two kinds of *bhakt*s though — the *andh bhakt* wants to remain a *bhakt*, in the belief that they will be protected by the object of their adoration; the *bhakt* of academia and the literary world wants to be the recipient of such *bhakti* themselves. The *andh bhakt* worships the powerful, the academic-*bhakt* the powerless, so that both transform into a fetish. One wants to remain

Hanuman, the other lives with the belief that it’s only a matter of time that they too will become Foucault.

Though Nietzsche dances in their classrooms, they ignore texts like *Twilight of the Idols* that criticise this neediness of the teacher to be the recipient of *bhakti*: “Thou seekest followers? Then thou seekest ciphers”. “Star professor” — a coinage that competes in cringe quotient with the “university don”

of a previous era — should be an oxymoron in the classroom; but star professors — and everyone likes to think of themselves as one — lubricate the personality cult, seemingly unaware that it is a weapon of bullying and indoctrination. Ursula K Le Guin has spoken about the stranglehold of such a power equation: “I hope you live without the need to dominate, and without the need to be dominated. I hope you are never victims, but I hope you have no power over other people.”

Jacques Derrida had deconstruction, René Girard mimetism, “I have no logo, no brand. But a philosophy does not spread without a logo,” rued Michel Serres, an extraordinary thinker and teacher. Substitute “philosophy” with “philosopher” or “professor”, and it’ll explain why Serres — and various other writers, thinkers and critics — are not on the Humanities syllabus. “Stand out of my sunlight” — Diogenes, the “beggar philosopher” is said to have told Alexander when asked what he wanted. The young conqueror was so struck by the philosopher’s contempt and detachment that he’s believed to have said, “But as for me, if I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes.”

Instead of conquering the classroom like Alexander, I wish that teachers stood out of students’ sunlight.

Roy is a poet and writer. Views are personal

Note to teachers: Stand out of students’ sunlight



UDAYAN DAS

THE RECENT Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit offers a useful reminder of the limits of India’s efforts to isolate Pakistan at the global level. Pakistan assumed the rotational presidency of a multilateral organisation which has counter-terrorism at its heart. Is Pakistan undercutting India’s relations with other states? Is India adequately expanding ties with other states to counter this? Strategically speaking, India’s policies have the right objectives. Weakening Islamabad on the global stage, ensuring sanctions, and rallying condemnation are common playbooks of statecraft. Where it is going wrong is in assuming that

it is easy to effectively isolate a state. Interests drive state policy more than morality does. States are far more likely to react to an issue that affects their interests directly. Therefore, Pakistan remains a bilateral problem for India, and other states share little overlapping concern with New Delhi.

States also make themselves useful to others despite their differences. Take, for instance, US relations with Pakistan in the post-Cold War era. Washington has been harsh on Islamabad on several occasions, particularly on the issue of terrorism, and aid has been granted, suspended, curtailed, and restarted repeatedly. Yet the Americans remained engaged with Pakistan, largely because of their interests in Afghanistan. Nor has the Iran war been the first time Pakistan mediated between states; recall the famed realignment of the US and China during the

Cold War. Flexible diplomacy can align interests despite moral complaints, and for states, that matters more.

A strategy focused solely on isolating Pakistan will not prove efficient for India. A more effective strategy is to steadily strip it of its ability to limit India’s options. Consider the relationship between India and the US over the last two decades. Washington did not abandon its engagement with Islamabad, but its engagement with New Delhi grew across a wide range of issues, involving economic, security, and political

Isolation does not happen in a vacuum, but in relative terms. If one wishes to isolate a rival, stronger positioning is the key

convergences. The de-hyphenation of India and Pakistan took place during this period. The US was also seen as decisively favouring India when it came to South Asia because of its overarching regional interests. The key to negate Pakistan’s influence would be to make India’s already existing security and defence relations stronger. Donald Trump’s tenure so far has not been the best for India; however, the deep strategic ties over the last two decades allow some consistency and reliability for India-US relations. This includes the existing issues of the defence partnership, critical and emerging technologies, along with fronts like the 2+2 and the Quad.

Saudi Arabia, too, has a long history of relations with Pakistan, yet India was still able to develop consistent relations with it, owing to economic and strategic conver-

gences. In both cases, India’s positioning rendered Pakistan’s equations with these states largely irrelevant.

Isolation does not happen in a vacuum, but in relative terms. If one wishes to isolate a rival, stronger positioning is the key. A measure of this is when other states do the de-hyphenation, choose to engage with you more, and find greater interest in siding with you in a crisis. If these boxes are ticked, the rival is already isolated, regardless of official statements. This strategy should extend in multilateral forums like SCO and BRICS where India’s relations with other states need to be aligned.

The writer teaches in the Department of Political Science, St. Xavier’s College (Autonomous), Kolkata and is a visiting fellow, Asian Confluence, Shillong

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Climate commitments

THE RISE in climate-related calamities, most recently the Nepal flood tragedy, confirms that urbanisation has pushed ecological balance much beyond its limits (‘In a warming world, reframe climate task’, IE, September 5). While the UNFCCC’s Loss and Damage Fund addresses financial losses, it remains inadequate given the intensity of the disasters. The question is: What about the human cost — the displaced families, the missing people and the damaged homes?

Paavni Srivastava, Dhenkanal

THE UNEP’s report acknowledges that exceeding the 1.5°C threshold is now unavoidable, but it does not suggest surrendering the objectives of the Paris Agreement (‘In a warming world, reframe climate task’, IE, September 5). Instead, the international community should emphasise limiting the magnitude and duration of this overshoot by reassessing the adequacy of existing climate strategies. Climate action cannot remain confined to long-term declarations; it should shift towards faster emission reductions that are measurable and hold countries accountable for their commitments.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

Brewing storm

WHILE RECENT GDP figures offer a comforting snapshot, the brewing storm in global bond markets signals that our current economic stability is largely a mirage (‘Beyond GDP, brace for turbulence ahead’, IE, September 5). With soaring long-term interest rates abroad, the cost of borrowing dollars and the burden of hedging against rupee depreciation are quietly becoming unsustainable. We must face the structural reality that expensive foreign capital will eventually drain our reserves. A pragmatic way forward demands fiscal discipline over populist spending, paired with export promotion and a reduction in duties.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

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• **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

Claude’s ‘thought process’ & AI consciousness debate



ANIL SASI

WILL ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI) be able to outperform human intelligence—and, if yes, will that will happen in the foreseeable future — is a recurrent question fuelled by the portrayal of AI in popular culture. Central to this comparison is a clear need to define the term “intelligence”.

So, when Anthropic’s research, led by its ‘Model Psych’ team leader Jack Lindsey, found something like an internal thought process in the workings of its AI chatbot Claude Sonnet 4.5 — words that were related to its eventual outputs but invisible to the user — the debate was reignited.

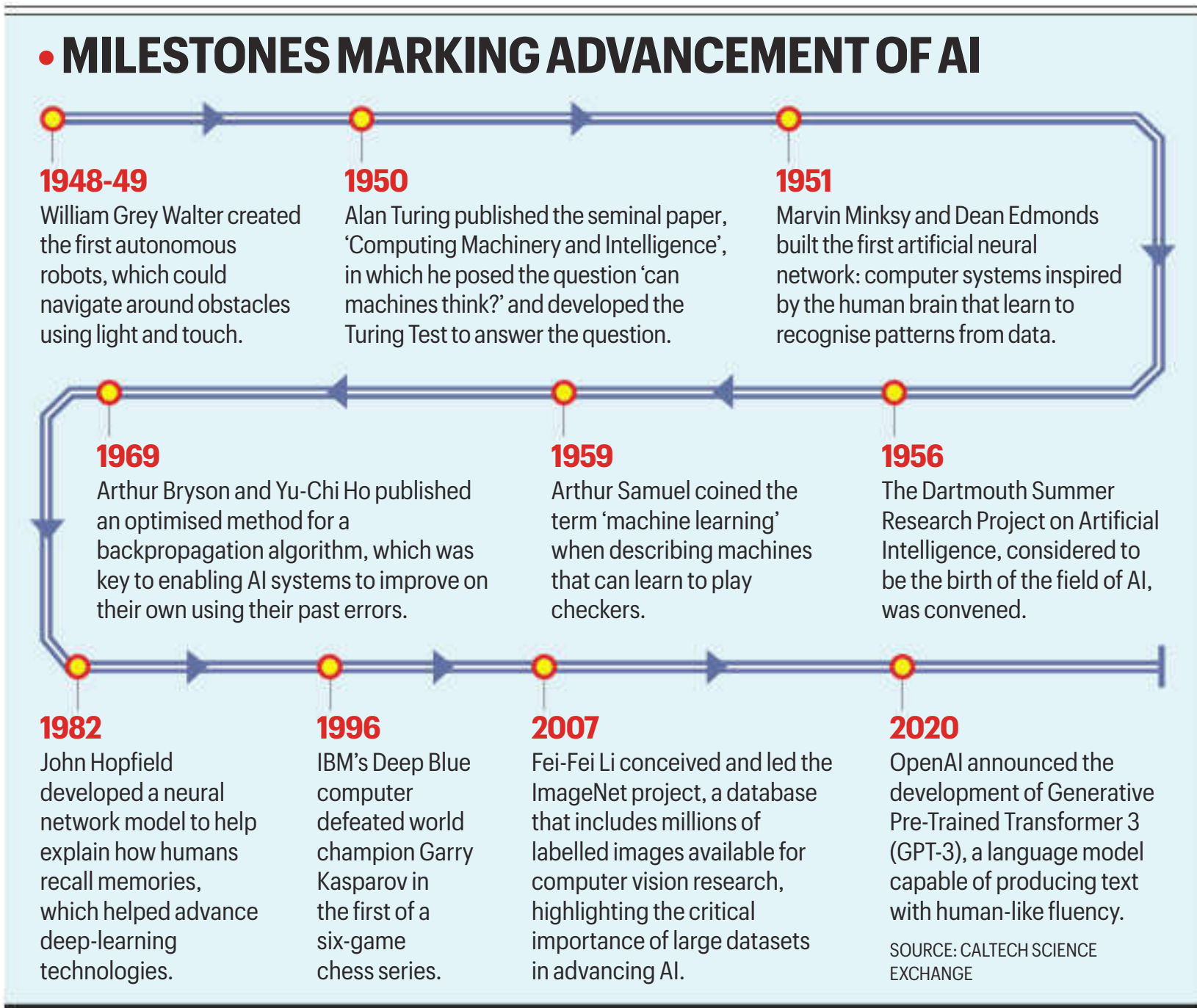
The AI company published a book-length research paper about the inner workings of large language models and put out a blog post announcing the results of this new paper in July, titled *A global work-space in language models*. The study presents evidence that a Claude has developed “a small collection of internal neural patterns that, compared to all its other internal processing, play a special role”.

J-space

Anthropic is calling the collection of these patterns ‘J-space’—short for Jacobian space and named after the technique used to find patterns. Essentially, these are patterns in a subset of Claude models’ inner computations and provide a mathematical approximation of an LLM’s working memory. Each J-space pattern is linked to a particular word; when one of these patterns lights up, it doesn’t mean the model is saying that word—just that the word is on its mind.

The J-space is essentially something that operates silently, in the model’s internal neural activations, allowing the model to think about a concept without writing it down. What is important is the clarification by Anthropic: that the J-space wasn’t designed or programmed by the model maker, but instead emerged on its own during Claude’s training process.

So does this answer the search for consciousness inside large language models



Anthropic has found something like an ‘internal monologue’ in the workings of its chatbot. Experts believe consciousness is still far off

broadcast in words,” according to Bergmann.

For instance, in the experiment of Claude Sonnet 4.5, Anthropic researchers asked the LLM to count to five and, at the same time, “introspect deeply”. The artificial intelligence model complied, dutifully coming up with 1,2,3,4,5. During this task, the researchers were observing what was going on inside the LLM’s many layers of artificial neural networks.

For a long time, these layers have remained largely impenetrable. But what surprised the researchers when they parsed through the layers as the model counted the sequence of five numbers was that different words kept popping up in the layers underneath. ‘Countdown’ was one such word. Then midway through the output, the word ‘halfway’ appeared. After the model produced the number five, it said nothing else to the researchers, but the word ‘done’ appeared in its neural layers.

This can be likened to an internal thought process, words that were related to Claude’s eventual outputs but were not visible to the user.

Seth is clear in his view that biological traits may be necessary to produce consciousness. And we’re nowhere close to that. Anthropic said its J-space experiments do not show Claude can have experiences or feel things the way humans do, so that means there is no evidence of consciousness.

But the J-Space appears to support the functions associated with conscious access. It holds the thoughts Claude can report on, deliberately bring to mind, and reason with, while the rest of its processing runs automatically beneath.

“This work is just a first step in what we expect to be an extensive line of research. The J-space looks like a good candidate for the divide between consciously accessible and unconscious processing in a language model, but we’d be surprised if it’s the whole story... And there remain many mysteries about how the J-space works,” Anthropic said in its blogpost.

“We don’t know what mechanism decides what enters the J-space in the first place. We’ve seen hints that it’s tied to Claude’s sense of self, something like emotional reactions, and traces of metacognition, without exactly having worked out how. But we now have methods for tackling questions like these. As that work progresses, our understanding of LLM minds—and their relationship to our own—will grow clearer,” it added.

and others are building may well move the needle on the potential for consciousness. The reason is that, all else equal, the more similar our technologies are to real brains, the more plausible consciousness becomes. The challenge is that we don’t yet know what difference makes the difference,” Seth told *The Indian Express*.

The difference

So, what exactly does this step-by-step thinking on the backend look like? According to AI researcher Dave Bergmann, when a reasoning LLM shows you its reasoning steps, that output is the equivalent of someone thinking out loud. (In technical terms, it’s reasoning in the token space.)

“Imagine yourself cooking a simple meal and narrating every step out loud, like you are hosting a cooking show: how you know when the pan is hot enough, why you are adding salt after a quick taste test, how you’re cutting this vegetable and why. You’re still not saying every thought aloud. There’s a distinct inner monologue in your head that doesn’t get fully or faithfully

Thoughts?

Anthropic researchers asked the LLM to count to five and “introspect deeply”.

As the chatbot finished the task, words kept popping up in its neural layers underneath. ‘Countdown’ was one such word. Midway through the output, the word ‘halfway’ appeared.

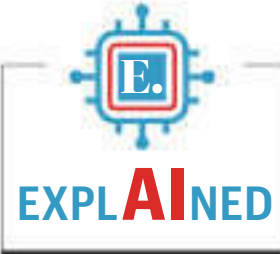
(LLMs) such as Claude, and can algorithms one day wake up and develop feelings? There are divergent answers.

Anil K Seth, Professor of Cognitive and Computational Neuroscience, University of Sussex and Director of the University’s Sussex Centre for Consciousness Science, said this is not really anywhere close. “I study consciousness, and I have my doubts,” Seth has maintained.

AI pioneer Geoffrey Hinton, meanwhile, has consistently said that chatbots have “subjective experience”, challenging the human belief in unique consciousness.

Does the kind of ‘biological computer’ that Australian startup Cortical Labs seems to be developing — a computer with human neurons mounted on silicon — potentially hold greater promise than Claude’s most recent experiment in achieving some sort of sentence? “The kind of bio-hybrid computers that Cortical Labs

human neurons mounted on silicon — potentially hold greater promise than Claude’s most recent experiment in achieving some sort of sentence? “The kind of bio-hybrid computers that Cortical Labs



A weekly column decoding AI’s new frontiers, how they shape the world and our place in it

• **HEALTH**

What is postpartum psychosis, can it affect criminal responsibility?

Anagha Jayakumar
New Delhi, September 6

A CLOSELY watched legal case in the US, involving a mother killing her three children, was declared a mistrial last week. Lawyers defending Lindsay Clancy, 36, had argued that jurors should find her not guilty by reason of insanity, citing a condition known as postpartum psychosis for her actions.

With the jurors unable to reach a unanimous verdict, prosecutors could seek a retrial with a new jury.

What is the condition?

“A most basic description of psychosis is that someone is out of touch with reality,” Susan Hatters-Friedman, forensic and reproductive psychiatrist at Ohio’s Case Western University, told *The Indian Express*.

Postpartum psychosis is a state in which mothers who have recently given birth may experience delusions, hallucinations, irritable or depressed mood and insomnia, she added. Its symptoms can wax and wane quickly, but the condition is not synony-

mous with violent tendencies. Its cause remains unclear, but risk is higher among people with bipolar disorder, a previous episode of postpartum psychosis or other psychosis, and a family history of psychotic illness.

In comparison, postpartum depression is more common, Hatters-Friedman said, where mothers experience symptoms of depression.

Clancy’s symptoms reportedly included hallucinations following the birth of her third child. She also physically harmed herself after the killings.

But psychosis does not always mean that a person appears disorganised. “A lot of it comes down to how organised the person’s mind is in their state of psychosis, in any psychotic disorder (such as schizophrenia). For example, someone could still be hearing voices and experiencing delusions, but be able to plan behaviour,” Hatters-Friedman said.

She added that in her research and forensic experience, “altruistic” and “acutely psychotic” motives are the two most commonly found among mothers de-

The case

● Lindsay Clancy is accused of fatally strangling her three children — five-year-old Cora, three-year-old Dawson, and eight-month-old Callan — at the family’s home on January 24, 2023.

● The judge in her case declared a mistrial on September 4 after the jury was unable to reach a unanimous verdict. The court will now reconvene at the end of the month to decide what happens next.



Lindsay Clancy tried to harm herself too. AP

clared legally insane. The former involves a belief that killing is in the child’s best interests, while the latter refers to killings driven by psychosis without a clearly apparent motive.

When is it legally relevant?

A postpartum diagnosis does not automatically imply that a person is legally insane or not criminally responsible. In

Massachusetts, where the trial took place, the legal question is whether a defendant is criminally responsible under what is commonly called the insanity defence.

The burden of proving criminal responsibility “beyond a reasonable doubt” rests with the prosecution. It must establish either that the defendant had no mental disease or defect at the time of the offence, or retained substantial capacity to appreciate the wrongfulness of their conduct and conform it to the law.

Psychiatric experts can offer opinion on whether a defendant was experiencing psychosis based on evidence of their past behaviour, but the jury ultimately decides on criminal responsibility.

A lack of criminal responsibility does not imply an ordinary acquittal and release. In Massachusetts, a person found not guilty by reason of mental illness or defect may be ordered to undergo up to 40 days of observation and examination. The state may then seek a commitment order.

Hatters-Friedman said that a lack of awareness of the condition by the legal system and the public also affects such cases.

• **GEOPOLITICS**

Banque Misr sanctions: US widens economic war with Iran

Moinuddin Ahmad
New Delhi, September 6

EXPANDING THE scope of ‘Operation Economic Outcast’, the Secretary of the United States Department of Treasury, Scott Bessent, last month issued an order that identified the United Arab Emirates branches of Banque Misr—Egypt’s second-largest state-owned financial institution—as a body of “primary money laundering concern.” The Treasury claimed that the bank’s UAE operations were processing transactions for accounts linked to Iran’s shadow-banking networks.

The Treasury proposed invoking Special Measure Five under Section 311 of the USA PATRIOT Act, which allows the Secretary to target specific money laundering and terrorist financing risks. The move applies only to Banque Misr’s five branches in the UAE — its operations in Egypt and other countries are outside its scope.

What are the UAE branches accused of doing?

Since the primary US sanctions prohibit Iranian banks from accessing US dollars, Tehran uses multi-jurisdictional “shadow-banking” architectures to monetise export revenues (primarily petroleum and petrochemicals) and buy foreign goods. According to the US Treasury, the mechanism functions through layered commercial intermediaries.

The Iranian network established shell companies registered in commercial hubs across the world, the US Treasury said. These firms posed as standard commercial entities engaging in food, consumer goods, or general commodities trade. The ultimate owners were tied to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran’s Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, and financial entities managing assets for the Supreme Leader.

The US Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement

Network (FinCEN) found that front entities held accounts at Banque Misr UAE. When these entities initiated foreign exchange transfers in US dollars, Banque Misr UAE routed the instructions through its correspondent bank accounts in the US. Banque Misr UAE was found to have transacted about \$1.8 billion between January 2024 and June 2026 for 103 companies. Transactions worth \$520 million took place during the last 12 months, alleged the FinCEN.

• **COMPOUNDING IRAN’S WOES**

● Tehran is testing its endurance against severe domestic economic strain.

● Deprived of hard-currency inflows, the Iranian rial faces rapid devaluation, exacerbating hyperinflation and shrinking domestic consumer purchasing power. The US hopes that the fresh sanctions will force Iran to capitulate.

Why an Egyptian bank?

Tehran exploited key structural features of regional North African bank branches instead of attempting to bypass the heavy, AI-driven compliance systems of major Western banks in Dubai, the US says.

Banque Misr UAE is involved in routine trade finance and worker remittances. Iran-backed companies, posing as general traders, chose places like Dubai and Hong Kong because these cities are considered neutral hubs. Unlike major international banks that rely on advanced real-time ownership-tracing tools, smaller bank branches still use standard, static name-matching software. Hence, Iran worked with layered shell companies and proxy directors to bypass basic filters.

What will be the likely impact?

Financial institutions in the US are expected to end ties with Banque Misr UAE once the 30-day public consultation ends and the official rule is enacted. This will result in Banque Misr losing its capability to clear USD. Corporate account holders will also have to go for transactions in local dirhams (AED) or alternative foreign currencies.

Major international institutions, including JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, and Deutsche Bank, are likely to tighten compliance oversight across Egypt’s financial system. These possible changes, in turn, can hike transaction fees and increase clearance time.

West Asian financial hubs like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha will remain vigilant. The Treasury action comes as a warning for many banks in the region. The move also comes as the first phase of what could be the future of US sanctions against overseas branches in allied states without penalising the parent institutions.

• **HISTORY**

Rajghat artefacts: A 1950s excavation sheds new light on Varanasi’s ancient past

Adrija Roychowdhury
New Delhi, September 6

THE BANARAS Hindu University (BHU) recently examined 22 boxes stored with it for around 70 years, containing more than 10,000 artefacts, including painted black pottery believed to be 3,000 years old. The artefacts were excavated from Rajghat, one of the oldest known settlements in the Varanasi region, between 1957 and 1969.

Earlier in August, experts had opened a box containing a human skeleton recovered from the same site.

Rajghat’s significance

Rajghat today refers to a neighbourhood located in eastern Varanasi. But the Rajghat archaeological site refers to the ancient settlement located on the north-eastern outskirts of the city, near the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Varana.

Archaeologist and former professor of archaeology at BHU, Vidula Jaiswal, explained that Rajghat is identified as the

capital of the Kashi Janapada. Janapadas were territorial kingdoms or political units in ancient India, particularly during the later Vedic period. Some of these janapadas grew into larger, more powerful kingdoms known as mahajanapadas by the 6th century BCE. Early Buddhist and Jain texts mention Kashi as one of 16 mahajanapadas in the Indo-Gangetic plain.

The region of Kashi, more popularly known as Varanasi, is dotted with several ancient settlements. A number of them have been excavated in the last few decades, which includes Aktha, Ramnagar, Samath and Rajghat. Jaiswal, who has led excavations at eight sites in the region, concluded that while Samath emerged as a pilgrimage site, Rajghat developed as the main urban centre.

Excavations at Rajghat

The settlement at Rajghat first came to archaeological attention in 1940, when a railway contractor reported finding archaeological remains while excavating earth for



A storage jar from the Gupta period. BHU

the extension and remodelling of Kashi Railway Station. The archaeologist Krishna Deva then took up trial excavation of the site on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of

India (ASI) in October-November of the year. Consequently, excavations were carried out at three mounds at Rajghat in 1957 by A K Narain and his colleagues from BHU’s Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology. Conducted in four phases over 12 years, the excavations unearthed a large number of significant artefacts. The lowest, and therefore oldest, layer of the settlement yielded pre-Northern Black Polished Ware (pre-NBPW), a type of pottery associated with an earlier phase of the Iron Age.

Based on this evidence, the origins of the settlement at Rajghat were dated to around 800 BCE.

Several years later, in the early 2000s, Jaiswal and archaeologist B R Mani re-excavated Rajghat to verify the dating of its oldest layer. “We just dug the lower levels of the site, starting from the Kushana period (1st century BCE to 3rd century CE), and kept going further down,” Jaiswal said.

Scientific analysis of the artefacts recovered from these layers subsequently

confirmed the date of the settlement’s oldest layer as around 800 BCE.

Among the artefacts recovered from the site are hundreds of seals and sealings. Professor Prasad Ahirwar, head of the department at BHU, said that the seals are the most important artefacts from Rajghat. “Many of them carry Greek inscriptions. Several of them carry names of the administrative units and their officials,” he said. That apart, ivory and iron objects, punch-marked coins, and terracotta figurines have also been found.

The significance of these finds, said Ahirwar, is in tracing the development of human civilisation in the subcontinent.

Centenary celebrations

The recent documentation of the Rajghat artefacts, said Ahirwar, is part of the centenary celebrations of his department at BHU. The idea was to preserve all the past work that the department has done over the last 100 years, and lay them out in the public domain for future generations

of researchers. “There are also plans for developing a museum in future,” Ahirwar said.

The documentation, which started from January this year, has already recorded about 4,000 artefacts. Ahirwar believes that there are close to 10,000 objects from Rajghat alone.

He also pointed out that the Rajghat excavation reports are already in the public domain and the artefacts have been available to researchers all these years. Some researchers have also studied the material. However, this is the first concerted and organised effort to document all the findings.

The human skeleton is the only artefact that has been opened for the first time. “When Professor Narain excavated it in the 1960s, we did not have the technology to analyse human remains,” said Ahirwar. With advances in techniques such as DNA sampling and analysis, he believes the skeleton could now yield more information about the age, ancestry and lifestyle of the people who lived in the region in antiquity.

WHY CHRISTOPHER COOTER

About three years ago, Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's allegation of 'potential' involvement of Indian government agents in the killing of pro-Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar — a charge India rejected as 'absurd' and 'motivated' — had derailed ties between India and Canada. In June last year, the two countries hit the reset button and announced new envoys. Canadian High Commissioner to India, Christopher Cooter, has worked on repairing the relationship which led to PM Mark Carney's visit. He is best placed to explain the transformation in equations, Delhi's security concerns, cooperation in energy, education, visas, the West Asia war and ties with the US

Shubhajit Roy: It has been almost three years since your former Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, levelled allegations of Indian involvement in the killing of what our government views as a pro-Khalistan separatist, Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Why did he do that? Could you give a sense of the journey from there to now.

About that turbulent period, there was a killing in Canada. There is now a judicial process around that and arrests were made. It's before the courts, and we'll see what justice decides in the end. But more broadly, between the two countries, there was an absence of trust, which really broke down at the official level. Over the last year, there has been a rebuilding of that trust. You see it in the four meetings that the two PMs have had over the last year. You see it in the relationship we now have between security officials who met. They were in regular contact in the kind of practical things they do together now, so that they understand each other and we don't surprise each other with statements or events. We've taken a lot of steps to address the security concerns, first and foremost of Canadians, but they also speak to some of your security concerns. We've listed the Bishnoi gang as a terrorist entity, launched a financial crimes commission, we have the Indian community in Canada under threat of extortion from some of these gangs, and so a lot of work has been done by our police. There is now a good deal of cooperation between the two countries in dealing with these kinds of issues. We want to build something that we've never had before with India, and our Prime Minister is committed to it. I think Prime Minister Modi is equally committed.

Shubhajit Roy: Moving forward, have you been able to insulate the bilateral political diplomatic relationship from the trial and the investigations into the killing of Nijjar and other such activities in Canada?

Yes, we all recognise that things can happen. There are people out there who do not want this relationship to be a success, who promote a negative agenda between the two countries. That's what happened in the past. It could happen again in the future. There could be some unexpected event. So what we've done by these institutional linkages is to try to insulate. It's not to put it to one side but to address it in a manner in which we have a productive outcome, where we can anticipate problems and deal with them. There is remarkable progress in the last few months in getting to a place which we've never really been in before.

Shubhajit Roy: What is the different approach adopted by PM Carney as compared to PM Trudeau?

It is not just with respect to India. We will maintain our principles, of course, but we will be pragmatic. We will not take things off the table just because we don't agree with the way people are doing things. We will talk to everyone. And that has worked very much in the favour of improving the relationship. In the uncertain world that we now live in with respect to trade relationships, our PM, who has a strong economic background, having been the bank governor of both Canada, and of England, comes forward with a very strong economic pitch that we need to build our ties with. We need to, in a way, almost rebuild Canada. And as we do this, India is a key player on the global scene. So there's a recognition that we need to work with India. We also have this very large diaspora; it's almost two million people in Canada. One of the things I was struck by in India is that sense of relief that Canada and India had come back together again. There was an emotional piece to this, not just about security but a feeling that how could this happen — we're family. We are rebuilding that emotional connection at an individual as well as a collective level. We are at different places in development, different speeds, different needs in our economies, but there's an interesting relationship that just happens to work very, very well right now.

Shubhajit Roy: Amid the energy crisis and energy insecurity, how does Canada look at this war in West Asia and how can Canada and India cooperate in energy collaboration?

The crisis, the war in the Gulf, the Ukraine war, and even Covid, they've all been highly disruptive. The lessons we are taking away are that we need to have fewer eggs in one basket, more resilience and more redundancy. Of course, we all hope these wars end as soon as possible. I know that you've got 10 million people in the Gulf, with a lot at stake in that region. But if you look at Canada, what we offer is a reliable partner in energy, probably more than any other country in the world. We like to think of ourselves as an energy superpower. We are number four in oil reserves and production, number five in natural gas production, number five in LPG production, and number six in nuclear power. We also have all the critical minerals that go into the green transition: rare earths, lithium, graphite and so on. So what we offer is stability and an enormous variety of energy sources. We've got fossil fuels, transition fuels, and the technology to make those transition fuels work, like batteries, which we're producing in large numbers. We have a long history in nuclear power. When the PM was here, there was a sale of \$2.3 billion of uranium for your reactors. But beyond nu-



ON BRIDGING TRUST DEFICIT

'There was an absence of trust, which really broke down at the official level... There is remarkable progress in the last few months in getting to a place in which we've never really been before'



ON DEFENCE COOPERATION

'We've just agreed with the Europeans to develop 12 submarines. But what we lack is scale. As we grow together, we're hopeful our industries can work together to protect both countries, while giving us access to world market'

‘Working together, combining resources, talent, scale, we think India and Canada can be world beaters’

Christopher Cooter, Canadian High Commissioner to India, on a new chapter in India-Canada relations, expanding trade and navigating a changing world. The conversation was moderated by Shubhajit Roy, Diplomatic Editor, *The Indian Express*



Canadian High Commissioner Christopher Cooter (right) in conversation with Shubhajit Roy, Diplomatic Editor, *The Indian Express* RENUKA PURI

clear, we've never sold you oil, gas, or LPG. Those are all huge now in Canada, and the infrastructure to deliver them to you has improved enormously. By 2030, we'll be able to export 50 million tonnes of natural gas through our West Coast ports. We'll have a 400 per cent increase in our ability to export LPG. We have a pipeline exporting oil from the West Coast that, with a few tweaks, will be able to export about a million barrels. But we just announced another pipeline, allowing us to export two million barrels. We produce between five and six million barrels a day. Interestingly, you import about that amount per day, so we will have the capacity to supply a significant amount. If you've had difficulties with supply from the Gulf, suddenly Canada appears as exciting. On nuclear, we just announced a new nuclear policy, looking forward to producing up to 10 more reactors in Canada. That policy is focused on working with countries abroad on building their nuclear capacity. Eighteen of your 24 existing reactors are based on CANDU reactors, the Canadian technology. So as your energy needs grow and are distributed — for example, your PM spoke about the full electrification of your railway system — that takes a lot of power. Could that be something that a small modular reactor would be able to power? There is lots of interest in that field.

Shubhajit Roy: The other major takeaway from PM Carney's visit in March this year was the speeding up of negotiations to conclude a trade agreement — the CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement), by the end of the year. What are the issues and challenges? Are you confident it will be wrapped up by the end of the year?

I'm very confident that it will go forward. Both PMs have expressed their commitment several times. We like free trade agreements, good ones that work for us. We've done a number of them in the last year, giving us access to about one and a half billion people, and we expect we can even double that

amount. We did one in 47 days with the UAE recently. We took, unfortunately, 12 years the last time we tried negotiating with you and didn't get very far. That isn't going to happen this time. I'm confident that we're going to get this done soon.

There are two things that a trade agreement should achieve. One is that it increases the ease of doing business through the removal of tariffs. But the other is that it demonstrates that both countries are open to business. We also have a large trade delegation coming in October. There are other pieces to the economic equation that we're working on hard as well. When all these start to come to fruition, you'll see our overall economic relationship in a much stronger place. The two PMs committed to double trade by 2030. That sounds ambitious, but our trade is nowhere near where it should be. Even a few large agreements on energy or critical minerals could easily double or even triple. I think we should be even more ambitious and look beyond 2030. Where do we want to be for Viksit Bharat? That is probably the long-range frame that we need to think about. If you look at things like critical min-



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erals and opening a mine on a mineral like tungsten, we have 20 per cent of the world's reserves, that's important for defence, auto, and so on. We don't have a single active mine. So to get to the place where we have a mine, we need three to five years. So a lot of areas need some time to ripen. It fits so well with the Canadian economy, potential and our resources, human and natural. It fits so well with the way that your economy is growing that it's hard to imagine that we would not have a much bigger economic relationship, which the free trade agreement will facilitate.

Shubhajit Roy: US President Trump has taken a much more hardline approach with Canada, calling it the 51st state and almost berating the Canadians and the government. How do you view this to play out?

We are disappointed. And the PM said that we had to walk away from the talks because the demands at the end were just beyond what we could possibly meet, and they went beyond normal trade talks. The 51st state dimension, imposition on our cul-

tural sovereignty... Efforts to strain our ability to have free trade agreements with other countries. These were impositions that we couldn't accept. The US will always be an incredibly important partner for us: culturally, people-to-people, economic ties. That's a geographic and political reality. We'll find our way through this. But in parallel, diversification and building Canada stronger is not plan B; it's plan A. So, we are investing heavily into our own economy and resources. So, if the Americans think that we're going to just roll over because we don't have resources, they miscalculated. We really like Americans. We look like them, talk like them, all the rest of it. But we are going to protect that sovereignty. The talks have broken down, as you know, tariffs will be imposed on the Americans dollar for dollar, but we will do what's in the best interest of Canada.

Shubhajit Roy: On Canada's relationship with China, PM Carney reached out to President Xi. Given India's own complicated relationship with China, how do you view Canada's relationship with Beijing?

PM Carney was in China before he came to India. His foreign policy is based on pragmatism. As with India, we also have a very large diaspora from China in Canada and the economic relationship with Canada is very large. It's much bigger than the one we have with India and a lot of Canadian jobs are at stake in that relationship. So, he was determined to put that back on an even keel, which we've now done. We do see India and China as different kinds of countries. You're a democracy, a federal country. We share a language. We share a legal history, so that makes it easier for us to do business in some ways. Insurance, banking, all those kinds of things are founded in similar laws. There is always going to be an important Canadian-Chinese relationship. It will be different from the one that we have with you, different in quality and character.

Divya A: On a number of occasions the

Indian side has expressed concern about the political space given to separatist elements in Canada. How seriously has the current dispensation taken those concerns?

It's a democracy; people have a right to express themselves. We may not agree with them, but we do have to maintain that respect for the right of people to express their views, whether we like them or not. I think if you look at the report of our intelligence agency that was tabled before Parliament a few weeks ago, you'll see a tone that's a bit different. It talks about Khalistan actors. It talks about the Air India bombing, which we've commemorated. We are looking at that issue seriously, and the primary driver is never going to be about what another country thinks about it. It's going to be what protects our citizens. The Air India bombing killed a great many Canadian citizens, and I think that our agencies are aware of the risks.

Amrita Nayak Dutta: After March, when the maritime security partnership was announced, which also covered defence material cooperation, how has it progressed and what are the key things that you're looking at in that particular domain?

So, in the maritime, as we have in the joint statement that the two PMs agreed to, they foresee a defence dialogue to take place. We also would like to see our private sectors work together. We are ramping up rapidly on defence spending. About \$180 billion of that will be in procurement. I mentioned the \$500 billion between now and 2035, and the rest will be on dual-use infrastructure. It's a huge increase for Canada. So what we hope is that the companies on both sides will be able to work together. We're also working on what we call a joint security of information agreement that allows them to have a framework for sharing sensitive information. We've got expertise in areas like optics, for example. We're ramping up there because with climate change the Arctic zone is becoming more accessible to other countries and we have a big piece of real estate up there. So we're concerned about that area. We've just agreed with our European friends to develop 12 submarines for Canadian use. But what we lack is scale. We only have 42 million people, and defence products can be extremely expensive. As we grow together, we are hopeful that we can find areas where this makes a lot of sense for our industries to work together to produce something that is to protect both of our countries, but potentially gives us access on the world market.

Saptarshi Basak: PM Carney became an international superstar with his speech in Davos. Canada is the first US ally to directly resist the US. Why do we see this from Canada and Carney and not from, say, the Europeans?

As the PM said, the cumulative effect of a number of decisions, including something we gave at the last minute, resulted in him having to pull back on the trade talks. So it wasn't done in any way as performance art. It was done because it was the only decision we could take at this point. How others in the EU react to the US: everybody has their own calculation of what makes sense. At the end of the day, though, we want a great relationship with the US, whether it's in defence, economics, culture, and so on. Many people, particularly in the US, find it rather bizarre that we're in this position.

As for the Davos speech, in the world today, it's not the simpler world of 1945. The world has evolved a lot, so there are a lot of powers who want to be more active in the world. They've got the capacity to do it, they've got the population, and they have a legitimate role to play. So when we talk about what he said, variable geometry and so on, regardless of the US or other larger powers, there is a lot of scope for countries to work together. In that Davos speech, it's not simply a reaction to, as he called them, the hegemon. He also said the old order wasn't entirely honest. We haven't yet constructed a new one. Those of us who can rely on each other when it comes to trade pacts or other deals should work together, to protect each other's sovereignty.

Shubhajit Roy: There are 4,00,000 students in Canada besides the diaspora. Visas have been a big concern for many Indians. How are you trying to fix that?

We did have some problems over the last few years, where in some cases there were so many students coming, not just from India, but so many international students that there wasn't enough housing. There were also fly-by-night colleges that were not really giving an education. We've tightened the rules, and the goal is to make sure that Indian students coming to Canada, or any students coming, have a great educational experience. They come away well-trained, properly housed, with an excellent education at a good price point. We've made a lot of progress in the last couple of years. We did impose caps because the numbers were growing more than we could handle. One unintended consequence was that the reputation of Canada in India was that it was somehow closed to students. Nothing could be further from the truth. We would like to see more Indians coming for tourism. We know we have to get the visa system working better, and we are looking at that very seriously now.



ON CANADA'S CHINA TIES VIS-A-VIS INDIA

'There is always going to be an important Canadian-Chinese relationship. It will be different from the one that we have with you, different in quality and character'

Ahead of the Curve in Managing Inflation

RBI will drain excess liquidity to stop overheating

Headline inflation has been ticking up in recent months, and is above the 4% RBI target. Price pressures are largely from volatile food and fuel components due to an erratic monsoon and oil supply disruption from West Asia. Wholesale price inflation is approaching 10% as global supply chain disruptions feed into input costs. But core inflation, minus food and fuel, is relatively stable and within RBI's comfort zone. Interest rate and liquidity management tend to look through episodic spikes in food and fuel inflation, unless these feed into a generalised phenomenon. RBI projects inflation for 2026-27 at 5%, with a peak in Q3 within its 6% tolerance band. The stance of RBI's monetary policy committee will be informed by resilient economic growth as well as the unfolding inflation scenario.

A surge in dollar inflows through the special FCNR(B) scheme shouldn't add to inflationary pressure. RBI actively manages liquidity to accommodate forex flows. It will drain excess liquidity to prevent the economy from overheating. The excess liquidity with banks on account of bulging dollar deposits will be drained through enhanced sales of gilts by RBI. Stabilising effects of the dollar inflow on the rupee also contribute to lowering of imported inflation. This is well within RBI's playbook after having conducted a series of dollar mopping-up exercises over the decades. Sterilising domestic liquidity from these surges is a part of that exercise. The premature close of the special FCNR(B) scheme indicates the vigil the central bank is keeping on liquidity.

RBI is unlikely to be behind the curve in managing inflation, after having had to explain its inability to control it within the mandated band following the Ukraine conflict. If India maintains its economic momentum, there is a likelihood the interest rate upcycle could be advanced. However, on current indications, growth is losing steam as inflation remains within manageable limits. RBI is known for trying to minimise the growth sacrifice as it maintains price stability.

Here, the contracting problem sharpens. Nobody can write a complete contract covering a 12-yr build, using first-of-a-kind technology. Too many contingencies, too long a horizon, too little precedent. So, the question reduces to which party has both the balance sheet to absorb overruns, and the horizon to wait for returns. That party is the residual risk holder, and naming it is the heart of financial design.

For six decades, India's answer has been that overruns will be absorbed by the exchequer rather than by investors. This worked — 24 operable reactors, indigenous PHWR (pressurised heavy-water reactor) capability, Kalpakkam fast breeder. But a single risk absorber that is also fiscally constrained produces slow, sequential deployment — roughly 9 GW in six decades.

Reaching the 100 GW target by 2047 will require an estimated ₹25 lakh cr. The treasury cannot absorb the cost overruns for an expansion of this scale on its own. Private participation is, therefore, not just about bringing in modern technology or operational efficiency, but also about bringing in extra corporate balance sheets to share the financial risk. The crucial, unanswered question is precisely which of those risks private investors will be expected to carry.

Read the Bharat Small Reactor (BSR) tender carefully. Private firms were asked to finance and build 220 MW units under Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited's (NPCIL) control and supervision. Private capital holds the asset risk, the state retains operational control. For a lender, this is a difficult structure because project finance depends on step-in rights, and a lender cannot foreclose on a reactor if it is not licensed to operate. Security, therefore, falls back on sponsor balance sheets with full recourse. Two things follow:

● Eligible field narrows to few conglomerates able to carry that recourse. So, a state monopoly is replaced by an oligopoly, rather than a market.

● Party bearing residual financial risk has limited control over operational decisions that generate it. The risk does not disappear. It's priced into tariff demands and lands on discoms and consumers.

Instruments for financing reactors are well-understood: regulated asset base treatment, which lets an owner service debt during construction, credit enhancement for discoms entering multi-decade PPAs and green bond eligibility. As of now, India's sovereign green bond framework explicitly excludes nuclear power. It would be desirable to have this amended by the finance ministry.

The capital stack is also not separate from technology and market choices. India is running 3 tracks with incompatible risk profiles under one framework. PHWR is proven technology and genuinely bankable, but constrained by the ownership-control mismatch. Indigenous small modular reactors (SMRs), with ₹20,000 cr allocated and 5 units targeted by 2033, have no operating reference plant. Large imported reactors depend on export credit agencies and come with geopolitical exposure.

Market choice matters, too. A grid-connected reactor's financing rests on discom credit. A captive reactor serving industrial heat or data centre load has an investment-grade offtaker that happens to be its own sponsor; dissolving the counterparty problem, provided the operational control issue is addressed. It is the closest Indian analogue to what is unlocking American SMRs.

India cannot build its nuclear strategy in a bubble, as rising global demand is driving up capital costs and straining a limited supply chain for heavy forgings, pressure vessels and certified welders. Next-generation SMRs face additional bottlenecks, with many designs relying on high-assay low-enriched uranium (HALEU), a fuel severely constrained in both availability and production capacity. Also, because international suppliers prioritise bulk, multi-reactor orders, piecemeal financing will push Indian projects to the back of global order books.

To overcome these barriers and attract investors, India needs targeted policy support. This includes viability gap grants to cover initial shortfalls, extended loan terms, preferential tax treatments, and an official green taxonomy to unlock sustainable global capital. Finally, temporary cost-plus tariffs must be used to guarantee fair developer returns and buffer against unexpected cost spikes.

India has strong, proven capabilities across the entire nuclear value chain. Moving to the next level requires a clear financing strategy. Evaluating any risk-informed model comes down to two questions:

● What exact risks are private investors being asked to absorb?

● What financial reward will they demand in return?

Madhavan is professor of strategic management, University of Pittsburgh School of Business. US, Nguyen is former executive vice-president, Westinghouse, and Ramanathan is distinguished fellow emeritus, electricity and renewables division, TERI

Letters to the editor may be addressed to editet@timesofindia.com

To meet the 100 GW target, clarify the risks private investors will bear and what they will earn

Money Clear About Nuclear



Ravi Madhavan, Tom Nguyen, & K Ramanathan

As consultations on the draft SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India) rules wrap up, the focus must shift to financing, the single factor that determines whether reactors get built. The core hurdles are familiar: massive upfront capital, decade-long timelines, and complex supply chain risks spanning fuel enrichment, manufacturing and regulatory approvals.

Because capital costs dominate the final price of electricity, budget overruns are make-or-break. As setbacks from Westinghouse's bankruptcy to delays at Britain's 3.2 GW nuclear power station Hinkley Point C demonstrate, the central threat isn't legal liability but cost overruns landing on balance sheets that cannot absorb them. The decisive question, then, is simple: who carries the financial hit when costs inevitably surge?

Here, the contracting problem sharpens. Nobody can write a complete contract covering a 12-yr build, using first-of-a-kind technology. Too many contingencies, too long a horizon, too little precedent. So, the question reduces to which party has both the balance sheet to absorb overruns, and the horizon to wait for returns. That party is the residual risk holder, and naming it is the heart of financial design.

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Fundamental economics

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An Old Geopolitical Distortion Corrected

The UN's decision to adopt 'Equal Earth projection' is an important corrective. For centuries, the Mercator projection — designed for 16th-c. navigation — has warped the world's proportions, inflating Europe and North America while shrinking Africa, Latin America and South Asia. Greenland, absurdly, has loomed as large as Africa, though Africa is 14× bigger. Such distortions aren't innocent — they reinforce colonial hierarchies, embedding a world view in which the 'global south' appears peripheral, diminished and less consequential.

The Equal Earth projection, developed in 2018, restores proportionality. Africa regains its true immensity, Latin America stretches to its rightful breadth, and Europe shrinks to scale.

By urging its adoption in education, media and official use, the UN is correcting a centuries-long misrepresentation that has seeped into politics, economics and culture. Representation matters. Just as parliaments, films and textbooks shape identity, maps are mirrors of self-perception. A continent consistently drawn smaller than it is risks internalising inferiority, much like the old, symbolically-loaded description of Africa as the 'dark continent'. Perception bleeds into aid, investment and diplomacy.

Such symbolism is profound. In classrooms, the new map will recalibrate how billions imagine the world. Over time, such subtle shifts in perception can influence policy, trade and respect. The US' lone opposition — Serbia, Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova and Ukraine abstained — was telling. Washington argued the UN should focus on 'pressing issues'. But maps are not neutral. To dismiss reform is to defend distortion. Equal Earth projection reminds us that every act of representation shapes dignity and power.

Summitry can serve many ends, especially when crowd cover becomes useful to signal a policy shift. The SCO gathering in Kyrgyzstan was one such. It gave India an opportunity to register opposition to the US-Israel war on Iran in the company of others.

Did it constitute course correction, or was it the usual playing of all sides to minimise damage? Was it heartfelt to the extent anything can be in politics? Or was geopolitics forcing Delhi to create certain optics and imagery?

It's not clear, but Delhi periodically finds it necessary to burnish its 'global south credentials' while pursuing other goals, especially when the cost is low and dividend reasonable. This was a good time to create some distance from Washington and its needless war. Consider the toll the Iran war has taken on India's economy, trade, fertiliser imports and lives of seafarers caught in the crossfire.

In July, the US bombed Iran's Chabahar port, destroying a civilian control tower and endangering India's strategic investment of \$120 mn and more. Some saw the bombing as Washington thumbing its nose at Delhi. The port was meant to provide India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. But its future now is unknown. Given the current difficulties in India's relations with the US, and Israel's indefensible actions in the region, the war against Iran seems less and less like a project worth defending.

So far, there's no outburst in the White House like last year when an SCO summit photo of Modi, Putin and Xi triggered Trump. The Trump regime has been briefed on both SCO and the upcoming BRICS summit in Delhi to explain the context. But none of that guarantees presidential

calm. Fortunately, there's no talk by US analysts of Russia-India-China, or RIC (remember that?), coming together.

The Bishkek Declaration didn't name the US or Israel, but reiterated 'SCO's previously stated position condemning military strikes' on Iran. It called for a political and diplomatic solution. The statement then linked 'peace and stability in the Middle East' to a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian question, an impossible idea in today's Israel.

Realists will dismiss the statement as 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing', while others will see the need to reiterate principles if only to keep hope alive. India signed the statement, joining all 10 SCO member states, including Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran and others. In June last year, India had stayed aloof from an SCO statement issued in the immediate aftermath of US-Israel attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities. Delhi did go on to sign the Tianjin Declaration two-and-a-half months later that condemned the US and Israel for 'gross violation of international law'. By then, it had experienced enough of Trump's second avatar.

India's signature in Bishkek is part of the continuum that some see as 'progress' in correcting the pro-US tilt. Whether summit declarations matter in the grand scheme of things is a different question altogether. But, sometimes, they do help in blunting diplomatic opprobrium. India's decision is rooted in several realities, not the least of which is its self-declared leadership of the 'global south'. As Russia expert Nandan Unnikrishnan said, 'If we claim leadership of the global south, we have to act like a leader of the global south. Perceptions are important.' The most recent blow to the image was Modi's visit to Israel just before the war started. India came to be seen by many as part of the US-Israel-UAE axis.

An additional reason for course correction is the upcoming BRICS summit where India needs a joint statement acceptable to all. Some SCO members are also in BRICS, making for easier diplomatic give-and-take. With Xi, Putin and Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian attending, it will be interesting to see how much understanding is shown for the host's common minimum programme. India would definitely not want the final declaration to be anti-West. China definitely would — it can feel the reins of the world in its hands. China looms large over both SCO and BRICS, dwarfing others and relentlessly pushing its foreign policy goals. Russia and India see it in real time. As for the US, its China policy depends on the day and issue at hand.

It's not a secret that Indian foreign policy is currently faced with questions for which it doesn't have ready answers, especially with regard to the US in its current 'destroyer' phase. Debates on whether India's pro-US tilt harmed other relationships (Russia, China) are intense. There's understanding that answers (technology, investment, machinery) won't come from China. Denial is Beijing's first strategy. Russia is stretched thin by its war on Ukraine. Here's the big dilemma: India knows China and Russia are not the solution to its developmental problems. But how much can it trust the Americans?

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Bond blues

Rising global yields, high public debt are worrisome

The surging bond yields in major developed markets across the world are sending an unmistakable message — the era of financial repression that began after the global financial crisis (GFC) is finally over. Interest costs or the cost of capital will now increasingly be based on demand and supply and not by artificial suppression of rates.



Ignoring this message will come with painful consequences, both for some of the global central bankers who have failed in their inflation mandates, or governments that run persistently high fiscal deficits. While the current high 10-year government bond yields — at around 4.75 per cent in the US, 2.90 per cent in Japan, 5.15 per cent in the UK, 3.35 per cent in Germany, and 4.2 per cent in France — were the norm in pre-GFC era, the crucial difference and complication lies in the balance sheets. Since 2007 to now, the government debt-to-GDP has soared from roughly 65 per cent to 124 per cent in the US, 150 per cent to 207 per cent in Japan, 43 per cent to 102 per cent in the UK, and 66 per cent to 116 per cent in France. As borrowing costs rise due to higher yields across tenors, spiraling interest expense in itself adds to the fiscal burden. Such bond yields have been dealt with in the past, but not at current levels of debt. Compounding the problem is an erosion of institutional credibility. For example the US Fed has failed in its inflation mandate for 64 consecutive months.

Governments continue to stick to expansionary fiscal policies and have increasingly resorted to interventions in the markets to address issues stemming from these — like the US treasury recently announcing plans to increase buybacks of 30-year bonds as yields surged to a 19-year high, or the rare synchronised, coordinated intervention by the US and Japan to halt the decline in Japanese yen against the USD when it was hovering at 40-year lows against the latter. These quick-fixes cannot work when the fundamentals do not change; long-dated yields remain elevated, and currency pressures in Japan persist. Market forces are sending a strong message and authorities need to take heed. Central banks must regain credibility — much like what Paul Volcker achieved in the early 1980s — and governments must curb fiscal excess before markets force their hand, as the UK gilt crisis demonstrated in 2022.

As for India, increasing cost of capital globally can affect inflows into the country as already witnessed in the case of net FII flows in the last two years. Further, reducing yield differentials between the US and India's 10-year yield, which is at around 215 basis points now, needs to be watched. While it is above the low of 165 basis points in May 2025, it can trend lower as US yields continue to increase. Lower yield differential can make Indian bonds less attractive to foreign investors given risk of currency volatility too. Reserve Bank of India will need to maintain a vigilant stance on inflation to avoid currency pressures, while remaining alert to spillover risks should developed market yields spike further.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Nigel Farage has questions to answer
Reform UK's conference was to open showcasing a party ready for government. It did so with two top aides removed after an investigation aired on Channel 4, its finances under police scrutiny and seven in 10 voters, polls suggest, regarding its leader, Nigel Farage, as sleazy – double the number who thought the same of Andy Burnham. Reform, a rightwing populist party, says it will take power back from a corrupt establishment. The latest scandal raises a question: does Reform oppose the influence of big money – or just who benefits from it? Undercover reporters from Verbatim Investigations, founded by journalists from the Centre for Climate Reporting, pretended to be a wealthy American father and his UK-based son who wanted to donate to Reform. In the UK, foreign donations are banned from politics. LONDON, SEPTEMBER 4

讀賣新聞

Can Deterrence Be Maintained in Asia?
U.S. aircraft carriers, which carry many fighter jets, are a symbol of the massive military power of the United States. If aircraft carriers continue to be absent from East Asia for an extended period, this could weaken deterrence, raising serious concerns. In response to the situation involving Iran, the U.S. aircraft carrier George Washington of the U.S. 7th Fleet, whose home port is Yokosuka Naval Base in Kanagawa Prefecture, has been deployed to the Middle East since mid-August. The carrier ship was sent to the region to relieve the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln. The Abraham Lincoln was originally scheduled to return to the United States in May but remained in the Middle East due to the prolonged attacks against Iran. TOKYO, SEPTEMBER 6

Party appeal vs candidate risk

Just ideology or a popular leader can't fully eliminate candidate risk in elections

LINE& LENGTH.
TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

While others were getting worked up over a former finance secretary's mischievous pronouncement on the latest GDP figures, I was reading a post by someone altogether more responsible: the Nobel winner Paul Krugman on the US bond market.

He was discussing it with another professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At one point they discussed what happened with, and to, the highly risky, subprime loans. Krugman mentioned something called copulas, a term I had not heard of. So I googled it and was told that “a copula describes the dependence structure between variables, rather than just the probability of independent events” and further that it “connects individual (marginal) probabilities into a combined picture.”

What does this mean? According to Abe Sklar's Theorem, which I had not heard of either, “any joint distribution splits into two pieces: the individual behaviors (marginals) and the dependence between them (the copula).”

Further googling, which is the current term for research, showed that copulas were massively used in the programmes used in the financial markets in the West in the period leading up to the crisis of 2008 to model joint risks and extreme events. They might have caused it eventually.

To simplify hugely, for which my apologies, that's basically what bundling of risky assets was all about. You combined various probabilities and got a single risk probability for the entire package.

The method used was something called a ‘Gaussian copula’. Google told me it “combines different probability distributions into a single joint distribution by capturing the correlation between variables.”

But there was a problem which was ignored: what if there were a few probabilities that were way off the



POLL CONNECT. Choosing winnable candidates is a tricky task for all political parties THULASI KAKKAT

mean? And that's exactly what happened by September 2008. The whole thing collapsed and we got the Atlantic Financial Crisis whose effects are still being felt.

POLITICS AND COPULAS
I will not stretch the analogy too far because that would be ridiculous. But it occurred to me that the question of joint probabilities could be important in the context of politics also because political parties combine the risks in individual candidates and come up with consolidated assessments of their chances of winning X or Y or Z number of seats, a kind of Gaussian copula, if you like.

The BJP for example believes that, as a party, it can definitely win between 220-240 seats. That's like a normal distribution with most of its candidates

The real task is to identify and accept high tail risk. This becomes hard when there is competition within a party to distribute patronage

falling under the bell. But what of the tails of this distribution?

This can become of critical importance if there are too many candidates with extreme risks. They would lie at the tails of the distribution. It is easy to get an idea of their riskiness by looking at the winning and losing margins.

So consider: of the 543 candidates chosen to contest an election, even if 20 per cent fall in this category, where the margins are small, the BJP could lose nearly 108 seats. Something like that may well have happened in 2024 when it lost 63 seats, of which 33 were in UP. Poor candidate selection, rather than any lofty reason like the rumoured abolition of reservations, could have been the reason.

The same thing applies to all political parties. They all can, and do, choose candidates with high risks of losing for whatever local reason.

CANDIDATE RISK
The Congress is a case in point and it should look into this if it wants to increase its Lok Sabha strength. Is it choosing its candidates badly? In Gaussian terms, is the tail demolishing the dog?

Back in 2014, Rahul Gandhi tried to reform the ticket distribution method by choosing candidates via the American primaries process, which is basically “may the most popular person get the ticket”. It was a great initiative because it sought to minimise tail risk.

But it failed spectacularly. The Congress went from 207 seats in 2009 to just 44 in 2014. There are many theories about why this happened but no one questions either the need or the method used to minimise candidate risk. Rahul then gave up the reform.

A very popular party leader like Indira Gandhi or Narendra Modi can be used to mitigate some of the high risk. People then vote for that leader rather than the candidate.

The problem lies, however, in (a) the popular leader no longer being able to mitigate the risk sufficiently and (b) in choosing too many high-risk candidates, hoping for the best. This is why at least a quarter or more of all contestants always lose.

So the real task is to identify and accept high tail risk. This becomes hard when there is competition within a party to distribute patronage because tail risks get underestimated and are reported wrongly to the party high commands.

Ways to deal with FCNR liquidity deluge

For both RBI and banks, there are interesting possibilities and implications

Madan Sabnavis

The deluge of forex into the country on account of the FCNR/OFCB/ECB scheme has been a blessing. It raises the forex reserves, which in turn looks healthier in terms of import cover. It adds to liquidity in a big way such that there is discussion on how to deal with surpluses.

The final number after the non-FCNR flows are reckoned could well cross \$150 billion after the announced \$137 billion garnered so far. What does it mean to all the parties concerned?

For the RBI, the inflow of \$137 billion means approximately 20 per cent increase in reserves from the level of \$682 billion as of June 5. This can be used for several purposes. First, it can be used for spot interventions in the market as and when required. Second, it can be used to square off forwards books which stood at \$103 billion as of June 30. Third, it can be invested in US treasuries or any other asset as per the policy being pursued. There could be a return of 4.7-5 per cent on these investments depending on the tenure of investment.

There is, however, also a swap cost for the central banks which can be around 3 per cent. With a round ₹13 lakh crore being given to banks for the swap of

\$137 billion, there can be a cost of ₹39,000 crore on an annual basis. This will however be covered by the investments in US treasuries, thus giving a positive net return. This will be positive for the income and expenditure statement.

On the other hand, given a larger balance sheet, the contingency buffer to be maintained increases in value terms, which can counter this increase in revenue. Also, if the RBI sells its holdings of GSec to manage liquidity then the interest earned from them would come down. Hence it needs to be seen if the surplus to the government can be maintained under *ceteris paribus* conditions.

ISSUES FOR BANKS
For banks, the issues will be different. They have procured clean funds at the cost of 6.25-7.25 per cent for five years. This higher amount of ₹13 lakh crore in dollar terms would entail an interest outgo of say ₹87,750 crore. The swap cost of hedging this interest at 3 per cent would be around ₹2,600 crore as this is not covered by the central bank. Now these funds have to be deployed in either lending or investments. Presently the weighted average lending rate on loans is 8.52 per cent for all banks, which means that there can be a spread of about 1.75 per cent, assuming average cost of 6.75



FCNR MOP-UP. Options for banks

per cent. The surplus of ₹13 lakh crore in the system has implications for the markets. These funds would be used to manage the loan book without seeking recourse to bulk deposits or certificates of deposits. Hence these two markets will get depressed.

Increasing the CRR through an incremental CRR may not be fair for banks which have not been aggressive in collecting such deposits. MSS issuance is a way out which can be used to support the fiscal deficit thus obviating the need for fresh borrowing. OMOs are also

likely where RBI sells its holding of government paper. The last is VRRR on a rolling basis — which will be an inferior solution for banks as the returns are the lowest.

Curiously, markets have been quite unmoved with the bond yields remaining where they are with expectations of a rate hike in future. The rupee has strengthened now, more out of sentiment. The dollars garnered will not directly affect the market as long as they are used to build reserves. If they are sold in the market, then it will help to strengthen the rupee.

The scheme raises some interesting ideas for further discussion. First, should the FCNR scheme be used periodically whenever it is felt that there is some slippage in the forex reserves? Based on the way in which the scheme was started and terminated early due to its success, a target sum can be announced such that the swap cost taken on by the RBI is, say, \$50 billion. Once this level is reached, the scheme can be stopped. The RBI can ask other central banks to invest in bonds issued by Indian banks in dollars, guaranteed by RBI, with a higher return than offered by the Fed. The protocol can be akin to FCNR, with similar spin-offs.

The writer is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. Views are personal

BELOW THE LINE



TVK MLA I Thahira B JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Mistaken identity

A non-existent tyre company created a big debate both inside and outside the Tamil Nadu Assembly. Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) Ranipet MLA I. Thahira in the Assembly raised a serious demand to shut down a JK

Tyre manufacturing unit in her constituency over allegations of pollution. It emerged that the company has no such factory at Ranipet, and the MLA was referring to a local tyre retreading or melting unit. While the Industries Minister intervened, Opposition members poked fun over the allegations of a non-existent company in the region. JK Tyres even issued a statement stating it does not have a plant at Ranipet but has one in Sriperumbudur.

Playing favourites

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gorr appears to have developed quite a liking for two key members of the Union Cabinet — External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Commerce and Industry Minister

Piyush Goyal. Speaking at a recent event in New Delhi, Gor named the duo as his ‘favourite ministers’. Turning to Goyal, whom he called a ‘dear friend’, the envoy quipped, “If you can’t get hold of me, reach out to Piyush and he’ll arrange it”. Goyal, however, was quick to point out the potential hazard of such high-level praise. “I’m worried about calling you a friend,” the Minister remarked in a lighter vein. “If you make such comments, I’ll have half of these people at my office looking for US visa appointments,” drawing laughter from the audience. The banter is especially interesting given the ongoing delays in US visa processing. With the State Department recently adjusting

appointment schedules globally for consular officer training, applicant backlogs have only grown. Whether Goyal was simply playing to the gallery or using humour to nudge the embassy on a pressing public grievance is open to interpretation. **Turbulence or accident?** What began as a report on a turbulence encounter has acquired a new dimension, with the preliminary investigation into Air India flight AI2379 recording that neither the flight crew nor the air traffic control reported adverse weather during the altitude upset. The Airbus A320-251N was flying from Phuket to Delhi on August 4 with 145 people onboard. The occurrence was initially notified to the Aircraft Accident Investigation

Bureau (AAIB) by the Airports Authority of India as a turbulence encounter, with some people onboard sustaining injuries. However, after reaching the airport, collecting evidence, and assessing the injuries, the AAIB classified the occurrence as an accident and ordered an investigation to determine the probable causes and contributory factors. The report said the aircraft was cruising at FL360 in the Upper Bhubaneswar Sector. Weather forecasts indicated scattered and broken clouds, with temporary forecasts of light thunderstorms and rain later. However, no adverse weather was reported by the crew or ATC. **Our Bureaus**

The forgotten girl child

Safeena Husain’s radical model for systemic change

BOOK REVIEW.

Richa Mishra

Aachuki (Arrived), Nakushi (Unwanted), Faaltu (Useless), Manbhaari (Heavy Heart), Maafi (Sorry), Dhappu (Fed Up) Naraaz (Angry), Galla (Stop) and Antimbala (Last Girl) — they are the protagonists of Safeena Husain’s book *Every Last Girl*. It is their names, their stories.

The book is far more than a memoir. It is an urgent, real-world manifesto for systemic change. When a girl is born or arrives (*Aachuki*), she is mostly unwanted (*Nakushi*). Her parents see her as useless (*Faaltu*). They have a heavy heart (*Manbhaari*), they are sorry (*Maafi*)... even angry (*Naraaz*). They make a plea: stop (*Galla*)! And they hope she is the last girl (*Antimbala*).

In her book Hussain tries to demolish the “poverty trap excuse” as she provides evidence that poverty isn’t the only reason girls stay out of school, it is often deep-seated cultural apathy.

She shows how to break that apathy sans a hectoring tone. In her words: “Eighteen years ago, I started Educate Girls out of a pistachio-coloured house in a quiet residential area near Palna, Rajasthan...”

“...And yet, while telling this story, I have left out something vital: the quality of the education received by our girls and their fellow male students, once they enrol. It is a question we face all the time: What is the point of enrolling a girl into school if what she then learns is irrelevant, un-engaging and poor quality? It is a fair question.”

SCALING UP

Husain takes us through her journey from a tiny pilot project in a dusty Rajasthan village and how it got scaled up to benefit 2.2 million children. She doesn’t sugarcoat the failures. She talks about the death threats, the bureaucratic roadblocks, the doors slammed on her face, and the agonisingly slow progress it took to win over a hostile village.

The book introduces you to Team Balika, where thousands of ordinary village youths risked their own social standing just to ensure a neighbour’s daughter could read.

The author recounts the chilling reality of entering a home to find a girl literally named Antimbala (last girl) — a desperate, superstitious plea by her family to the universe to stop sending them daughters. In government registries, Antimbala



Title: Every Last Girl
Author: Safeena Husain
Publisher: HarperCollins India
Price: ₹499

barely existed. She was a ghost in the system, who grazed goats, while her brothers attended school.

Husain’s model forces workers to look past spreadsheets and look directly at these forgotten children. By physically walking into the furthest courtyard of a village, the Educate Girls team proved that tracking down the ‘Last Girl’ requires a clipboard, a hardy pair of shoes, and a refusal to let a child remain invisible.

Husain’s suggestion to change minds rather than just laws highlights a sharp economic truth. In many communities, a goat is seen as a valuable asset, while a daughter is treated as a financial burden. The book is peppered with several such anecdotes.

To make partnerships accountable, Husain focuses on the local School Management Committees (SMCs), which are often completely inactive or ignored. The book describes a village where the local primary school was locked up, the teacher was chronically absent, and the building was used to store hay.

‘*Every Last Girl*’ occasionally walks a tight rope. It can face criticism for an NGO-first bias that downplays state infrastructure, oversimplifies the messy operational realities of scaling, and relies on transactional economic arguments to justify a girl’s worth.

However, through her journey from discovering millions of invisible girls to mobilising 55,000 volunteers, Husain proves that social change demands raw grit, smart technology, and deep community trust. By balancing narrative flaws with flawless real-world execution, the book offers a moving human story. Ultimately, Husain proves that stubborn cultural barriers completely crumble when you refuse to let a single child be forgotten.

Life of an enigmatic army chief

A multidimensional portrait of military icon Gen Sundarji who operated years ahead of his time

BOOK REVIEW.

Arun Hariharan

Few military leaders in post-independence India have provoked as much strategic debate, intellectual fascination, institutional heartburn as General Krishnaswamy Sundarji.

Serving as India’s Chief of Army Staff between 1986 and 1988, Sundarji was not merely an operational commander. He was a strategic theorist, a relentless reformer, a technological evangelist, and the sort of officer who seemed constitutionally incapable of leaving a sluggish system undisturbed.

In *General Brasstacks: The Sundarji Story*, historian and veteran Probal Dasgupta delivers a crisp, engaging, and immensely readable biography of this enigmatic general. The book combines narrative pace with archival research, interviews, and a clear understanding of military institutions.

Dasgupta opens by embedding Sundarji within the broader evolution of the Indian Army. Commissioned into the Mahar Regiment and later rising through armoured formations, Sundarji stood apart from many legacy commanders still wedded to slow, attrition-heavy doctrines inherited from the colonial era. While some peers may have been perfecting the finer geometry of parade-ground turns, Sundarji was busy absorbing ideas on speed, air mobility, command-and-control systems, mechanised warfare, and the unpleasant but necessary art of making the enemy’s planning staff spill their tea.

HIGH-ALTITUDE AUDACITY

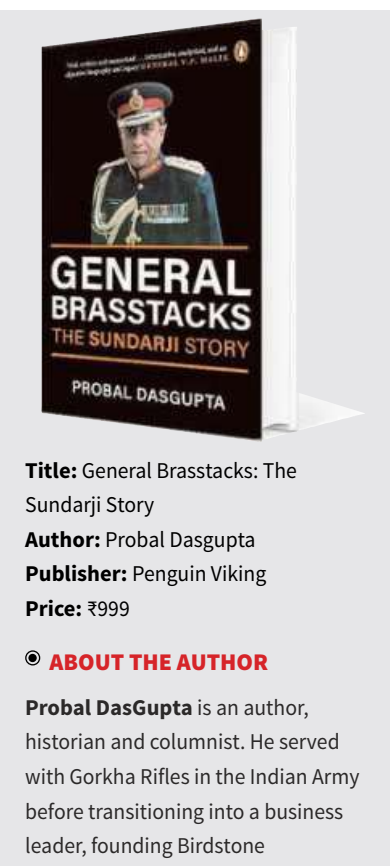
Among the book’s most gripping sections is Dasgupta’s reconstruction of the 1986 Sumdorong Chu standoff in Arunachal Pradesh. When Chinese

forces intruded into the disputed Wandung area, traditional bureaucratic wisdom urged caution. Sundarji chose something rather more vertical: high-altitude leap-frogging.

Under Operation Falcon, he ordered the airlifting of the 7th Infantry Brigade by Mi-26 heavy-lift helicopters to occupy the dominating heights of Hathung La, directly overlooking Chinese positions. The move caught Beijing off guard and left New Delhi’s political corridors whispering urgently, calculating consequences, and looking for the nearest senior officer to blame if things went wrong. Sundarji held his ground, making the point that credible border deterrence requires not just polite concern, but physical presence on commanding heights.

The centrepiece of the biography is Operation Brasstacks (1986-1987), one of the largest land force mobilisations in Asia since World War II. Bringing together nearly half a million troops, armoured divisions, and air support in the Rajasthan desert, Brasstacks was Sundarji’s grand live-fire classroom for testing India’s new mechanised manoeuvre doctrine. It was, in military terms, an exercise. To anyone watching from across the border, however, it must have looked like an exercise in making blood pressure monitors explode.

Dasgupta provides a sharp analysis of the anxiety it generated in Islamabad. To Pakistani planners, the massive exercise appeared less like routine training and more like an armoured spearhead rehearsing for something dramatically impolite. The resulting crisis brought two nuclear-aspiring neighbours to the edge of war. Dasgupta handles this tense episode with admirable balance, showing both Sundarji’s intellectual ambition and the dangers of strategic theatre performed with real armies, live ammunition, and very little room for misunderstanding.



Title: General Brasstacks: The Sundarji Story
Author: Probal Dasgupta
Publisher: Penguin Viking
Price: ₹999

© **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Probal DasGupta is an author, historian and columnist. He served with Gorkha Rifles in the Indian Army before transitioning into a business leader, founding Birdstone

causing severe damage and deep communal trauma.

In Sri Lanka, Sundarji directed Indian troop deployments into a complex civil war against the LTTE. Here again, Dasgupta highlights the gap between strategic ambition and ground reality. An army trained for high-intensity operations against state forces found itself in jungle warfare, urban fighting, and murky political objectives. Dasgupta pulls no punches in observing how Sundarji’s confidence in military solutions contributed to costly missteps, including the tragic Jaffna University heliborne raid.

BOFORS AND BUREAUCRACY

Beyond field manoeuvres, *General Brasstacks* excels in capturing civil-military dynamics. Sundarji was a key proponent of the Swedish Bofors 155mm field howitzer, recognising its technological superiority, mobility, and battlefield utility. When the deal became embroiled in the political corruption scandal surrounding the Rajiv Gandhi government, Sundarji found himself in the middle of a national controversy.

Dasgupta details how Sundarji navigated the crisis: refusing to compromise his professional evaluation of the weapon while insisting that political controversy should not derail vital defence acquisitions. His defence of the artillery system was dramatically vindicated a decade later during the 1999 Kargil War, where Bofors guns proved decisive in pounding high-altitude enemy positions.

The book is a valuable and highly readable contribution to Indian military literature. Dasgupta presents a multidimensional portrait of a military icon who operated decades ahead of his time.

The reviewer is an Indian Army veteran and senior Business Continuity professional &also a published author and poet

NEW READS.

	Title: The Lift-off Nation Authors: Rajan Anandan and Saurabh Srivastava Publisher: Juggernaut An insightful book that gives a comprehensive picture of the current state and future potential of the fastest-growing startup ecosystem on the planet		Title: Will AI Murder Us All? Author: Aakash Singh Rathore Publisher: Vintage Books A bold, thought-provoking guide to the ethical and existential challenges of artificial intelligence		Title: Strategic Collaborations Author: C Bhaktavatsala Rao Publisher: Notion Press The book combines intellectual rigour with practical relevance, offering both insight and a blueprint for effective collaboration
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thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 7, 2006

New drug policy to arm regulator with more teeth

The proposed new pharma policy has taken steps to plug some loopholes that could be utilised to keep drugs out of price control. According to official sources, the policy proposes to provide suo motu powers to the Nation al Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority (NPPA), which would be the regulator for the industry, to bring under price control new doses of medicines that are not covered under the existing National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM).

UWB okays Rs 350-cr rehab package

Up against a Thursday deadline to submit a rehabilitation plan to the Reserve Bank of India, the board of the troubled United Western Bank (UWB), which met here today, approved a Rs 350-crore package offered by SICOM and the Maharashtra Government.

India moves up in World Bank’s ‘Doing Business’ rankings

Doing business became easier in India in 2005-06, with the country moving up four ranks in the latest World Bank-International Finance Corporation’s ‘Doing Business 2007’ report on the ba sis of reform measures such as simplification of business registration, easier cross-border trade and improved access to credit.

Short take

Air India’s systems must inspire confidence

Vandana Singh

When the Tata group regained control of loss-making Air India, it promised transformation through fleet renewal, technology, operational restructuring and a stronger customer experience. But aviation has one requirement that cannot be deferred while a turnaround takes place: Safety.

Air India’s FY26 losses more than doubled year-on-year ₹22,238 crore. Integrating airlines, modernising fleets, replacing legacy systems and building a global carrier require substantial capital and time. But financial losses are fundamentally different from failures that can affect passenger confidence.

The June 2025 AI171 tragedy changed the conversation permanently. The Boeing 787 operated from Ahmedabad to London crashed shortly after take-off, killing 260 people.

A recent DGCA audit identified 51 safety-related findings at Air India, including issues involving training, rostering and simulator use. These findings were part of a regulatory audit and should not be presented as having caused or been directly connected to an incident. But they raise a legitimate institutional question: how effectively are safety systems identifying and correcting weaknesses before they become operational risks?

The August 4 Phuket-Delhi Air India

flight AI2379, an Airbus A320, suffered a sudden loss of 300 feet of altitude, injuring passengers and crew. The decoded flight-data recorder showed a loss of hydraulic systems, resulting in the temporary loss of the aircraft’s control surfaces for around four seconds before the hydraulic systems recovered.

The issue is not simply what failed on August 4, but whether Air India can demonstrate that every relevant layer of the safety system was functioning as intended before the aircraft took off.

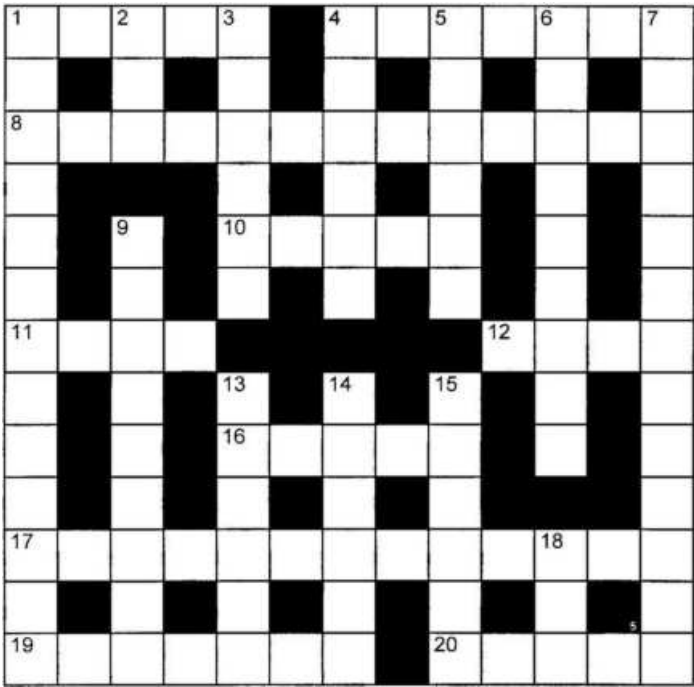
The captain of the Phuket-Delhi flight reportedly tested positive for marijuana and was removed from duty pending investigation. The technical failure and the drug-test finding must not be conflated; there is no basis to say that

one caused the other. But together with the continuing scrutiny of training, maintenance, certification and operational systems, they make the question of organisational controls unavoidable. The task is to establish a safety culture in which maintenance records are rigorous, compliance is non-negotiable, crew fitness is beyond question, and technical warnings are investigated thoroughly.

The Tata Group needs to demonstrate that when something goes wrong, its systems are strong enough to detect, investigate, correct and prevent recurrence.

The writer is Chairperson of Aviation Cargo at the Federation of Aviation Industry in India (FAII)

● BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2730



EASY

- ACROSS**
- Works for one’s money (5)
 - Anarchic (7)
 - Given to meditation (13)
 - A small bay (5)
 - Defeat, destruction (4)
 - Asterisk (4)
 - To vote in (5)
 - Long thin marks without curves (8,5)
 - Sent swiftly on one’s way (7)
 - Marner (George Eliot novel) (5)
- DOWN**
- Experts at freeing themselves from bonds (13)
 - Move fast (3)
 - Theatrical, dramatic (6)
 - Turned-back parts of coat collar (6)
 - Opulence (6)
 - Manifestly (9)
 - Female flock minders (13)
 - Conversation (9)
 - Interval of time (6)
 - Orderly arrangement (6)
 - Standing-places for horses (6)
 - Nothing, zero (3)

NOT SO EASY

- ACROSS**
- Deservedly gets an audience with the Poles (5)
 - As unruly as Wells became (7)
 - Thoughtful way one will study cut-out pattern when about four (13)
 - It is a bay at home that is rented out (5)
 - What one makes that is unprofitable (4)
 - Head the bill that takes time to begin (4)
 - Be at cross purposes in order to return one (5)
 - Use ruler to draw them as the shortest point-joiners (8,5)
 - So hurried to be sent on one’s way (7)
 - Sails around Marner (5)
- DOWN**
- Getting out of laces to gossip with those like Houdini (13)
 - Amount printed for as long as the play goes on (3)
 - Picturesque as this railway is, it’s miniaturised (6)
 - A spell of reform applied to extensions of the collar (6)
 - The law is about to produce riches (6)
 - Yet lend six a medley, seemingly (9)
 - They may be crooked, the girls from Dresden (13)
 - Could rid Scouse of it by learned argument (9)
 - A full stop to a historic time (6)
 - Came across a brick-carrier in this way (6)
 - Engine doesn’t go on the theatre seats (6)
 - Nothing scored by Bellini was partially returned (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2729

- ACROSS** 1. Dross 4. Gallant 8. Latinised 9. Dim 10. Qualify 12. Cube 14. Flaccid 17. Crew 18. Tadpole 20. Not 21. Recurrent 23. Enchant 24. Dwell
- DOWN** 1. Deliquescence 2. Outlay 3. Sensible 4. Gas 5. Lady 6. Ardour 7. Temperamental 11. Yacht 13. Hindered 15. Septic 16. Cohere 19. Orca 22. Cat

Investment gridlock

The informal sector, unlisted firms, and job-intensive industries must participate in the capex cycle

AFTER THE NATIONAL Statistics Office (NSO) released GDP estimates for the April-June quarter (Q1), hopes have risen that India may finally be on the cusp of a robust investment cycle. According to the NSO, gross fixed capital formation at constant prices has trended higher for four straight quarters, recording strong year-on-year growth of 11.9% in Q1, albeit on a relatively weak base. Investment accounted for 34.4% of GDP, up from 33.1% in the previous quarter and higher than in the first quarters of any year after the pandemic disruptions. Manufacturing capacity utilisation rose to 77.4% in Q4FY26 from 75.6% in the previous quarter. Capital accumulation through consistently high central government budgetary investment and state governments' newly acquired capacity to fund large projects through reforms-linked soft capex loans appears to have improved the investment climate. While overall public capex has not risen significantly as a fraction of GDP, its composition has changed in recent years, with the Centre taking a larger share and helping improve capital deployment. Supply-side measures such as tax cuts, deregulation, and investment incentives have further strengthened the crowding-in effect.

A section of Corporate India and investors in electricity, including renewables and nuclear power, digital infrastructure, and high-tech sectors are already investing. Artificial intelligence is also attracting substantial capital. Several listed firms are reporting real sales growth and have ample access to funds. Banks' outstanding industrial credit rose by an average of around 16% in the three quarters through Q1, unprecedented in recent years. Higher domestic production and sustained imports of capital goods and intermediate materials also indicate stronger private capex intentions. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, projects worth around ₹18 lakh crore were announced in Q1, with private companies accounting for a record 86%.

However, the recovery remains narrow. Unlisted companies, the informal sector, and conventional employment-intensive industries have limited participation. The value of new manufacturing projects declined sharply in the last two quarters (78% and 41% respectively), after falling in the preceding quarter too. Services have provided the main support, with project values rising 114% and 107% in the last two quarters. Moreover, the number of new projects almost halved in Q1FY27 from a year earlier despite a 53% increase in their value. Consumption is holding up, but largely because of strong sales of high-end products rather than mass-market goods. Exporters have shown remarkable resilience and agility in finding new markets, with real growth of 12.1% in Q1 goods and services shipments, despite additional US tariffs and the West Asia conflict. Yet investment appears to be accelerating faster than domestic demand and short-term export prospects would warrant, suggesting that large corporate groups are betting on India's medium- to long-term growth potential.

A few investors becoming more confident, however, will not be enough to create a broad and durable investment cycle. Achieving a sustained investment rate of 36-37% — necessary to escape the middle-income trap and support 8-9% growth — requires a wider and longer-lasting capex boom. India remains capital-scarce and faces a draining of domestic savings, making productive foreign direct investment (FDI) crucial. Yet much of the current FDI is risk-averse, involving ownership transfers rather than new productive capacity. Even foreign investments in data centres often involve minority stakes and debt support. To reinforce the investment cycle, policy must address market-power concentration, broaden consumption, and improve the prospects of smaller enterprises. India needs a capex cycle that creates jobs and incomes, not merely one that expands capacity.

THE HUMAN FACTOR

Messi's masterclass: Shut up and lead

MINUTES BEFORE THE 2022 World Cup final — the most-watched sporting event on the planet, a nation's 36-year itch on the line — Lionel Messi, who has now bowed out of international football, prompting the predictable avalanche of leadership listicles, gathered his teammates into a huddle. Here, surely, was the moment for the full Al Pacino: veins bulging, fists pounding lockers, inches gained. Instead, the greatest footballer alive told his men, in effect: calm down and forget everything. Block out the noise. Stick to the plan. Then they went out and won.

I thought of a town hall in which a chief executive announced 800 job cuts and, in the same breath, urged survivors to "bring their whole selves to work" — a request several had presumably just fulfilled by carrying their whole selves out in a cardboard box. The contrast was instructive. Messi, facing actual world-historical pressure, dialled it down. Our corporate leaders, facing bad news, reach for the motivational poster.

This is the first thing the workplace could learn from Messi: leadership is not volume. For years he was written off as too quiet to captain anyone — the football equivalent of being told in your appraisal that you "need to be more visible". He never became louder. He simply became so trustworthy that when he did speak, people leaned in. Meanwhile, offices everywhere continue to promote the person who talks most in meetings, on the theory that airtime equals authority. The reality, however, is it doesn't.

The second lesson is about what he actually says. Before the Copa América, Messi's team talk contained no strategy at all. He thanked his players for 45 days without complaint about hotels and food, and — remarkably — named the teammates who had become fathers during the tournament bubble and hadn't yet held their babies. He acknowledged, publicly, what the job had cost them. Compare this with the standard corporate recognition programme, in which sacrifice is rewarded with a digital badge and an email that begins "Team", and you begin to see why Argentina would run through walls for him and your team won't answer Slack after six.

Then there is the protecting-your-people business. When Papu Gómez dyed his hair blonde and became the squad's punchline, Messi quietly told everyone to knock it off. No HR ticket raised, no all-hands on psychological safety, no workshop with breakout rooms. Just a leader noticing that a joke had curdled and ending it. Most managers, in my experience, handle such moments by developing a profound fascination with their phones, and later wonder aloud why the annual engagement survey scores are down again.

At Inter Miami, the man with eight Ballons d'Or spent his time pulling aside teenagers mid-match to show them where to run, and his weekends watching academy kids from the sidelines like any other football dad with a thermos. The corporate translation of this — senior people actually mentoring juniors rather than merely listing "mentorship" under Interests on LinkedIn — remains, I'm told, in pilot phase at most organisations.

And finally, the hardest lesson of all. When Messi announced his retirement from international football, he didn't cling on, restructure the team around himself, or move upstairs as Executive Chairman of Goals. He said a brilliant younger generation deserved its chance, and left. I have worked in offices for long enough to know how rare this is. The average corporate leader treats succession the way a toddler treats bedtime: as a conspiracy to be resisted with everything they have.

So here is the Messi leadership method: speak less, mean it more; thank people by name for things that actually cost them; shut down the office bully; teach the youngsters; and leave before they wish you would. None of it requires a headset microphone. All of it requires something in shorter supply than talent — which, as Messi's career suggests, was never really the point.

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TEACHABLE LESSON

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan

“The success of educational institutions is reflected in the success of their students. Quality teaching can ensure excellence in students, while infrastructure can only build facilities

AI PRICING

INDIA'S OPPORTUNITY IS MUCH BIGGER THAN BECOMING THE WORLD'S LOW-COST AI GARAGE

Don't fight the wrong price war

EXPERTS ARGUE THAT China's aggressive AI pricing could rewrite the global playbook, while India could emerge as a cost-efficient hub for AI infrastructure. But fundamentally there is one important caveat.

China is indeed changing the AI game. But India should be extremely careful about copying the Chinese price tag and calling it strategy. Just because India has spent decades winning the global race for "cheaper", it cannot win this race. IT services? Cheaper. Back-office processing? Cheaper. Call centres? Cheaper. Software engineers? Cheaper. And now we want to become the discount aisle of AI. That is not a sovereign AI strategy.

China's AI pricing is far more consequential than a simple price war. Chinese companies are using cost as a weapon of technological diffusion. DeepSeek's latest V4 Pro initially cost just \$0.87 per million output tokens, although it has since raised peak-hour pricing to \$3.96. Even after the increase, it remains dramatically cheaper than many US frontier models. Alibaba's Qwen models are similarly aggressive. The result is that AI is becoming abundant, not merely cheaper. And abundance changes markets.

China learnt this lesson in solar panels, batteries, electric vehicles, telecom equipment, and consumer electronics. First reduce the cost. Then increase adoption. Then build scale, and then squeeze competitors. Finally, dominate the ecosystem. Reliance Jio seems to have caught on the same strategy, if you have to draw a parallel.

AI may be following the same choreography. But here is where the Indian opportunity gets misunderstood. India should not aspire to be China's cheaper cousin. It should aspire to be the place where AI creates the greatest economic value. There is a gigantic difference.

The cost of compute is only one component of AI economics. Power, cooling, chips, networking, data, talent, model

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engineering, cybersecurity, latency, regulatory compliance, and, most importantly, commercial applications determine the real economics. A ₹65-an-hour GPU is wonderful. A ₹65-an-hour GPU producing a ₹60-an-hour business problem is less wonderful.

India is actually making impressive progress on compute. Government data says over 38,000 GPUs have been onboarded through 14 providers, with average subsidised access of about ₹65 an hour, roughly one-third of the global average. Data-centre capacity has also risen from roughly 375 Mw in 2020 to around 1,500 Mw in 2025. So yes, the infrastructure story is real, but AI is becoming a power industry disguised as a software industry.

Data centres already consume enormous quantities of electricity, and AI workloads are pushing rack densities and cooling requirements sharply upwards. Industry estimates put power at roughly 40-60% of data-centre operating costs. Although startups like Rezonent Microchips is aiming to reduce this consumption, India cannot simply announce another thousand data centres and declare victory.

The country will need reliable electricity, transmission infrastructure, renewable power, storage, cooling, and water. Otherwise our AI strategy will eventually

encounter an ancient Indian technology: the power cut. And there is an even bigger danger in the "India as a low-cost AI infrastructure hub" thesis. We could become fabulously successful at hosting everybody else's intelligence while remaining mediocre at owning our own.

That would be the AI equivalent of the old outsourcing trap: India writes the code, someone else owns the platform, captures the IP, controls the customer, and pockets the disproportionate economics. The India AI Mission is at least attempting to avoid that fate. It has a ₹10,370-crore outlay and explicitly targets compute, indigenous foundation models, datasets, startup financing, and AI talent. That is the right direction.

But the ambition must go further. India needs to make some hard decisions.

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Why should our competitive advantage be cheap AI when our real advantage could be uniquely useful AI? India has something China and the US cannot replicate easily: the largest population-scale laboratory of digital public infrastructure, linguistic diversity, frugal innovation, and heterogeneous consumers. Had India looked at offering the cheapest payment infrastructure, UPI would not have become transformative. It became transformative because India built infrastructure that millions could actually

The law and politics of climate reparations



**CHHAYA BHARDWAJ
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If Nepal is committed to holding States responsible, it should build scientific evidence and pursue long-term climate justice through systemic reform

THE DEVASTATING FLASH flood in Nepal last month, estimated to have caused over \$5 billion in damage, is a humanitarian crisis that is also being politicised for responsibility and reparations under international law.

While Nepal recovers, its political leaders raise questions about the legal responsibility of other States for the floods, if any, without engaging with the actual rules of international climate law. This article anchors the analysis in the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) advisory opinion on climate change, and examines three issues: which States might bear responsibility, what forms of reparations are legally possible, and how Nepal may approach issues of relief from other States.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirms that as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions increase, so does the frequency of climate extremes. The ICJ reiterated that "international law sets forth obligations for States to ensure the protection of the climate system" from GHG emissions. This lays a conceptual foundation for the claim that certain GHG-emitting States have contributed to Nepal's floods. Political statements in Nepal have pointed fingers at the US, China, and India as States responsible for the floods. The two primary challenges to such claims, also confirmed by the ICJ, are legal attribution and scientific causation.

Legally, the ICJ clarified that when multiple States contribute to a wrongful act, the responsibility of each may be invoked individually, mirroring Article 47 of the Articles on the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (ARSIWA). Nepal would need to prove the specific share of emissions attributable to

India (historic and current) and demonstrate that they caused the August flash floods. Nepalese political discourse has also not addressed the EU's historic or ongoing emissions, although any apportionment exercise would inevitably include them.

The closest jurisprudence analogous to the Nepalese situation is *Luciano Llinuya v RWE AG*, where the claimant argued that RWE, a German power corporation, should pay 0.47% (17,000 euros) of the total cost required for his village, under

threat from a glacial lake outburst flood. Its key takeaway is evidentiary: that attribution science can ground a proportionate share of responsibility measured by an emitter's share of cumulative global emissions. Even when apportioning responsibility on a State, the principle of common but differentiated responsibility also poses a challenge for Nepal's claim against a developing, low-income country like India.

Jurisdiction is another obstacle. Nepal cannot compel India to litigate a climate-damage claim. India's acceptance of the ICJ's jurisdiction for contentious cases includes broad reservations, and neither India nor Nepal has accepted compulsory dispute settlement under Article 14 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Thus, contentious litigation is impossible without India's consent. Nepal may consider alternative options, such as an advisory opinion, diplomatic negotiations, and domestic litigation in foreign courts; however, none of these guarantees

a successful claim.

International law recognises three forms of reparation: restitution, compensation, and satisfaction (ARSIWA, Articles 34-37). Compensation extends only to "financially assessable damage" and only if a sufficiently direct causal link is proven. The attribution and apportionment difficulties discussed above reappear at the quantum stage, making it difficult for Nepal to establish attribution to India. The options of restitution in kind by seeking and receiving technical support, reconstruction aid, and other forms of cooperation are realistic and less politically contentious.

From a policy standpoint, the most effective mechanism for Nepal is not litigation, but the loss-and-damage architecture created precisely because liability litigation claims are so hard to win. Nepal can access the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage and the Santiago Network by submitting a well-documented post-disaster needs assessment, and through these channels would likely mobilise resources more quickly.

Several States offered assistance to Nepal in disaster relief, but it initially rejected aid from foreign personnel. This reflects Nepal's sensitivities and security concerns. Yet, international law emphasises cooperation. The International Law Commission's 2016 Draft Articles on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters affirm that the affected State must seek external assistance where a disaster manifestly exceeds its national response capacity (Article 11); and it cannot arbitrarily

refuse aid (Article 13). The legal question is whether Nepal's decline was arbitrary in light of its own capacity to respond.

India's assistance aligned with the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the open-border regime, and the regional disaster treaty — the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters, 2011. However, India has not officially recorded this relief effort as a practice under any treaty. Besides, the India-Nepal Joint Committee on Water Resources and its Joint Committee on Inundation and Flood Management already exist, and real-time hydrological data are shared on river systems. From an international law perspective, India's efforts not only demonstrate its regional solidarity but also advance its restitution efforts, and what is practically possible for India to do given its own national circumstances.

The politicisation of climate justice, including international responsibility and reparations, is attracting global attention. If Nepal is committed to holding States responsible, it will have to adopt a dual approach: building scientific evidence and pursuing long-term climate justice through systemic reform. Regardless, Nepal should first seek relief through existing mechanisms like the Loss and Damage Fund. Second, it should commission attribution studies to build science. Thirdly, understand and use the option of domestic litigation to secure relief for Nepal. And finally, work with State coalitions to strengthen international mechanisms for financial support after such crises.

For India, the lesson is parallel: formalise its existing relations with Nepal and other States to establish its rules for climate cooperation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tech billionaires must be accountable

Apropos of "The tech mogul strongman is on the rise" (FE, September 5), the growing influence of technology billionaires over public discourse and political decision-making raises legitimate questions about accountability. Innovation and entrepreneurship deserve encouragement, but private wealth should not acquire disproportionate influence over democratic institutions. Social media platforms, artificial intelligence companies, and digital infrastructure now shape how people receive information and form

opinions. Governments therefore need clear and consistent rules on competition, transparency, and conflicts of interest. At the same time, regulation must not become a tool for political control or discourage genuine innovation. Independent regulators, stronger disclosure norms, and public scrutiny can

provide a better balance. Democratic societies should welcome technological progress while ensuring that power, whether political or corporate, remains subject to reasonable checks. —SM Jeeva, Chennai

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Editor's
TAKE

Belgium hedges against an unpredictable US

From defence co-production to the India-EU free trade agreement, Brussels and New Delhi are finding common ground for a rules-based economic order

When Bart De Wever landed in New Delhi on September 2, he became the first Belgian Prime Minister to visit India in two decades – his first as PM. A wreath at Rajghat, warm words at Hyderabad House and ten outcomes in three days signalled more than protocol: a considered European wager on India just as Washington's commitment to open trade looks conditional at best. De Wever did not need to name Donald Trump in Mumbai to be understood. Addressing the India-Belgium High-Level Dialogue on the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, he cautioned against a rising tide of protectionism, mocking leaders who "decide something on Monday, revoke it on Wednesday, and reinstall it on Saturday." When the room applauded, he added, wryly, that their applause told him exactly who he meant. India needed no footnote. Its exporters had lived that whiplash directly: a 50 per cent US tariff over Russian oil purchases, cut to 18 per cent by a bilateral deal, then to 10 per cent after the Supreme Court struck down Trump's wider tariff powers.

For his hosts, De Wever's complaint simply described the recent past. Belgium brought substance to match the sentiment. Officials framed the outcomes around "three Ts" – trade, technology, talent. A defence Letter of Intent, an industry MoU between Belgium's BDSI and India's SIDM, and contracts signed by defence ministers Rajnath Singh and Theo Francken point toward co-designing and co-producing military hardware, not merely buying it.

A CBI-Belgian Federal Police pact on transnational crime carries an unspoken subtext: the pending extradition of fugitive diamantaire Mehl Choksi, in Belgian custody since 2025. Add semiconductors, critical minerals, renewable energy, an investment fast-track mechanism, and a target to double the \$13-billion trade relationship within five years, and this reads less like a courtesy call than a partnership being deliberately rebuilt. The deeper convergence, though, is of worldview. Belgium and India – one a small federal state balancing linguistic communities, the other the world's largest democracy – share a commitment to pluralism, the rule of law and open markets that both leaders called a "natural" fit.

Brussels backs India's bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat, and De Wever went out of his way to praise Modi personally, casting him as a rare point of steadiness amid global disorder. Beneath the flattery sits calculation: as Washington's tariffs swing and Beijing's leverage grows, both capitals are hedging toward each other, and toward a rules-based order that no single power controls. That same logic underwrites the India-EU Free Trade Agreement itself – concluded in January, awaiting signature, and set to scrap tariffs on 96 per cent of EU goods, the largest such pact either side has struck. The takeaway is straightforward. Europe's middle powers, modest individually, are becoming collectively significant as India diversifies away from an unpredictable Washington. Whether this visit's promise holds will be measured less in joint statements than in whether its MoUs mature into contracts – and whether Choksi finally comes home.

Teachers: The artists of education

In an age when machines are becoming capable of almost everything predictable, the irreplaceable act remains the human one: a teacher who sees potential in a student that the student cannot yet see in themselves



JAYANT CHAUDHARY

No one remembers the exact day they learned to read. But almost everyone remembers the teacher who taught them. That asymmetry, between the forgettable moment and the unforgettable person, tells us something essential about teaching. A teacher leaves behind something that cannot be easily measured: the confidence to try, the discipline to persist, the curiosity to ask, or sometimes simply the belief that one is capable of more. Thus, teaching cannot be classified as anything less than an art.

The National Awards to Teachers, conferred each year by the Hon'ble President of India, honour a chosen few whose contribution has risen above the rest. Nonetheless, in every corner of the country, in classrooms, skill labs, polytechnics, sports grounds, and music rooms, students find their own way to say thank you. A handwritten note. A moment of recognition in a morning assembly. A quiet acknowledgement that stays with a teacher long after the day is over. These are not lesser celebrations but, in many ways, the truest ones.

The data, however, tells us a parallel concerning story. OECD's 2026 Teacher Knowledge Survey distinguishes between knowing a subject and the ability to teach it. Its findings posit that subject knowledge does not always translate into effective pedagogy. The point is simple but important: knowing something deeply and knowing how to help another person learn it are not the same skill. Teaching is an art, requiring an understanding of human connections, pedagogy and some theatrics for the classroom.

The UNESCO Global Report on Teachers, 2024, places a hard number on what neglecting this profession costs. The world needs 44 million additional primary and secondary teachers by 2030, and over half are needed simply to replace those already leaving. Meanwhile, the McKinsey Global Institute estimates that between 75 million and 375 million workers globally will need to switch occupational categories by 2030 due to automation. In such a scenario, the value of competent teachers is more than ever.

India has acknowledged this challenge and is responding with intent. The four-year Integrated Teacher Education Program, launched in consonance with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, integrates subject mastery and pedagogy into a single under-



THE HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER MEETS EVERY YEAR WITH NATIONAL AWARD WINNERS NOT MERELY TO CONGRATULATE BUT TO LISTEN, TO KNOW THEIR STORIES FROM THE GROUND, AND TO OFFER THE PERSPECTIVE THAT ONLY LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE CAN PROVIDE. TEACHING IS A CREATIVE ACT, AND CROSS-LEARNING ACROSS FIELDS HELPS RENEW THIS CREATIVITY

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graduate degree, attracting the best minds into teaching by design.

To ensure congruent standards amongst the in-service teachers, the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) tie career advancement to demonstrated teaching quality rather than mere seniority. To benefit from cross-sectoral learning, the National Mission for Mentoring (NMM) provides structured support to teachers to learn from mentors from various fields. I, too, have registered as a mentor for this mission. The Hon'ble Prime Minister meets every year with National Award winners not merely to congratulate but to listen, to know their stories from the ground, and to offer the perspective that only leadership experience can provide. Teaching is a creative act, and cross-learning across fields helps renew this creativity.

India is also expanding who counts as a teacher, and that is perhaps the most novel idea of all. Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society (ULLAS), the New India Literacy Program, is built on the principle that anyone who is literate can teach someone who is not.

As we celebrate International Literacy Day this year, nine states and union territories have been declared fully literate under this program. This spirit is further embodied in the Vidyanjali portal of the Ministry of Education. It connects over 8.75 lakh government schools to volunteers who bring their expertise, whether in dance, mathematics, public speaking, or craft, into classrooms as a gift.

Every one of them acts as a teacher. Every subject they bring is valued equally. Because at its core, teaching is not a technical func-

tion but a craft. Every lesson plan is a composition. Every explanation is a performance.

An artform does not distinguish between the artists and thus any hierarchy that we carry in our heads must be examined and dismantled. Sometimes, the music teacher or the PE teacher is considered supplementary and the vocational trainer, a fallback. This classification is not just unfair but completely wrong. When examination pressure mounts, music or exercise may restore calm, which aids preparation.

With India's growing orange economy, multiple art forms shall prepare students for one of the fastest-growing sectors of the modern world. As sports universities take shape and supplement national athletic infrastructure, the sports coach and PE teacher will open gateways to authentic career pathways. The ITI trainer teaching precision manufacturing is crafting skills that help construct bridges and strengthen hospitals. That is nation-building in another form.

In an age when machines are becoming capable of almost everything predictable, the irreplaceable act remains the human one: a teacher who sees potential in a student that the student cannot yet see in themselves. That act has no algorithm. It does not stop when the school bell rings. And it belongs to every teacher, in every subject, in every kind of institution across this country.

The Latin phrase sums it up aptly: Non scholae sed vitae discimus. We learn not for school, but for life. And the teacher, the true artist of human possibility, is the person who makes that possible.

PIC TALK



Children shower flowers on a statue of Mother Mary as part of preparations for the Monthi Fest at a church, in Mangaluru, Karnataka

PHOTO: PTI

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Empty Mind to Receive the New

We take pride in what we know. Years of experience, qualifications, hard earned opinions about us built over a lifetime - we carry them like trophies and crowns, convinced they make us wise. But examine if there is a quiet danger in this pride: a mind so full of what it already knows has no space left to receive anything new. Alvin Toffler in his book "Future Shock" wrote that the illiterate of the future would not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. We assume learning is only about adding - a new skill, a new fact, a new opinion and to stack onto the old. Rarely do we consider that growth sometimes demands the opposite: emptying, before we can be filled again. A young scholar once travelled to an ashram, proud of the scriptures he had already mastered, eager to be taught by a revered guru. As he sat before him, reciting all he knew, the guru quietly picked up the young man's kamandal, still half filled with water, and began pouring more into it. The water spilled over, running onto the ground. "Guruji, it is already full!" the young man said, startled. The guru smiled. "So is your mind. You came here to learn, but you arrived already full of your own knowledge. Empty yourself first - only then can I offer you anything true." Most of us walk through life like that overflowing kamandal - certain, full, closed. We listen to reply, not to understand. Our mind always has to be empty to receive the new. Real learning begins only when we're willing to unlearn first. Humbly accept that our cup is full and pour it out. Today, sit with one belief or opinion you hold strongly, and ask - am I still willing to learn something that contradicts it?

-DAIV

When organisations lose the human touch



SANJAY CHANDRA

2ND OPINION

I became a member of Club Mahindra in 2010. Whenever I needed something beyond my normal entitlement-an additional room, for instance-I would write to them. Someone would call to understand my requirement. If I missed the call, they would call again. I would be placed on a waitlist and, sometimes, the additional room became available. At other times, it did not. Even then, there was an apology and an explanation. Whether I eventually got the room was not what stayed with me. Someone had listened. Someone had tried. I felt valued.

Over the past few years, I sensed a change. A missed call is sometimes followed by an email saying that I could not be contacted, bringing the conversation to an end. Recently, dissatisfied with the response to a request, I gave a poor rating on their app. An executive called but

explained that he was helpless. He could not even place me on a waitlist. When I asked for the escalation matrix, he promised to send it by email, which he never sent.

It would be easy to blame technology or the increasing scale of organisations. Yet my experiences elsewhere make me hesitate. Whenever I stay at Taj or ITC properties, I encounter employees who appear instinctively inclined to help. They cannot always fulfil a request, nor should one expect them to. But there is usually an attempt to understand whether something can be done. The difference is subtle but important. Good service is not about always saying yes. It is about making the customer feel that the request has been heard and someone has genuinely tried.

My father still narrates an incident from more than four decades ago. While browsing at Harrods in London, he inadvertently left his camera behind. He realised it only after boarding his flight back to India. This was before mobile phones and emails, when international calls were prohibitively expensive. On returning home, he wrote to the store. Sometime later, he was surprised to receive the camera. Accompanying it was a letter from Harrods apologising for the inconvenience. The customer had forgotten his camera. The store apologised.

Perhaps technology, therefore, is not the real issue. Harrods could demonstrate concern without apps, customer relationship management software or automated tracking systems.

Taj and ITC demonstrate that modern organisations

can retain the human touch. And my experience with Club Mahindra suggests that an organisation can possess that quality and gradually lose it. Why does this happen?

As organisations grow, processes become necessary. Standardisation improves efficiency and technology allows businesses to serve customers at a scale otherwise impossible. But processes also define what employees may or may not do. Somewhere along the way, an employee can stop asking, "How can I help?" and begin asking, "What does the system allow me to do?"

Perhaps this is where leadership and organisational culture matter. Employees work within the systems, authority and expectations created for them. It is leadership that determines whether procedures become rigid boundaries or allow room for empathy when circumstances demand it. Technology and growth need not make organisations impersonal; much depends on the culture created at the top. When employees know that helping customers matters as much as following a process, that understanding shapes every interaction.

Systems may become smarter and processes more efficient. But an organisation retains its beating heart only as long as its leadership remains willing to care-and creates a culture in which caring is possible.

The writer is a founder of Kala - Krazy About Literature And Arts, is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator, and strategy consultant

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Congress must put Punjab unity first

The reshuffle in the Congress organisation, with Sachin Pilot replacing Bhupesh Baghel as the party's Punjab in-charge, comes at a crucial juncture. With the Punjab Assembly elections approaching, the party can ill afford internal differences and factionalism. Reports of strained relations among senior Punjab leaders and the boycott of organisational meetings have undoubtedly weakened the party's preparations. Mr Pilot's appointment should therefore be seen as an opportunity to rebuild trust and bring competing factions onto a common platform. His organisational experience and relatively young age could inject fresh energy into the state unit. However, no organisational reshuffle can succeed unless Punjab Congress leaders rise above personal ambitions and work collectively. The party must concentrate on strengthening its grassroots network, addressing people's concerns and presenting voters with a credible political alternative. Mr Pilot's immediate priority should be to restore unity, discipline and effective coordination between leaders and workers. The Congress must also ensure that organisational decisions are implemented at the grassroots rather than remaining confined to party offices. If the party can turn its internal diversity into collective strength, it may yet regain political relevance in Punjab.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

Food safety crackdown must be sustained

The FDA's crackdown on food adulteration and mislabelling is an appreciable step, but such exercises must continue until they achieve their intended purpose. Other states should adopt similar measures, even if rigorous enforcement initially sends ripples through hotels, restaurants and food businesses. For years, food-safety enforcement in Maharashtra appeared to suffer from a familiar problem: plenty of rules, but insufficient fear among those who flouted them. That complacency now seems to be facing a challenge. The recent Navi Mumbai operation, conducted by the FDA with the Navi Mumbai Police Crime Branch, illustrates why sustained vigilance is necessary. Officials reportedly uncovered an alleged racket involving the removal and alteration of manufacturing and expiry dates on packaged food.

At a Turbhe establishment, 8,442 cartons linked to 10 exporter companies were seized, along with equipment allegedly used for relabelling and repackaging. Tampering with expiry dates is not merely regulatory misconduct; it undermines informed consumer choice and can endanger public health. The real test is whether such action creates a culture of routine compliance, backed by systematic, transparent and evidence-based inspections.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

India-Poland: Strategic partnership deepens

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's recent discussions with Poland's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski underline the growing importance of India-Poland relations. The visit was also reciprocal, following Mr Sikorski's visit to India in January. The two sides focused on promising areas including investment, manufacturing, space technology, defence, semiconductors, artificial intelligence and green energy.

Bilateral trade, already worth around \$6.3 billion, provides a strong foundation for further economic engagement. India and Poland established diplomatic relations in 1954, and their ties were elevated to a strategic partnership in 2024 during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Warsaw—the first by an Indian Prime Minister in 45 years. It is encouraging that the Action Plan for 2024–2028 is now being actively pursued. People-to-people ties provide another important dimension.

A sizeable Indian community lives in Poland, while many Indian students pursue higher education there. Poland also extended valuable assistance to India during the Covid-19 pandemic, including medical equipment. Greater cooperation in emerging technologies, defence, education and clean energy could give this strategic partnership substantial depth in the years ahead.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Bihar must get a voice in the Ganga water-sharing deal

As India-Bangladesh Ganga Water Sharing Treaty approaches its expiry, Bihar faces a crucial moment in its long-running struggle over water. The state bears the consequences of upstream extraction and downstream obligations at Farakka, yet has had little say in decisions that directly affect its agriculture, and livelihoods



SUDHAKAR SINGH SUBODH KUMAR MEHTA

The Ganga is not merely a 2,525-kilometer-long ecological lifeline; it is also the epicentre of a deepening hydro-political conflict within Indian federalism. In Bihar, the Ganga spans a length of approximately 16,205 square kilometers, with nearly 80 percent of the state's geographical region falling under the Ganga river plains or its sub-basins. While Bihar's internal tributaries contribute over 50 percent of the river's total water flow during the dry season, the state remains a victim of severe downstream hydrological neglect. Upper-riparian states such as Uttar Pradesh and Haryana extract massive volumes of water for urban centers and intensive agriculture. Consequently, the natural flow of the river reaching Bihar is drastically depleted. Despite this, the full burden of meeting downstream and international supply mandates at Farakka falls squarely on Bihar.

To understand Bihar's developmental crisis, it is essential to analyse how upper-riparian extraction, central neglect, and treaty allocations have systematically marginalized the state. Furthermore, downstream obligations mandate that adequate water flow reaches the Farakka Barrage to fulfill national navigation demands at the Kolkata and Haldia ports. The Kolkata and Haldia ports serve not only West Bengal but also connect landlocked states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Nepal to maritime routes, while simultaneously honouring international treaty terms with Bangladesh.

As a result, the onus of maintaining this downstream flow falls almost entirely on the tributaries merging into the Ganga within Bihar. To protect its citizens from recurring droughts, severe floods, and ecological imbalances, the Government of Bihar has repeatedly raised the fundamental issue of equitable and fair water usage by upper-riparian states. In 1991, the state constituted the Second Bihar State Irrigation Commission to evaluate water resource issues. The commission concluded that during dry months (March and April), the sub-basin's contribution to the Ganga was significantly lower than the central requirements assessed by the Central Water Commission (CWC) in 1982, which mandated a flow of 1,500 cusecs at Farakka. This forces Bihar to release nearly three times its designated share of water. To bridge this gap between water availability and downstream mandates, the Central Government must restrict water extraction by upper-riparian states during the dry season (January to April). An effective water flow mechanism at Farakka is urgently needed to safeguard downstream interests.

Bihar has been consistently side-lined in inter-state and international meetings and discussions. During the construction of the Kanpur Barrage (1995) on the Ganga, the Uttar Pradesh government was invited for special consultations, while downstream interests were ignored. During a debate in the State Assembly on June 30, 1995, the Bihar government argued that before the river's ecological health is permanently threatened, the Central Government must address these systemic imbalances. Bihar expressed strong disagreement with the 1996 Ganga Water Sharing Treaty with Bangladesh because, despite being a major riparian state, it was excluded from the core negotiations.

Although international treaties fall entirely under the constitutional domain of the Central Government, water management remains a State subject. Excluding middle/upper-riparian states like Bihar from treaty negotiations creates a severe imbalance in cooperative federalism, especially when extensive consultations are conducted with downstream states like West Bengal. Signed on December 12, 1996, the 30-year treaty aims to share Ganga waters for mutual benefits in flood management, irrigation, basin development, and hydropower.

The treaty mandates a 50-50 allocation during peak dry season, provided that each country receives a minimum of 35,000 cusecs of water in alternating 10-day cycles between March 1 and May 10. Despite Bihar's limited



ALTHOUGH INTERNATIONAL TREATIES FALL ENTIRELY UNDER THE CONSTITUTIONAL DOMAIN OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, WATER MANAGEMENT REMAINS A STATE SUBJECT. EXCLUDING MIDDLE/UPPER- RIPARIAN STATES LIKE BIHAR FROM TREATY NEGOTIATIONS CREATES A SEVERE IMBALANCE IN COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM, ESPECIALLY WHEN EXTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS ARE CONDUCTED WITH DOWNSTREAM STATES LIKE WEST BENGAL.

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voice in international water allocation, its role at the Farakka Barrage remains the most critical. During the dry season, when the Ganga enters Buxar in Bihar from Uttar Pradesh, its flow drops to approximately 4,000 cusecs. To meet the minimum threshold set by the treaty at Farakka, 75 percent of the required additional water is supplied by Bihar's internal tributaries (Gandak, Kosi, Ghaghara, Mahananda, and Son). In the absence of adequate water storage facilities, uncontrolled monsoon flows cause widespread devastation in North Bihar through severe flooding. Constructing a flood-control dam in the upper catchment area of the Kosi River in Nepal could prove to be a crucial pivot for Bihar's safety and regional development.

Following the devastating floods of 2007, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar formed a high-level technical committee comprising experts from the Central Water Commission, Ganga Flood Control Commission, and Central Water and Power Research Station, headed by Nilendu Sanyal. The committee recommended regular monitoring, anti-silting measures, and dredging to prevent embankment breaches, alongside establishing diplomatic and technical coordination with Nepal. However, these recommendations were never implemented. The Sanyal Committee never identified the Farakka Barrage as the primary cause of flooding, nor did it demand its decommissioning. Despite this, going against the report of the technical committee set up by his own government, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar submitted a proposal to a central expert committee in 2017, arguing that the Farakka Barrage acts as an obstruction by trapping heavy amounts of silt upstream, raising the riverbed level of the Ganga and causing floods in Bihar.

Thus, Bihar officially requested the Central Government to consider decommissioning it. Conversely, technical committees formed by the Bihar government from time to time have not attributed the siltation problem to the Farakka Barrage. Construction of the Farakka Barrage began in 1961, specifically designed to divert Ganga water into the Bhagirathi-Hooghly river system to flush silt from the Kolkata and Haldia ports. The Farakka Barrage is an economic lifeline for the Kolkata and Haldia ports and a vital maritime corridor for a landlocked state like Bihar.

As we know that, following the partition of India, the lower portion of the Ganga went to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), cutting off maritime trade access for Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Nepal. Moreover, removing the barrage would escalate inter-state conflicts, as West Bengal relies on it for water supply, power plants, and irrigation. The Central Water Commission also periodically prioritizes desilting and dredging.

As the 1996 Ganga Water Sharing Treaty reaches the end of its 30-year term on December 12, 2026, the Bihar government must demand formal representation in the treaty renegotiations. Even though water sharing is a central subject, Bihar endures its physical consequences. An institutionalized role in the Joint River Commission's negotiation delegation alongside West Bengal is the need of the hour.

The Samrat Choudhary administration must present comprehensive data on agricultural, industrial, and drinking water requirements for the next 30 years. Furthermore, the scientific data compiled by the Second Bihar Irrigation Commission should serve as an important baseline. The Bihar government must urge the Centre to implement a National Silt Management Policy focused on systematic dredging. The Central Government should also direct upper-riparian states to engage in formal dialogue with Bihar. The upcoming deadline offers an opportunity to update the 30-year-old framework using modern climate data. Today's necessity is to maintain a balance in foreign relations with Bangladesh while addressing Bihar's legitimate concerns regarding drought and flood management. Only a collaborative and equitable framework can restore the ecological health of the Ganga while safeguarding the social and economic stability of all riparian stakeholders.

Gearing up to eliminate tuberculosis



GOBARDHAN DAS SIMARJOT KAUR

India is marching towards becoming a developed nation by 2047, eliminating TB is no longer simply about saving lives, it is about reducing healthcare costs and demonstrating India's ability to solve a global problem through indigenous innovation. Over the past decade, India has significantly strengthened its fight against Tuberculosis (TB) through the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP). Although the ambitious 2025 elimination target remains a work in progress, it has accelerated investments in diagnostics, treatment and patient support. The results are encouraging. According to the WHO Global TB Report 2025, India's TB incidence has declined by 21%, from 237 to 187 cases per lakh population between 2015 and 2024, almost twice the global rate of decline. During the same period, TB mortality fell by 25%, while treatment coverage improved dramatically from 53% to 92%, reflecting stronger case detection and better access to care. Digital platforms such as Ni-kshay, nutritional support through the Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana, expanded molecular diagnostics and nationwide community campaigns under TB Mukta Bharat have together transformed India's TB response, laying a strong foundation for eventual elimination.

Despite this progress, the battle is far from over. Drug-resistant TB remains a serious threat, requiring longer treatment, higher costs and more complex clinical management. Delayed diagnosis, undernutrition, diabetes, overcrowded living conditions and social stigma continue to fuel transmission. Addressing these issues will require stronger public health systems alongside continued scientific innovation. Scientific innovation is changing the landscape of TB treatment. New medicines such as Bedaquiline, Delamanid and Pretomanid have significantly improved outcomes for patients with drug-resistant TB by enabling shorter and more effective treatment regimens. Researchers are also working on improved vaccines, rapid diagnostics and host-directed therapies that strengthen the body's immune response against infection.

India is not merely adopting these innovations; it is actively developing them. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and its National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT) are leading research on new diagnostics, treatment strategies and disease surveillance. The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) are supporting startups and research institutions working on vaccines, diagnostics and novel therapeutics, helping build a stronger indigenous innovation ecosystem. Indian industry is also playing a crucial role. Companies such as Macleods Pharmaceuticals, Lupin, Cipla and Cadila Pharmaceuticals manufacture affordable anti-TB medicines that are used across India and also exported to many low and middle-income countries. Meanwhile, Molbio Diagnostics has developed the portable Truenat platform, enabling rapid molecular diagnosis even in remote healthcare settings. These achievements reinforce India's position as not only the "Pharmacy of the world" but also an emerging hub for affordable healthcare innovation.

Beyond conventional medicines, Indian scientists are exploring natural and host-directed therapies that could improve TB treatment. Researchers at the CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM) and the CSIR-Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI) are studying bioactive compounds from medicinal plants such as Ashwagandha, Turmeric, Giloy and Black Pepper for their immune-modulating properties. While these therapies are still under investigation and cannot replace standard treatment, they may eventually complement existing medicines by improving patient recovery. Unlike many Western countries, where TB has become relatively uncommon, India continues to face unique demographic and socio-economic conditions that sustain transmission. High population density, nutritional deficiencies and unequal access to healthcare mean that solutions developed elsewhere may not fully address India's needs. This makes indigenous innovation essential. Affordable diagnostics, vaccines and medicines designed and manufactured in India will not only strengthen national health security but can also serve other high-burden countries facing similar challenges. The next phase of India's TB strategy must move beyond disease management to innovation leadership. Greater investment in biotechnology, vaccine development, genomic surveillance and public-private partnerships will be essential to develop affordable, scalable solutions. Equally important will be improving nutrition, sanitation, early diagnosis and awareness, since eliminating TB requires both scientific breakthroughs and stronger community health systems. India now has an opportunity to redefine its role in the global fight against TB. The country possesses world-class scientific institutions, a robust pharmaceutical industry, and a rapidly growing biotechnology ecosystem. By combining strong public policy with indigenous research and private-sector innovation, India can move beyond managing the world's largest TB burden to developing solutions for the world. The fight against TB is no longer only about eliminating a disease, it is about demonstrating India's ability to lead through science, innovation and affordable healthcare. India's sustained commitment and investment is likely to become a model for TB elimination across the world.



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India's next fiscal challenge is climate risk



ANURADHA PS

Climate change in India has been looked upon more as an environmental issue for decades. This then turned into a development challenge and now to a fiscal risk. Transport networks and supply chains can be paralysed during a flood. Heatwaves may decrease productivity from work and increase electricity consumption. During drought, the real purchasing power gets affected and farm incomes. Cyclones can cause damage to public infrastructure, disrupt activities of businesses and affect the provision of essential services.

The expenses continue after these uncertainties. Governments need to fund relief, reconstruction, social protection and the restoration of public assets, which may occur at a time when economies are already strained, and public revenues are already limited. Beyond the standard budget debates, a critical question remains unaddressed: what is the true fiscal cost of climate change for India?

The costs of activities aimed at addressing climate change and its impacts are already significant in India. But the difficulty is that this is distributed across ministries, sectors and programmes and the fiscal exposure is not clear.

The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy did a study in 2020 that estimated the expenditure related to climate programmes accounts for about 5-6 per cent of all national budgetary expenditure, of which a significant portion is specifically targeted.

A threat to the financial stability

A study of climate change and fiscal deficits in India in 2026 finds that compared to the overall government expenditure the coefficient of variation of the climate related expenditure is very high, at 26.4 per cent. It also detects higher budget differences in sectors vulnerable to climate change. The figures must be taken with a pinch of salt as they are based on how climate-related spending is categorized.

The relevance is not just on the side of increased spending by governments due to climate change. It could increase the uncertainty of public expenditure. In India, IAC projects total adaptation needs of ₹56.68 trillion up to 2030 in a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario. Further, NITI Aayog has also pointed out that the potential climate-damage cost to India by 2030 will be ₹15.5 trillion. These are scenario-based estimates, rather than obligations which have to show up in government accounts.

The establishment of another independent Indian climate fund is not necessarily required in India. It requires a Union Budget's Climate Fiscal Risk Statement. The statement needs to stipulate five areas: What are the most flood, drought, heat-wave, cyclone and water stress exposed sectors, states and public assets? What contingencies might



be the risks that governments would be exposed to following a severe climate event?

There are models from other countries to be learned: The UK's Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) looks at the impact of physical climate impact, adaptation and transition to a low carbon economy on borrowing and public debt. The Treasury has also added climate change and adverse weather response considerations to its long-term economic and fiscal analysis of New Zealand. In the Philippines, the Climate Change Expenditure Tagging (CCET) method is employed to identify, monitor and report on climate-related expenditure in the budget process. India requires both aspects: knowing the amount of spending it is doing on climate action, and what climate change could do to the public finances.

Fiscal reviews typically focus on lower growth, higher interest rates, and lower revenues. Climate shocks should be incorporated into the same exercise. If a big flood does the damage, what will

happen to a state's finances? What occurs following successive droughts to agricultural and rural-support expenditure?

The IMF's Quantitative Climate Change Risk Assessment Fiscal Tool (Q-CRAFT) is a tool that can be used by governments to analyse the implications of climate scenarios for a country's macro-economic and fiscal indicators, including government debt. These should be adopted systematically throughout India starting at the Union level and gradually moving on to make climate-fiscal assessments at the state level. States have to be included.

They carry the brunt of the initial expense of wrecked roads, drainage, water systems, agriculture, health services and disaster response. But they have different financial means. The fiscal federalism aspect of climate risk is therefore also a question. Efforts of the 16th Finance Commission provide a useful context for understanding how intergovernmental transfers can help address variations in climate exposure, climate resilience requirements and fiscal capacity.

Fiscal insurance as resilience

Often, a resilient drainage system or heat-resistant public infrastructure and drought-resilient agriculture are regarded as extra costs. It should instead be seen as some future expenditure that is not incurred. The value of an investment can't just be based on its initial cost if it lowers reconstruction expenses the next day. Public investment appraisal should also take into account losses and liabilities that resilience can avoid. The same principle goes

for insurance. If a loss is not covered by insurance then governments fill the gap as insurers of last resort. By using appropriate catastrophe insurance, parametric insurance and other risk-transfer mechanisms, a more manageable share of losses for governments can be reduced following disasters. The transition to the lower carbon economy is also a part of climate-risk accounting. The fuel-tax revenues and subsidies could be impacted by changes in the consumption of fossil fuels, and the transition to renewable energy, electricity grids, storage, green mobility and worker adjustment will involve investments.

Progress has been made in India with regard to monitoring climate investment and bolstering disaster management. It is now time to reflect climate risk in fiscal policy. The impacts of climate change can build up over time – from repeated floods, crop failures, "heat-stressed" cities, damaged infrastructure, increased reconstruction costs, and the increased need for public support. These pressures, when clearly apparent in government accounts, come on the back of fiscal space having been restricted. India is facing a new hurdle of budget administration: not only is there a question of how much it spends, but also of how well India's public finances will withstand a changing climate. Rather than being reshaped by climate change, its budgets have to anticipate the risks of climate change.

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CONTRAPUNTO

For the execution of the voyage to the Indies, I did not make use of intelligence, mathematics or maps
- CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Right-Sizing

Switch from Mercator’s map was long overdue. When size matters, every nation deserves fair depiction

Size, unfortunately, is a proxy for importance. That’s why kings rode elephants, and forbade plebeians to be mounted around them. And in that age of kings and emperors—the year 1569, to be precise, when Shakespeare was five – a cobbler’s son in modern-day Belgium drew a map that made navigation easier. Because it was the age of navigation, that map was quite a hit, so much so that not only ships but also classrooms adopted it. Thus, generations, us included, have learnt geography from that map.

And that’s a problem. Because the map Gerard Cremer or Kramer – Kramer is German for shopkeeper – made was an imperfect representation of the globe. To fit a 3D globe on a 2D plane, Cremer, who had latinised his name to Gerardus Mercator – merchant – by then, had to stretch the parts that were away from the Equator. So, places like Europe and Russia became disproportionately bigger. Greenland, which is two-thirds the size of India, appeared as large as entire Africa. African nations, understandably, didn’t like it. When size is a proxy for importance, why should a large country like Algeria tolerate being shown as smaller than Greenland?

Opposition to Mercator’s map is not new. When WW2 spread deep into Russia, military strategists realised their estimates of distances were all wrong. Yet, even some maps of other planets like Mars, Jupiter and Venus, are based on Mercator’s projection. It is the foundation of Google Maps also. Useful, yes, but politically wrong. That’s why, on Friday, UN General Assembly passed a resolution to promote “equal-area maps”, like the Equal Earth projection, which is a more realistic representation of different countries’ and continents’ relative sizes.

Only America opposed the resolution, terming it a “radical ideological project”. But it might be that Trump does not like the “new” and small Greenland, although even now it’s twice as large as Texas and California combined. India has welcomed the new map, and the principle of “equal-area cartographic representation”, but demanded that its territory, including Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, be shown in accordance with the official Indian map. Altogether, this is a good step. We should reexamine the world map, and our notions of the relative importance of nations, based on their size. As for Mercator’s map, it won’t go away because it is a genius idea with specific uses. Politics of maps aside, Mercator contributed to human advancement, like Galileo and Newton, and shouldn’t be villainised for it.

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Kitchen Therapy

Home food is good for heart, mind and soul.
So, no surprise, ‘cooking’ itself is healthy

G ran always told us, and science backed her up, that eating home-cooked food is a great strategy for good health. Now, an observational study in Japan has found home-cooking activity can cut back the risk of dementia in older people. It’s true home-cooking becomes drudgery when the daily labour, from planning to serving, to being responsible for balancing taste with family’s nutritional needs, falls disproportionately on women. At the other end of the household spectrum, for those living solo, cooking can seem a chore. Here is where the convenience economy has pitched in, and hugely helped, for households where social norms haven’t changed to equitably divide household chores, and where cooking seems a drag.

That said, it is also equally true that cooking, over the last two decades or so, is many people’s newfound joy, therapy even – especially baking, that demands near-meditative focus, calm and patience. The riot of colours of fresh veggies, fruits, grains, pulses, meats and fish is a joy to behold, in a world that’s mostly a phone screen. Kitchen tech advancements, with fascinating gadgetry, gizmos and thingamajigs, make the most arduous tasks a breeze. The excitement of discovering new ways of doing old things, chop chop, has no parallel. To get it just right consistently, the seasoning, flavour, colour, texture, is high ambition, high achievement. If social media is a drool-scroll of hacks, tricks and intelligent recipes, for home cooks, there is no greater delight than a rack of cookbooks from across the world, a treasure trove, a travel through global cuisines – most home food anywhere, across continents, is remarkably simple, hearty, fun to make. And healthy.

Since Homo sapiens learnt to tame fire, cooking has meant sharing, and community. Cooking makes us human. It’s little wonder the very act of cooking has been found to be healthy too. That’s a juicy, grilled tip to make it a labour of self-love.

Lifting The Lead

Sort of like setting free Calypso’s captive

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TOI-Ahmedabad has been in the same Ashram Road office for 59 years, which is why the building’s lift has been grunting for a hip replacement. For years, it carried reporters and exclusive stories, desk persons and epic headlines, like a bumpy but non-stop auto ride. Now, the lift behaves like a meandering Odysseus: halting at an unnecessary floor and emitting sighing creaks as though it’s in Calypso’s captivity.

This office will always be known for its Homeric feat of slaying the Grammar Ogre: it allowed us to use the word “literally” without fearing ridicule. It literally made news. Every afternoon, plastic marquee letters (like those at old cinemas) were stuck on a board outside, spelling out the hottest breaking headline. Amdavadis stopped to take in news from Ashram Road’s landmark media flex. On the day election results would be announced, the crowd outside would keep growing, spreading the poll hubbub across several buildings on either side.

Those on its fringes who could not see the marquee updates relied on vox pop: shouts broadcasting vote tallies from the centre of the crowd. This analogue ticker ran with surefootedness till the nineties.

Journalists of that vintage can’t recall the lift being diagnosed with osteoporosis. Trouble began when our office ascended to the third floor from its decades-long first-floor perch. “Thoda sa naya lift karadey” may not be the staff demand that’s now made the office move from Ashram Road itself, but the movement’s evoking overwrought images. One office wag said, “If Ashram Road is a zebra crossing, TOI is the Beatles.” Mercifully, such nostalgia is tempered by excitement.

“We’ll be on the 15th floor,” a colleague said of the new building. Of course, our Ashram Road legacy won’t be forgotten. Glass facade of the new office on Bopal-Ambli stretch (a hatchling among tony zones), will reflect the paper’s successful push to get Ahmedabad Unesco World Heritage City status. We helped secure this prized tag while working from a building that’s an unacknowledged relic. If lifts in the new building fail, my colleagues will have 15 leisurely flights of stairs to reminisce about our glories. But I will wait for one to be repaired. No scholar has contended that legends can be recounted only with mythically strong lower limbs. We know of no dissertation on Homer’s macho calves.

Rouzbeh Parsi



Iran expert, Lund Univ, Sweden

The limbo of not full-out war, but also not actual peace, lingers in the conflict between US and Iran. The tired trope of Western narratives about Iran is that its political elite, more often than not, is at war with itself, and therefore, impossible to negotiate with. While there is some truth to Tehran being a capital full of overlapping power groups, it is equally true that nothing coalesces them into unity like an existential danger. And the mother of all existential dangers for a formerly revolutionary system, is war with the global hegemon it has been challenging since its inception, US.

Thus, Tehran is not nearly as divided as the Trump administration tries to claim. The war has not only forced many rivals together in Tehran – it has also changed some of the fundamentals of the political dynamic in that country. The killing of the supreme leader, and a fair number of the political and military elite, has also opened up conversations and decisions in ways that were impossible during the leadership of Ali Khamenei. His ambivalence – eternal revolutionary opposition to US, but no direct confrontation with it – delivered neither the rewards of peace and accommodation, nor a clear-cut confrontation where Iran could make its mark. And the same ambivalence was prevalent in domestic politics, where rigid conservatives were privileged but had no answers to society’s real problems, and protests were met with violent repression.

But the war shook this lethargic stalemate. Against the wishes of Ali Khamenei, his son Mojtaba was elected to succeed his father. While still very much hidden, he has started to assert himself through several appointments: veterans like former Revolutionary Guards commander Mohsen Rezaei as secretary of Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Mostafa Izadi as deputy commander of IRGC, and the merger of Khatam al-Anbiya central headquarters with the General Staff of the Armed Forces under Ali Abdollahi. The military campaign against US and its allies has also continued, and deterrence is now measured in actual retaliation.



get a better outcome at the negotiation table. That position is best represented by Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the speaker of parliament, together with President Masoud Pezeshkian and SNSC under Rezaei.

They do not always see eye to eye, but they sing from the same sheet. What they need is the reopening of Strait of Hormuz on Iranian terms, sanctions relief, the return of frozen funds – and an answer to the most fundamental question of all: can a US signature be trusted?

Iran is under enormous economic pressure – between 2018 and 2025, approximately 16mn Iranians have joined those under the poverty line, and presently food inflation is at 128%! Tehran, therefore, cannot afford a forever war, and yet it is more resilient than

Washington is willing to acknowledge.

Meanwhile, the political cost for Trump, and for the world economy, his country is a foundational rock in, grows by the day – the full repercussions for the oil market and its derivatives will become clear this winter.

This ought to indicate a greater willingness in Washington for a settlement of the conflict. But Trump is no ordinary president, and his administration is not only institutionally shamolic, it is fundamentally divided between necons (secretary of state Marco Rubio) and restrainers (Vice-President JD Vance) with Trump as a fickle arbiter. Trump, who came to power on not getting embroiled in forever wars, jumped into one and can’t stomach the compromises needed to end it. Thus, left on autopilot, Washington prefers war to political concessions.

Here, secretary of war Pete Hegseth also plays a role as the macho personification of Trump. He too has no plan for this war, but insists that US military must persevere. He has systematically undercut the military brass at Pentagon, leaving precious few in the system who can act as critical voices.

As the military option has repeatedly failed, the US administration has turned to its other favourite tool: sanctions. Treasury secretary Scott Bessent, with a lot of fanfare, announced an economic D-Day against Iran. But when questioned, acknowledged that he would not try to enforce the new draconian approach on China. In the meantime, both Congress and public opinion show very little enthusiasm for the war. It remains to be seen how much Republicans suffer for it in the midterm elections.

Thus, in Iran the war moved the line, while in Washington nothing of consequence changed. Iran’s still fundamentally misunderstood, and anything less than victory against it is too catastrophic to countenance.

In the end, the problem remains the same: Trump seems unwilling to sign anything that establishes what a disaster this war has been for US. So, while Tehran debates with itself what is realistic to demand, how to get it from US, and whether any deal would hold, Washington cannot even commit to a strategy based on a negotiated outcome, since that would document a defeat.

First Steps Taken. Next, Label Samosas & Jalebis Too

Health concerns are not just a matter of consuming high fat, sugar, salt and ultra-processed food, so food regulation must also keep in mind some of India’s traditional snacks

SubbaRao Gavaravarapu, Bharati Kulkarni and Shashank Joshi

As FSSAI moves forward on defining thresholds for foods high in fat, sugar and/or salt (HFSS), and mandating prominent front-of-pack warning labels for HFSS packaged foods, the principle for food labelling is straightforward. Foods high in nutrients of concern need to be consumed less frequently, and in smaller quantities, particularly by children. And thus, easy-to-understand information at point of purchase is crucial.

A caveat: FSSAI proposes that, in the first phase, the warning would apply to products high in *two or more* nutrients of concern – added fat, added sugar and salt. Only in Phase 2, would the warning extend to products high in even one. This could create a gap. A product very high in sugar, but not crossing the threshold for fat or salt, could escape a warning altogether. The same could happen with salt alone.

If a nutrient is important enough to define a food as concerning, warnings should not be withheld. On Aug 10, FSSAI proposed thresholds that would identify what foods would qualify as HFSS. For solid foods, cut-offs include more than 4.2g added fat, 3g added sugar, or 0.625g salt per 100g, with corresponding thresholds for liquids. It also has plans to restrict availability of such foods within 50m of schools.

An important point also is that discussions around traditional foods, street foods, foods produced by micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), or locally prepared foods, should not obscure nutritional characteristics of the food itself.

An HFSS food carries similar health risks, irrespective of whether it is made by a large manufacturer, an MSME, a street vendor, a restaurant or at home. This is not an argument against India’s diverse food culture or livelihoods; it is an argument for applying nutritional criteria consistently, while ensuring proportionate and practical regulation.

That said, defining an HFSS food is only one part.

Beyond fat, sugar and salt, there is growing concern about ultra-processing (UPFs), which can alter the food matrix and nutritional quality. Many UPFs contain refined carbohydrates, fats, salt, flavour enhancers, emulsifiers and sweeteners that can make products hyperpalatable.

Regular UPF consumption is also associated with noncommunicable diseases. Labels should therefore, in future, communicate both the degree of processing and HFSS nature of foods. An ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) commentary in *The Lancet Regional Health-Southeast Asia* proposes a dual-axis framework combining processing and nutrient composition.

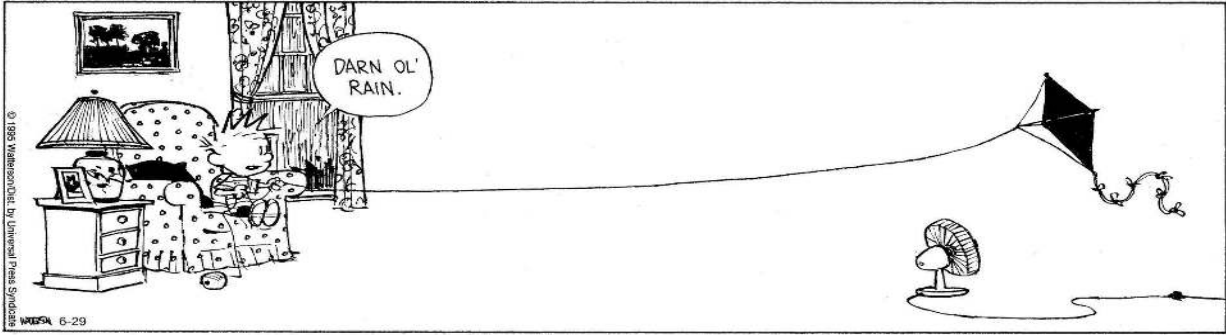


This matters because HFSS and UPF are not identical. A traditionally prepared samosa or jalebi may be high in fat or sugar without being ultra-processed, while some products like whole-grain breakfast cereals may be UPF but relatively low in fat, salt and sugar.

India therefore needs an integrated approach considering processing, nutrient thresholds and food diversity. The challenge is to put the right information in an easily comprehensible form. Three points to consider:

● ICMR-NIN’s ‘dietary guidelines for Indians’ (DGI 2024) should be the foundation. Thresholds, for added sugar and fat, are linked to overall energy intake.

Calvin & Hobbes



Jug Suraiya

Among the many schisms in Western philosophy, none is wider than that between deontology and utilitarianism. Many philosophers make themselves sound more impenetrable than they are in the belief that pomposity will be mistaken for profundity.

Deontology, which sounds like something distressing a dentist might do to you, is a bombastic way of saying that the means by which an end is achieved determines whether the outcome is morally right or wrong.

The term is derived from the Greek *deon*, meaning duty, and asserts that whatever we do must be based on an immutable ethical code of conduct rigidly defined by rules and obligations which we cannot transgress.

The foremost proponent of deontology was Immanuel Kant, whose keystone

concept of the ‘Categorical Imperative’ enjoined us to act so that each action should be of universal application.

If I oppress another, I must accept oppression as an all-encompassing condition that would involve the oppression of myself. In other words, do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Kant’s Categorical Imperative resulted in some knotty problems. According to him, you could never tell an untruth. If your friend, fleeing a murderer, hid in your house, if questioned by the killer you’d be morally obliged to reveal your friend’s whereabouts, resulting in his demise and making you an accomplice to murder.

To bypass such dilemmas, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham came up with their doctrine of utilitarianism, whereby all actions must be judged by

their results on the basis of the greatest good for the greatest number.

But utilitarianism creates its own conundrums, such as the problem frequently posed to students of ethics. A train with 50 passengers is going to crash, killing all, unless a lever is pressed and the train diverted. You cannot reach the lever but you can push a person sitting on an overbridge to fall to his death and depress the lever, saving the passengers.

Would you take the life of one to save fifty? Can the value of human life be arithmetically quantified?

What if the sacrificed person is your blood relative, a brother? All right then, maybe I can mix and match, like at a buffet, and take a bit of deontology and a bit of utilitarianism whenever I fancy. Kant, Mill, and Bentham would make common cause

Sacredspace

No event can occur without a positive, definite cause at the back of it. Everything follows the law of cause and effect. This law is quite mysterious. That is the reason why Krishna says: “Gahana karmano gatih” – mysterious is the nature of action.

Swami Sivananda

Dharm Is Beyond Duties And Isms

and denounce you as a blatant opportunist, casting you beyond the pale – into the trackless realm of dharm, a domain with no pre-planned destinations but which unfolds like a journey without maps.

Libraries have been written on interpreting the meaning of dharm. Is it moral righteousness? Is it doing one’s duty? Is it destiny? Is it the inescapable cumulation of karmic cause and effect? Is it all, or none, of these?

Perhaps the meaning we give to dharm is in itself a dharmic act, a choice we have to make at each crossroads we come to, with no signposts to point the way, our conscience the only compass.

The disciple guided by his guru’s precepts follows the dharm of the guru, not his own. The trick lies in finding one’s own dharm, learning to be one’s own disciple, not that of Kant or Bentham. Nor even that of Arjun’s Krishna at Kurukshetra.

The wrong cure

Tariffs can't address trade-imbalance concerns

The meeting of the leaders of the Finance Track of the Group of 20 economies, or the G20, was held in Asheville, North Carolina, this week as part of the United States' presidency. The United States' (US') approach to the Finance Track has prioritised three issues: Growth, global imbalances, and financial literacy. These priorities are shared by New Delhi and by most members of the grouping. However, consensus nevertheless eluded the Asheville summit for reasons that are easy to understand. Nineteen of the 20 members signed up to the chair's declaration, but one did not: China. As the beneficiary — in terms of reserves and trade surpluses — of global imbalances, it has consistently refused to see them as a problem. But, as the chair's declaration noted, large-scale imbalances are both a cause of major global instability and have negative spillover effects. They are also a symptom of non-market conditions and non-tariff barriers in some of the economies that are party to it.

It is evident, in this case, that the concern is well founded. Chinese markets are excessively closed to outside companies; the Communist Party's continuing control over the economy forces it to prioritise investment, even overinvestment, over healthy consumption, which would lift aggregate demand globally; and its targeted, if hidden, subsidies into certain production and export lines violate market principles and contravene the terms on which it was welcomed into the World Trade Organization in 2001. The fact that Beijing stands isolated on this issue is a signifier of the fact that it has consistently refused to address these concerns, and is now in fact denying that they even exist. It seeks to present this summit, and other such attempts to address its persistent imbalances problem, as an attempt by the US to constrain the growth of the Chinese economy.

This claim would find no takers if the US had not, over the same period, destroyed its credibility by claiming that unilateral tariffs are an appropriate method by which the problem of imbalances could be addressed. Just as China is globally isolated about its non-market practices and its exploitation of the trade architecture, the US is in a similar position when it comes to the unilateralism and mercantilism it has displayed in the past years, particularly since Donald Trump became President for his second term. His original slate of tariffs was designed to directly target trade deficits. But trade imbalances are symptoms of deeper problems — a lopsided approach to savings and investment, economies geared too much towards either savings or consumption — and so trying to address the symptom rather than the disease, particularly in a unilateral and untargeted manner, is irrational policymaking. The fundamental approach must be cooperative — in that it is essential for all of China's trading partners to push it into reforming its economy in such a way that domestic consumption increases, and it becomes more of a market for foreign final goods.

From New Delhi's point of view, it might be tempting to welcome a summit that so clearly isolates Beijing. But India's growth trajectory is threatened by both a closed trading system manipulated and dominated by China and by a new period of economic nationalism and tariff walls brought in by the US. The purpose of the G20 should be to address both these issues in a collegial manner. From that perspective, the summit did not achieve its objective.

The cost of rising sea

India's coastal cities need a broader adaptation strategy

The United Nations (UN), in a new report, has warned that rising sea levels are no longer a distant environmental threat but an economic emergency. Global sea levels rose by 4.7 mm a year during 2014-23 and by a record 5.9 mm in 2024. A rise of at least 50 cm is already effectively locked in, making adaptation unavoidable. For India and others in the region, the implications are more serious than the loss of physical infrastructure. The UN estimates that more than 14 million people in Mumbai, Kolkata and Dhaka face the risk of losing their lives, homes, and livelihoods to permanent inundation. This points to an important distinction between vulnerable South Asian cities and richer coastal cities such as Miami and New York. In the latter, the principal concern is the destruction or loss of value of buildings, transport networks and other physical assets. In Mumbai and Kolkata, additionally, permanent inundation can trigger displacement, disrupt livelihoods, and place additional pressure on already constrained urban housing markets.

The risks are amplified by land subsidence. Where coastal land is sinking at the same time as oceans are rising, the effective increase in relative sea level is considerably greater. Saltwater intrusion can contaminate groundwater and agricultural land, while flooding can damage sanitation, transport, energy and water systems. These effects can feed into each other. Damaged infrastructure disrupts economic activity, displacement raises housing demand elsewhere, and declining property values and higher insurance costs weaken household and business balance sheets. India's own development choices have also increased coastal vulnerability. The country is estimated to have lost about 40 per cent of its mangroves over the past century owing to pressures including coastal development. While recent assessments show improvement in mangrove cover in parts of the country, mangroves are not merely environmental assets. They are natural coastal infrastructure, reducing exposure to flooding and erosion while supporting fisheries and livelihoods. Protecting and restoring them should, therefore, be treated as an economic investment in resilience, alongside seawalls, drainage and other engineered infrastructure.

The financing challenge remains formidable. The UN estimates that developing countries require \$310 billion-365 billion a year for adaptation. India needs to combine public investment with multilateral and concessional finance. Importantly, fiscal planning should recognise that repeated disaster relief can ultimately cost more than investing in resilience before assets and communities are exposed. This requires a change in how infrastructure and urban projects are evaluated. Coastal development should be assessed against long-term sea-level and subsidence projections rather than historical flood patterns. Master plans should identify areas where new construction is unsuitable, protect evacuation corridors and critical infrastructure, and reserve land for resilient housing and, where unavoidable, managed relocation. Early-warning systems and local sea-level monitoring also need strengthening. Some sea-level rise is unavoidable. The policy priority should be to reduce the avoidable damage. That means pricing climate risk into today's land-use, housing, infrastructure and fiscal decisions. While the cost of doing so will be substantial, the cost of leaving millions without secure homes, while repeatedly rebuilding infrastructure in increasingly vulnerable locations, will be substantially greater.

US' failing wars on terror



SCOTT ANDERSON

Quite early in *All the Presidents' Wars*, the journalist Peter Bergen's chronicle of the "war on terror," the reader is likely to conclude that the groups of American officials who have presided over the past two and a half decades of conflict in West Asia consist of idiots, fools or knaves. The further one progresses into this damning and meticulously researched book, the more this assessment seems confirmed.

In fairness, the war on terror hasn't been an unmitigated catastrophe. The development of advanced weaponised drones facilitated the killing of Qaeda leaders at long range and with little risk.

American military commanders also eventually adopted counterinsurgency tactics in Iraq that proved very effective, even if they failed to change the ultimate outcome of that conflict. And while it is difficult to get all hopped up over something that *didn't* happen, the fact is that there hasn't been a large-scale terrorist attack on American soil since September 11.

Bergen is distinctly suited to tell this sprawling story. A veteran journalist, professor and *Cable News Network* (CNN) national security analyst, Bergen had his first major brush with history in early 1997 when he journeyed to Afghanistan as part of a CNN team that was interviewing an Islamic extremist then barely on anyone's radar: Osama bin Laden. In the years since, he has written or edited a dozen or so books on the themes of terrorism and counterinsurgency.

He also is in possession of a formidable Rolodex. In the wake of fiasco, there is nothing more likely to get an American government official to blab to a journalist than the fear that one's

bureaucratic rivals are already doing so. It is testament to both Bergen's tenacity and the sheer number of fiascos under discussion here that his collection of interview subjects runs to over 500 people.

The result is less an edge-of-your-seat narrative than a steady accretion of revealing anecdotes and insider details that transport the reader from surprise to a peculiar sense of wonderment at the scale of the ineptitude.

Bergen delivers a particularly scorching portrait of the way George W Bush groped for pretexts to invade Iraq after 9/11, and then expended tremendous energy trying to minimise the political fallout as the quagmire there deepened. Also coming in for Bergen's opprobrium: the first administration of Donald Trump. Ironically, Trump's original 2017 team of foreign and defence policy advisers included some of the military officers who'd proved most successful in fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but Trump preferred to follow his "instinct" over anything that smacked of

strategy, consistency or logic. Trump often seemed most interested in optics. In one darkly hilarious anecdote, Bergen recounts how Melania Trump inexplicably wandered into the Situation Room on October 27, 2019, while her husband and his advisers were watching a live feed of an operation to kill or capture Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of ISIS.

After an American K9 dog chased Baghdadi into a tunnel where he blew himself up with a suicide vest, the high-level discussion turned to how the president might best convey the news to the public. "You should talk about the dog," Melania advised. "Everybody loves dogs." Proof that Trump does sometimes listen to advice, he told the press about the K9, which had been slightly injured — "a beautiful dog, a talented dog."

Far less amusing, in Bergen's view, was Trump's betrayal of the American-allied Afghan government. Anxious to be able to announce a withdrawal of all



ALL THE PRESIDENTS' WARS: Twenty-Five Years of America's War on Terror
by Peter Bergen
Published by Norton
401 pages \$32.99

US troops from Afghanistan before the 2020 election, Trump had his representatives negotiate a peace settlement with the Taliban while excluding the democratically elected government, enabling him to announce before the election that the last American soldiers would leave the country as early as May 2021.

As Bergen archly points out, when one side in peace talks offers up a withdrawal date, the talks are no longer a negotiation but a surrender. While holding Trump chiefly responsible for this shameful episode, Bergen also blames Trump's successor, Joe Biden, for failing to countermand the deal. That decision turned an embarrassing retreat into a truly disgraceful and tragic one. The image of a quavering America, Bergen argues, may also have helped embolden Vladimir Putin to invade Ukraine the following year.

One might wish that *All the Presidents' Wars* was coming out a few months from now, in time for the full

dinner tables! When two arms work at cross-purposes, the only way to resolve the contradiction is by having a common leadership or a high level of convergence. This helps in rationalising the purpose, taking a shifting position: Sometimes compromising cause in favour of profit; sometimes forgoing profit for the "purpose". A towering leader can manage dissent from either of the interested parties so long as she is not consistently favouring one cause over the other. Ratan Tata, who, in the first phase of his leadership, consolidated his position to be the undisputed leader of the group, had the aura and the authority to do this. The moment power demutualised between the corporation and Tata Trusts, stress came out. While stress is on priorities, it manifests itself in personalities. If the personalities are accommodative, it works; if they are not, it does not.

If we look at other philanthropic foundations, most of them were built out of distributed profit, or the stake sale in the commercial arm that formed the corpus, thereby demutualising the commercial and the philanthropic arms. New-age philanthropic organisations like the Gates Foundation, Nilekani Philanthropies, and Azim Premji Foundation have all set up their philanthropic initiatives from the profits that were distributed by the commercial arms or by stake sale. Going forward, that is the only route for the Tatas, irrespective of their resistance to pare the stake and avoid listing. The only other way is to have convergence between the charitable and the commercial arms through common leadership that has the moral authority. Noel Tata could have played the role that Ratan Tata played in his early days at the helm of the Tatas. However, given the changes brought about during Ratan Tata's time, this convergence looks difficult. With the Shapoorji Pallonji group wanting liquidity, any resistance is only postponing the inevitable.

The ideal situation for Tata Trusts is to let go of the controlling interest in Tata Sons, thereby unshackling the commercial arm from the charitable burden, while continuing to enjoy the profits from the residual stake. Listing Tata Sons would bring in diverse commercial interests on board. A significant minority stake of Tata Trusts may allow it to have some boiler-plate powers on exceptional decisions while the routine decisions should be dictated by commercial interests.

A stake sale by Tata Trusts will also help it to have a larger corpus that could be used to balance the unequal dividends that flow from Tata Sons on an ongoing basis. It will also avoid instances like the current stalemate of Tata Trusts not being able to find a nominee to represent it on the Tata Sons board because of an intervention of the charities commissioner with respect to one of the trusts. This negatively affects the interests of Tata Sons and the commercial arm. De-mutualising the substantial and material part of the relationship between Tata Trusts and Tata Sons is a lasting design solution. Obviously legacy, sentiment, traditions and egos come in the way of rational design arguments.

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Profit and purpose: The ongoing clash

The ideal situation for Tata Trusts is to let go of the controlling interest in Tata Sons, thereby unshackling the commercial arm from the charitable burden

Much has been written on governance in the Tata group in the context of the announcement of N Chandrasekaran's intent to step down as executive chairman of Tata Sons in February next year. This gives an opportunity to examine the complex relationships among businesses that have the sole purpose of maximising shareholder wealth and philanthropy carried out from the profits of the businesses.

Unlike many foundations that have emerged out of profits made by the corporation, the house of the Tatas is differently structured. Here, charities directly hold the controlling share in the holding company — Tata Sons. The accountability frameworks of the philanthropic organisations and businesses are different and their incorporation is also under different statutes, making the structure work at cross-purposes and it is natural for cracks to appear. That it did not appear in the Tata group for more than a century is a miracle, but that miracle can possibly be explained by the convergence of leadership in both arms.

Things changed after Ratan Tata introduced a rule de-mutualising the leadership of the commercial and philanthropic arms, ensuring different persons headed these entities. With two strong personalities heading them, this design results in formal negotiations between the two arms. The relationship between a trust owning majority stakes and a commercial conglomerate is like the relationship between the government and Reserve Bank of India — sym-

biotic and adversarial at the same time.

From the perspective of Tata Sons, the commercial arm, the profits of the conglomerate should be applied only to grow the businesses in the long term. Therefore, it has to conserve capital for emerging opportunities, sustaining bleeding businesses with a turnaround plan, and for frontier businesses needing capital burn. The distribution of profits is a result of the strategic objective of the commercial arm.

Tata Trusts would want a continuous flow of resources to carry on their philanthropic activities at scale, particularly when they have committed large multi-year grants. It is possible that Tata Trusts fund activities that are inherently anti-business: Like environment or worker rights. Recall that some protesters against the Nano plant in Singur, West Bengal, were direct or indirect beneficiaries of Tata Trusts. If the Tata Trusts is autonomous, then there is only an occasional convergence with business interests.

An experiment of achieving a social objective using business as a tool is found in the case of United States-based company Patagonia, where the purpose of the business is to work for environmental causes. For years, Patagonia was family-owned and controlled, helping it to easily put its cause above profit. Even now, the new structure of Patagonia is wholly owned by a trust dedicated to the cause. It is solely held by the trust and will not list. This design works so long as ownership is closely held and board meetings happen over



REPROSPECT
M S SRIRAM

The GDP combat sport

In late 2010, Andreas Georgiou, a former International Monetary Fund (IMF) economist, was parachuted into Athens by the European Union and IMF at the height of the euro-zone crisis, to head the Hellenic Statistical Authority (Elstat), Greece's new statistical agency. His task seemed innocuous: To find out how badly Greece's public finances had deteriorated and calculate a fair gross domestic product (GDP). For years, Greek governments had misreported fiscal data. It could not even account for parts of its own spending, including defence. But Georgiou's assignment turned out to be dangerous. Within weeks of taking office, his emails were hacked. Within months, he was accused of betraying the national interest. Prosecutors eventually charged the man brought in to clean up Greece's statistics with falsifying them. His alleged crime was to insist that the figures should add up. "In Greece, statistics is a combat sport," remarked Georgiou wryly. Supposedly dry and complex GDP data can provoke passionate outcours.

This was in evidence last week too as India claimed its economy grew by 7.8 per cent in the quarter ended June. Critics promptly questioned the arithmetic and thus began another instalment of India's increasingly raucous GDP wars. The dispute concerns methodology, base years, deflators, and the various adjustments required to convert the bewildering activity of 1.4 billion people into a single number. Former officials and economists have questioned whether the new GDP series is comparable with the old one. The government insists that critics are comparing apples and oranges. Yet the spectacle has something faintly comical about it. It assumes that there is a precise number called India's "true" GDP growth, hiding somewhere in the statistical undergrowth and the job of economists is to flush it out.

The GDP figure is only an estimate. Statisticians,

like those elsewhere, work with samples, surveys, company accounts, tax returns, and administrative data. Where information is missing, they infer. Where better information subsequently turns up, they revise. Quarterly estimates involve still more inference. India's problem is more acute than that of many rich countries. The formal economy is increasingly well documented, thanks to goods and services tax (GST), digital payments, and away bills. But millions of small firms and workers still inhabit the statistical penumbra. Nor would India be the first country to have trouble measuring itself. China's GDP figures have for years attracted suspicion for their remarkable smoothness. Advanced economies too, with all their statistical machinery, revise GDP estimates.

The new Indian series, with 2022-23 as its base year, attempts to incorporate a much changed economy and newer sources of information. That is surely preferable to continuing indefinitely with an obsolete statistical map. So, the sensible question to ask is whether the 7.8 per cent number makes sense when compared with everything else that the

economy is doing. Fortunately, economic actors leave clues everywhere. Start with taxes. The monthly gross GST number has become a favourite measure of economic virility. After two years of double-digit growth, GST growth in 2025-26 was flat on a like-for-like basis, even though that year, GDP growth was 7.1 per cent. Now look at the April-June quarter of this year when the growth rate is claimed to have hit 7.8 per cent. Net GST revenue grew by 7.1 per cent but in this, domestic GST grew by just 2.8 per cent, whereas GST on imports was up by a massive 26 per cent. Apart from GST, all other numbers of the June quarter point to solid expansion. Advance-tax payments, perhaps the most interesting of the lot, increased 15.3 per cent, with corpor-



IRRATIONAL CHOICE
DEBASHIS BASU

ation advance tax up 16 per cent and non-corporate payments up 12.7 per cent.

The Purchasing Managers' Index is in expansion territory. Most importantly, India's perennial weak spot — exports — reported robust growth in April-July. India's merchandise and services exports rose 13.2 per cent year-on-year. Merchandise exports alone rose 17 per cent. Investment provides another test of whether the GDP figure has a basis in reality. Gross fixed capital formation grew by 11.9 per cent in real terms in the April-June quarter, its fastest pace in 13 quarters. Investment accounted for 34.3 per cent of GDP compared with 31.4 per cent a year earlier. The Centre's capital expenditure has risen by around 30 per cent in the early months of the financial year.

Big question: Income growth

The big question is whether consumption (which accounts for about 63 per cent of GDP) among the masses, too, is growing. For mass consumption to grow, income growth has to be strong. Unfortunately, real wages have been largely stagnant to declining for years. The Economic Survey 2025-26, citing data, which shows real monthly earnings of male self-employed workers fell from ₹9,454 (2017-18) to ₹8,591 (2023-24) — a nine per cent real decline and rural non-farm wage growth has been near-zero since the pandemic; and agricultural wage growth under two per cent annually. Real salaried wages fell roughly four per cent cumulatively from 2012-24, even as corporate profits record highs. This is the single-biggest doubt one can raise about the 7.8 per cent GDP growth. If the government has to focus on creating genuine long-term growth it has to focus on income growth from manufacturing jobs, preferably funded by large (\$80 billion-100 billion a year) of foreign direct investment meant for exports. GDP growth will then automatically take care of itself.

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Reality Check

India's latest GDP growth figure has delivered precisely the kind of political dividend that impressive headline numbers are meant to produce. At a time when the Narendra Modi government faces uncomfortable questions about unemployment, weak private investment and uneven consumption, rapid economic growth offers a powerful counter-narrative. But the celebration surrounding the number risks obscuring a more important question: what, exactly, is India measuring? The controversy over the revised GDP series should not be reduced to a predictable contest between government triumphalism and opposition scepticism. Statistical methodologies require periodic revision. Economies change, new industries emerge and old datasets become inadequate. A failure to update national accounts would itself undermine credibility.

If the new methodology genuinely captures economic activity more accurately, its introduction is justified. Yet methodological improvement does not absolve policymakers of the responsibility to explain its consequences clearly. When revisions substantially alter estimates of the economy's earlier size, comparisons with subsequent years become inherently more complicated. A spectacular growth rate may reflect genuine acceleration while also benefiting from a recalibrated statistical baseline. Both propositions can simultaneously be true. That distinction matters because GDP has increasingly become a political instrument. The more fundamental issue, however, lies beyond the statistical dispute. Economic growth must eventually become visible in the lives of citizens. India's paradox remains striking. An economy supposedly expanding at one of the fastest rates among major nations continues to struggle with youth employment. Private investment, though showing encouraging signs of revival, remains uneven.

Foreign direct investment has not matched the expectations generated by India's geopolitical and demographic advantages. These are not minor qualifications to an otherwise successful story. They are tests of whether growth is sufficiently broad-based to sustain itself. The composition of the expansion is equally important. Tax cuts, lower interest rates and government spending can stimulate activity, but their effects are not permanent. Export growth aided by a weaker rupee may improve competitiveness, but currency depreciation also makes imported energy and industrial inputs more expensive. India's rapid diversification of energy supplies during the West Asia crisis demonstrated administrative agility, yet the country's dependence on imported crude remains a structural vulnerability. Then comes the monsoon. Weak rainfall threatens agricultural output, rural incomes and food prices, potentially creating the uncomfortable combination of slower consumption and higher inflation. If inflationary pressures force the Reserve Bank of India to tighten monetary policy, the very investment recovery now being celebrated could face fresh headwinds. None of this means India's growth is illusory. There are genuine strengths: infrastructure investment, manufacturing expansion, digitalisation and an increasingly important role in global supply chains. But confidence in an economy cannot rest indefinitely on one quarterly number, however impressive. The ultimate verdict on India's growth will not come from statistical revisions or political slogans. It will come from whether expansion creates productive jobs, attracts sustained private capital and raises incomes beyond the already prosperous sections of society. Until then, the most sensible response to a spectacular GDP figure is neither disbelief nor euphoria, but scrutiny.

Putin's Trap

Russian President Vladimir Putin's greatest problem may no longer be winning the war in Ukraine. It may be finding a way to stop it. More than four years after Russia launched its full-scale invasion, neither side has secured a decisive military breakthrough. Ukraine has survived predictions of collapse and increasingly demonstrated its ability to carry the war into Russia through long-range drone strikes. Moscow, meanwhile, retains vastly greater resources and continues to grind forward at enormous human cost, but without achieving the strategic victory that would justify the sacrifice.

For Putin, this is an increasingly dangerous equilibrium. A compromise that leaves Ukraine outside Russian control and fails to deliver the territorial objectives for which he launched the invasion could look less like peace than an admission of failure. The Kremlin's predicament is therefore not conventional military weakness. Russia remains a formidable power, with a large defence-industrial base, extensive manpower and the capacity to sustain repression. Its economy has adapted better than many Western forecasts anticipated. But strength does not automatically produce strategic success. Russia is powerful enough to continue the war, yet seemingly unable to end it decisively on its preferred terms. That combination creates an incentive to escalate. The most immediate danger is likely to be Ukraine. Another brutal winter campaign against electricity generation, heating and civilian infrastructure could be accompanied by intensified offensives and fresh recruitment. Reports that Moscow may seek hundreds of thousands of additional troops suggest that the Kremlin sees manpower, rather than political compromise, as the answer to stalemate.

Yet escalation may not stop at Ukraine's borders. Russia has already been accused by European governments of engaging in sabotage, cyber operations and other forms of hostile activity against countries supporting Kyiv. The logic is obvious: if direct confrontation with NATO remains too dangerous, pressure can instead be applied below the threshold of war. That makes Europe vulnerable to a different kind of conflict - one without a declaration of war. Attacks on infrastructure, disruption of transport, cyber sabotage, disinformation and mysterious security incidents can impose costs while preserving ambiguity.

The danger lies precisely in miscalculation. A campaign designed to intimidate NATO could eventually trigger the collective response Moscow wishes to avoid. Putin's dilemma is rooted in the nature of personalised rule. Democratic leaders can lose elections and alter policy. Autocrats who have personalised a war cannot easily separate their own political survival from its outcome. The longer the conflict continues, the more difficult compromise becomes because the costs incurred demand an even larger justification. This does not mean Russia is about to attack NATO or that Putin has abandoned rational calculation. On the contrary, the greater likelihood is calibrated escalation: more violence in Ukraine, greater repression at home and more aggressive pressure on the West's political and economic vulnerabilities. But calibrated escalation has a fatal weakness. Every new step creates consequences that cannot be fully controlled. Putin may still have many options. His problem is that increasingly none of them offer a clean exit.

Silent crisis of our time

It is important to distinguish loneliness from solitude. Loneliness is not being alone; it is the painful feeling that one's relationships lack the closeness, understanding, or belonging one needs. A person may spend hours alone and feel peaceful and fulfilled. Another may sit among relatives, attend parties, or work in an office and still feel profoundly lonely. Solitude can be nourishing; loneliness is felt as an absence

On June 5, I wrote an Op-Ed in this newspaper on depression and briefly touched upon its frequent companion - loneliness. Space did not permit me to explore what I believe is one of the most serious yet least discussed problems confronting contemporary society. Depression attracts attention because its consequences can be dramatic. Loneliness, by contrast, often hides behind closed doors, polite smiles, social-media posts, and the appearance of normalcy.

Yet loneliness may be one of the defining afflictions of our age. In 2025, the World Health Organization reported that roughly one in six people worldwide experiences loneliness. It is no longer merely a private sorrow but a global public-health concern affecting young and old, affluent and poor, in crowded cities and remote villages alike.

The paradox is striking. We possess more tools for instantaneous communication than any previous generation, yet rarely have so many people felt so isolated. We can reach someone across the world in seconds but may not know the person next door. We accumulate contacts, followers, and online "friends," while longing for one human being with whom we can speak honestly.

The problem is not new. In 'The Conquest of Happiness', Bertrand Russell argued that human beings flourish when their interests and affections extend beyond themselves. Friendship, family, community, and meaningful engagement are not decorative additions to life but part of its foundation. Russell understood that happiness and belonging are intertwined - a lesson of renewed urgency today. India now faces social changes that make belonging increasingly difficult. Urbanisation, migration, academic competition, demanding careers, and shrinking households have transformed traditional life. Young adults leave home for education or employment and find themselves in unfamiliar cities without dependable support.

Older parents remain behind, sometimes separated from their children by thousands of kilometres. Research based on the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India found that more than a third of Indians aged sixty



and above in its sample reported feeling lonely. That figure demands attention.

India once possessed a powerful, if imperfect, defence against isolation: the joint family. Grandparents, parents, children, uncles, and aunts often lived beneath one roof or nearby. Such arrangements produced tensions and obligations; nostalgia should not obscure that reality. Yet they also created a network of daily interaction and care. A child rarely returned to an empty home, an elderly person usually had someone nearby, and sorrow could be shared rather than endured alone. It is important to distinguish loneliness from solitude. Loneliness is not being alone; it is the painful feeling that one's relationships lack the closeness, understanding, or belonging one needs. A person may spend hours alone and feel peaceful and fulfilled. Another may sit among relatives, attend parties, or work in an office and still feel profoundly lonely. Solitude can be nourishing; loneliness is felt as an absence.

Some of India's greatest figures understood that absence long before psychologists began measuring it. Rabindranath Tagore repeatedly explored loneliness, longing, loss, and the search for human connection. Despite international fame, he was no stranger to grief. The deaths of his wife, children, and other loved ones left deep emotional scars. Yet from sorrow he created poetry, music, and literature of extraordinary beauty. His work reminds us that loneliness is not a personal failure but a universal human experience.

Jawaharlal Nehru likewise wrote of loneliness. During imprisonment and throughout much of his public life, he reflected upon not fully belonging. Educated in England yet deeply bound to India, he sometimes seemed caught between cultural worlds. His experience reminds us that loneliness can arise not only from physical separation but from cultural homelessness - the feeling of being at home everywhere and nowhere.

Tagore and Nehru illustrate an important truth: loneliness is not cured by fame, power, or public admiration. One may be known by millions and still feel unknown. The history of Indian cinema offers equally poignant examples. Few artists captured isolation more powerfully than Guru Dutt. *Pyaasa* and *Kaagaz Ke Phool* remain haunting explorations of alienation, rejection, and the



longing to be understood. Meena Kumari, adored by millions as the "Tragedy Queen," gave voice to her private sorrow through poetry. Sanjeev Kumar, one of Hindi cinema's most gifted actors, achieved immense professional success but, by many accounts, struggled with loneliness in his personal life. Their stories remind us that admiration is not intimacy, and applause is not companionship.

The West offers similarly poignant examples. Vincent van Gogh's letters reveal a man who longed for affection and companionship while enduring rejection and emotional isolation. Ludwig van Beethoven's advancing deafness gradually excluded him from the

social world he desperately needed, leaving him unable to participate fully in ordinary conversation. Marilyn Monroe, desired and admired by millions, appeared to struggle with the painful suspicion that the public loved her glamorous image without truly knowing the woman behind it.

A painter, a composer, and a film star - their careers could scarcely have been more different, yet loneliness entered each of their lives. These are only three examples. There are many others whose names alone could fill this page, all bearing witness to the same unsettling truth: public recognition can never substitute for private belonging. Modern technology has introduced a troubling new dimension.

Social media promises connection but frequently produces comparison. We encounter carefully curated images of other people's holidays, achievements, friendships, marriages, and apparently flawless lives. Comparing their polished exteriors with our unedited interiors can leave us feeling inadequate and excluded. Meanwhile, the habits of digital communication may gradually erode the patience required for deeper relationships.

Technology can sustain affection across continents and offer solace to isolated people. The danger arises when digital contact replaces human relationships. A text, emoji, or social-media "like" cannot replace heartfelt conversation or a friend's dependable presence.

Loneliness matters because its effects extend far beyond emotional discomfort.



ABHIK ROY

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The Korea Herald

Lopsided recovery

Economic recoveries tend to look better from a distance. South Korea is enjoying a semiconductor boom and is heading for its fastest annual growth in five years, yet many households are living in a far less forgiving economy. The Bank of Korea raised its benchmark rate by another 25 basis points to 3 percent, and lifted its 2026 growth forecast to 3.3 percent. For indebted households, neither figure offers much consolation. The problem is the uneven way inflation and interest rates hit household budgets. Consumer prices rose 2.8 percent in July from a year earlier, and core inflation reached 2.6 percent, its highest since December 2023.

Essential food prices have been even more punishing. In the second quarter, rice rose 13.2 percent, potatoes 11.1 percent and eggs 9 percent. Prices of low-cost meals such as gimbab also rose faster than the overall consumer price index.

Such increases matter more to poorer households because necessities consume a larger share of their income. Spending on food rose 6.9 percent among households in the second-lowest income quintile, compared with 1.8 percent for the 20 percent in the highest incomes.

Interest costs show an even wider divide. Monthly interest expenses for the bottom 20 percent of households jumped 36.1 percent year on year in the second quarter, nearly three times the 12.1 percent increase for all households.

Debt statistics reveal how quickly this strain is becoming entrenched. Nearly 97,200 people entered formal debt adjustment programs during the first half of this year. Among borrowers who were making payments under such arrangements, applications for small emergency loans reached 14,894 in the second quarter, the

highest quarterly figure since 2022.

A borrower who restructures a debt and then takes out another loan to cover living expenses is hardly on the road to financial recovery. This makes the policy mix particularly awkward. The BOK is tightening because inflation could broaden as the recovery strengthens. At the same time, the government is pursuing measures to ease financial burdens, including a planned 6 trillion won (\$4.3 billion) debt relief program for struggling small-business owners and expanded lending through financial institutions. Assistance for people in genuine distress is necessary. But broad credit support can blunt the effect of monetary tightening, giving the central bank less room to ease rates.

The result is a peculiar policy loop. Fiscal measures bolster demand, whereas monetary policy raises the price of money. The first boosts inflation, the second

The World Health Organization links chronic loneliness and social isolation with depression, anxiety, heart disease, stroke, cognitive decline, and premature death. The lonely person may nevertheless continue to work, care for a family, attend social occasions, and appear perfectly well. Because loneliness leaves no obvious physical mark, people around them may never recognize the depth of their distress.

There is no single remedy. Loneliness cannot be cured by an app, a pill, or a government programme alone. Meaningful connection requires time, effort, vulnerability, and presence. It also requires the courage to admit that we need other people. In a culture that celebrates self-sufficiency, such an admission is sometimes treated as weakness. It is nothing of the sort. The need to love and be loved is among the most fundamental facts of being human.

Government nevertheless has a role. Public policy can support community centres, parks, libraries, senior programmes, public transport, mental-health services, and neighbourhood activities that bring people together. Schools can teach children how to listen, cooperate, and recognize distress. Workplaces can cultivate humane relationships rather than treating employees merely as units of productivity. Doctors should also ask patients, especially older adults, about social isolation.

But institutions cannot do everything. Families must sometimes choose conversation over screens. Neighbours must rediscover the practice of noticing one another. We should telephone ageing parents, visit a bereaved relative, invite an isolated colleague for tea, and ask a struggling friend how he or she is really doing. Most importantly, we must remain long enough to hear the answer. What seems to us a small gesture may become someone else's lifeline.

Mother Teresa often spoke of the terrible poverty of feeling unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. That insight speaks directly to our age. The loneliness epidemic is not merely a psychological or medical challenge; it is a moral and social one. It asks whether, amid speed, distraction, and personal ambition, we are still willing to make room in our lives for one another.

No technological invention can cure the human longing to be known, valued, and loved. The deepest remedies remain simple and timeless: listening without impatience, visiting without obligation, speaking with kindness, and offering our undivided presence. These gestures appear ordinary, but they are the threads from which companionship, community, and a humane society are woven.

Loneliness seldom announces itself loudly. It lives in empty apartments, nursing homes, trains, and within those who seem to possess everything. We cannot eliminate loneliness, but we can ensure that fewer people endure it unnoticed. The answer begins when we pause, reach out, and offer a person the human assurance: you are seen, you are valued, and you are not alone.

contains it. But they do not simply cancel each other out, because the effects are uneven. The risk is that those who can least absorb higher interest costs end up bearing the costs of both approaches.

External pressures could complicate the dilemma. At the annual Jackson Hole Economic Policy Symposium in Moran, Wyoming, on Friday, new Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh said underlying US inflation had not improved enough and emphasized the Fed's responsibility for price stability. If US rates rise and Korea keeps its rate at 3 percent, the current 0.75 percentage-point gap could widen, putting renewed pressure on the won and raising import costs.

Korea cannot assume that export strength will rescue domestic demand. July retail sales fell 2.4 percent despite semiconductor exports reaching \$41 billion. A booming export sector can coexist with a struggling consumer economy.

Public figures certainly have the right to express their views, but their influence can also be used to encourage understanding without deepening existing divisions.

Parton's emphasis on charity, education and personal generosity shows how social responsibility can take practical forms. Her support for literacy, in particular, demonstrates the value of sustained work beyond public statements.

At a time when celebrities are often judged by their political affiliations, there is merit in respecting different ways of contributing to society.

What matters ultimately is not silence or rhetoric, but whether a person's influence produces some lasting public good and brings people together rather than further apart.

Yours, etc., A. Myilsami, Coimbatore, 1 September.

A birth year can't be a worldview

YATEESH SRIVASTAVA

Newsrooms have found a new noun and cannot put it down: Gen Z, pronounced as if it were a party with a leader, a manifesto, a whip and a press secretary. Anchors deploy it the way they once deployed “the youth”. Politicians use it the way they use “the people”. Reporters slap it on whoever is holding a placard this week and call the segment done.

Jantar Mantar was filled by mid-July. Students sat in protest over a leaked examination, a cancelled NEET, a retest forced on millions, and a minister who simply would not go. On 20 July, a mass of people of all hues tried to walk towards Parliament. Police responded with tear gas and batons. Five days later, Dharmendra Pradhan resigned. This was the first cabinet exit in twelve years, extracted by street pressure and resolute determination. Then came the late-night Reels, the sudden “friends”, and, from the Red Fort on 15 August, a new phrase: dimaagi naxal.

After the Jantar Mantar protests, it is impossible to watch television or YouTube, or to read a newspaper or a magazine, without being inundated with references to Gen Z. In truth, the commentary and so-called analysis that followed did two predictable things, and both were wrong. It read the sit-in as a generational uprising. It read the phrase as either a surgical strike on ideology or an attack on thought itself. In both cases, it mistook a demographic category for mindset. A protest is a fact about a demand or a grievance. A birth year is a fact about demography. A security label is a fact about how power prefers to categorise its critics. Today, everyone treats a demographic as a worldview, yet nothing could be further from the truth.

Two people born in 2003 can leave the same decade with opposing politics. One sits at Jantar Mantar. One is in a coaching centre, preparing

for the very exam being contested. One thinks the protesters are entitled. One cannot place Jantar Mantar on a map. All of them are Gen Z. None is more authentically Gen Z than the others. The cohort supplied the timeline. It did not dictate the mindset.

We already know this, because we apply it correctly everywhere except in the present. Nobody treats “Boomer” as a single stance on the Emergency, liberalisation, caste or capital. The label survives as shorthand for age. It is not mistaken for a programme. Gen Z gets no such courtesy, because Gen Z is new, loud and convenient. A protest makes for cleaner copy if you can call it a rising. A Red Fort coinage makes for cleaner copy if you can call it either fascism or foresight. Both readings flatten what actually happened.

Students sat in against a specific, documentable failure: an examination system that unscrupulous elements had learned to game. Some came from small towns, some from universities, and some from families who had spent years of savings on coaching for a paper whose integrity had just been publicly gutted. Their unity was centred on one grievance, held together by shared circumstance, not by shared ideology. When the minister resigned, the coalition loosened. Compensation was promised to the families of students who had died by suicide following the cancellation. Cases against protesters were to be withdrawn. Broader exam reform was set aside for later talks. An ideological movement does not, more or less, dissolve the moment it wins one scalp. This one did. That alone should have told commentators what kind of event they were watching.

The Instagram turn was not a conversation with a generation. It was an attempt to borrow the tone of the platforms protesters already inhabited, including selfie angles, Reels, and the repeated address “friends”, without first addressing the demand that had put them on



the street. The reception was unkind because performance reads as exactly that. “We’re not friends” was not trolling; it was the iteration of a fact. You cannot use make-believe and call it intimacy. This was the outreach.

Then came the attack. Standing on the ramparts of the Red Fort, built ironically by the fifth Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, the Prime Minister declared that armed Naxalism was breathing its last. What remained were dimaagi naxals: people with a Maoist mindset who had once sat in corridors and committees and were still seeking opportunities to promote violence and anarchy, a thinly veiled reference to the principal opposition party and the bureaucrats in their governments. Then came the call to action: citizens must identify and isolate them so the young could be steered into the mainstream of development.

The term did not arrive from nowhere. It continues a longer series, including urban naxal, tukde-tukde gang, andolanjeevi, that seeks to draw a line between legitimate criticism and what the establishment frames as ideological subversion. After a claimed success against the armed phase, the residual threat was recast as intellectual.

The honest defence deserves to be stated before it is tested. Union

minister Kiren Rijju said the phrase was not aimed at the opposition as a class. He said it named those who support Maoists and reject the Constitution; those who stand with separatists and with Article 370; and those who talk of cutting the chicken's neck and separating the North-East. On that reading, the term is preventive: isolate residual ideology before it again influences institutions or romanticises disruption and makes it mainstream

That appeared to be a coherent justification garbed in the robes of national security. What happened after was entirely another story.

A label functions as a policy only if it is narrow enough to name a specific type of misconduct. Once it becomes conceptually ambiguous, it invites ridicule. Senior opposition figures declared themselves proud to be dimaagi naxals. Satirical accounts appeared within a day. An insult coined to isolate became, for a section of the online public, a membership card. That is not because an age cohort holds a Maoist brief. It is because a category that cannot distinguish a student furious about a leaked paper from a person who rejects the Constitution will be seized by both, and by everyone in between who enjoys watching a coined phrase rebound conclusively on its author.

The error runs in both directions. You cannot treat every twenty-two-year-old at Jantar Mantar as the vanguard of a new politics, nor can you treat every critic of the phrase as a Maoist. Both reduce a person to a type and then treat the type as proof.

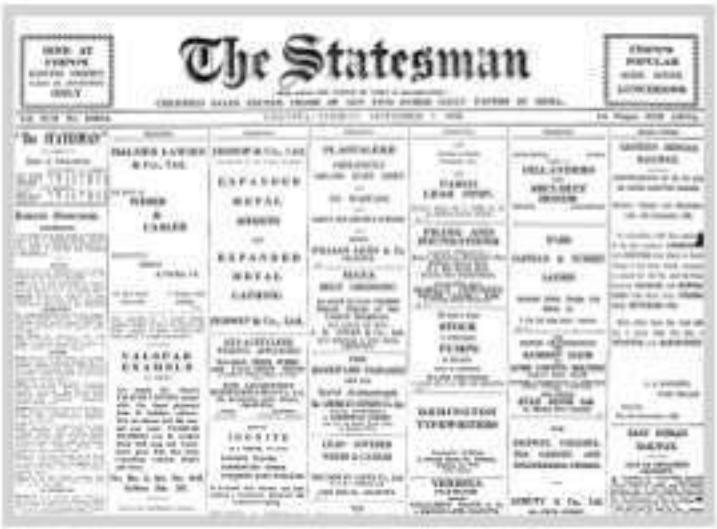
Report the protest as a protest: a coalition of the specifically aggrieved who wanted a compromised exam system fixed, some of them young. Report the outreach as outreach: a botched attempt to sound familiar after previously alienating yourself. Report the speech as a speech and draw your inferences about what was said and what was meant.

Modi did not suddenly become clumsy. He applied a method that has worked in older media and hierarchical mobilisation to a moment that rewards precision over atmosphere. A grievance is not a mindset or an ideology. A shared birth year does not indicate homogeneity. A generation is not a movement. Listening to people carry on about Gen Z, it seems they believe all three to be gospel truth.

We already know this about every cohort except the one on the streets. No Boomer was ever the same. No member of Gen Z ever was either. And not every mind that objects is a Naxal, dimaagi or otherwise.

The writer is a Mumbai-based consultant.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 07 September 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Heavy rain is unusual in Karachi, much less a cyclone, and it is not surprising that railway tracks and telegraph wires should have been destroyed by a storm which on this side of India would have been considered nothing out of the way. We expect storms and heavy rains and means of communications have been built with these phenomena in view. Even the twenty inches of rain Calcutta had in a few hours in 1900 only flooded the streets for the time being. There was no interruption of communications. The Karachi storm seems to be connected with the unusual weather we have experienced in India all through the year. There were, to begin with, the unexpected depressions from Persia which brought us rain during the hot weather. The monsoon was unusually late, but when it came the downpours were of a particularly violent kind. We should now be having comparatively dry weather with a thunderstorm or two to mark the breaking up of the monsoon, but the rain continues as if we were still in July. However, few people will complain of the present weather.

News Items

TYPHOON DAMAGE IN JAPAN

BUILDINGS COLLAPSE: HEAVY CASUALTIES

Tokio, Sept.

Widespread damage has been caused by a typhoon. At Hamamatsu a train proceeding from Tokio to Nagoya was overturned. Fortunately there were only minor injuries to passengers. At the same place a clothing factory was destroyed and eight workers were killed and 25 injured. Forty aeroplanes at a military aerodrome near Nagoya were wrecked. A school at Tokohashi collapsed and twelve children were killed and 20 seriously injured. The School and Prefecture at Aichi collapsed, burying 300 persons. 60 children were injured. A hundred houses were demolished in Saitama and there were 67 casualties. Forty buildings in Tochigi, including the police station, were destroyed and three policemen and several others were seriously injured. A number of small craft were wrecked in the sea and many fatalities have occurred. —Reuter.

SPANISH MYSTERY

DECISION LIKELY TO CAUSE A “SENSATION”

(From Our Special Representative.)

London, Sept.

According to a message which the Daily Mail publishes from Madrid, a new mystery has arisen in Spain owing to Senor Yanguas having left San Sebastian in a swift motor car in response to Primo de Rivera's hasty summons to the Council of Ministers in Madrid. Prior to his departure he declared that the Council's decision would cause a greater sensation than the formation of a dictatorship. King Alfonso is also in Madrid. Significance is attached to the banquet which Senor Yanguas gave the Italian Ambassador on the eve of his departure from San Sebastian.

QUESTION OF SITE

PROPOSED INDIA HOUSE IN LONDON

London, Sept.

Though no site has yet been selected for the proposed India House, the Westminster Gazette expresses the opinion that it would be in the Charing Cross area near the other Dominion offices, and the offices of India's High Commissioner and the Trade Commissioner would be incorporated in the same building. The paper declares that the proposal is regarded favourably at the High Commissioner's Office. —Reuter.

LOST SUBMARINE

COURT MARTIAL TO BE HELD THIS WEEK

London, Sept.

A court martial will be held at the Naval Barracks, Devenport, this week arising out of the loss of Submarine H-29, which sank in Devenport Basin on August 9, with the loss of six lives. — Reuter.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

Being mature

When I was young, I heard often, “When you grow up, you will understand.” When I grew up, I still did not understand. I was told, “With years, you will mature. Then you will understand.” I must be a slow maturer, for I am still waiting for understanding to dawn.

What is this mysterious quality of maturity?

When people want you to be mature, what they mean is that they want you to be like them. You are young and naturally think in a new way. That is not the traditional way; it is upsetting for older people. You ask awkward questions to which they have no answers and make them look foolish. They would prefer you to be mature enough not to ask those questions and think in those curious ways.

In this customary sense, maturity means conformity. Your ostensible well-wishers are telling you not to upset the applecart and live as they do. By imitating the mature ones who have gone before them and living the placid, unquestioning life they have led. They wish you the best, which in their judgment means to fall in line, do what everybody else does, live a conventional life – simply toil as the blinded Samson did, day after day, in a grinding mill.

You can of course grow in maturity. Schools and colleges exist to drum the lessons of compliance on your soul. You must not only act mature, but also think mature. You turn literate not to read Marx and Schopenhauer but to write trite notes and memoranda. You learn mathematics and calculus, not to solve great mysteries, but to do bookkeeping and financial jugglery at others' behest. With a certain hypocrisy, religious schools indoctrinate you in a particular religion without telling you of the other great religions of the world. The goal apparently is to make a pristine square peg conform to a round hole of uniformity.

But there is another kind of maturity, of which we hear less but which is quite within our reach. Rich or poor, we are all born with two remarkable qualities: the innocence of knowledge and the capacity for learning. We know little but can learn. The finest of minds and greatest of spirits are people who defied the kind of regimentation that pollutes most humans. Socrates defined that accomplishment, on his last day before being poisoned, by saying that ‘an unexamined life’ is not worth living. An examined life involves refusing to kowtow to convention and electing for yourself the values and priorities you have consciously chosen.

It involves, for instance, refusing to embrace a religion because your

family believes in it or join a political party because your father has always supported it. It entails consciously shedding unqualified affection for a community in which you may be born or unbridled hate for another community that all your neighbors hate. It implies the disposition and guts to differ from the ardent views of your neighbors and colleagues.

If it comprises choosing your own views – as distinct from the views of the people you have known, loved, respected – it means, in effect, choosing your own life unfettered by past ties, social or national. It means also to overcome our easy and natural inclination to choose what our community, party or country has opted for. The mature person must have the maturity to stand out as what Thoreau called ‘the majority of one,’ because one has pondered and decided that that was the right way to go.

Strangely, this mature way is just the way the most immature child is inspired to act. The child follows his instinct and goes for what he likes or values, irrespective of what his guardian thinks. That spontaneous self-directed leaning, in defiance of what the rest of world wants, is the essence of the beauty of the child. That is the beauty that most of our education and social training are set up to eradicate.



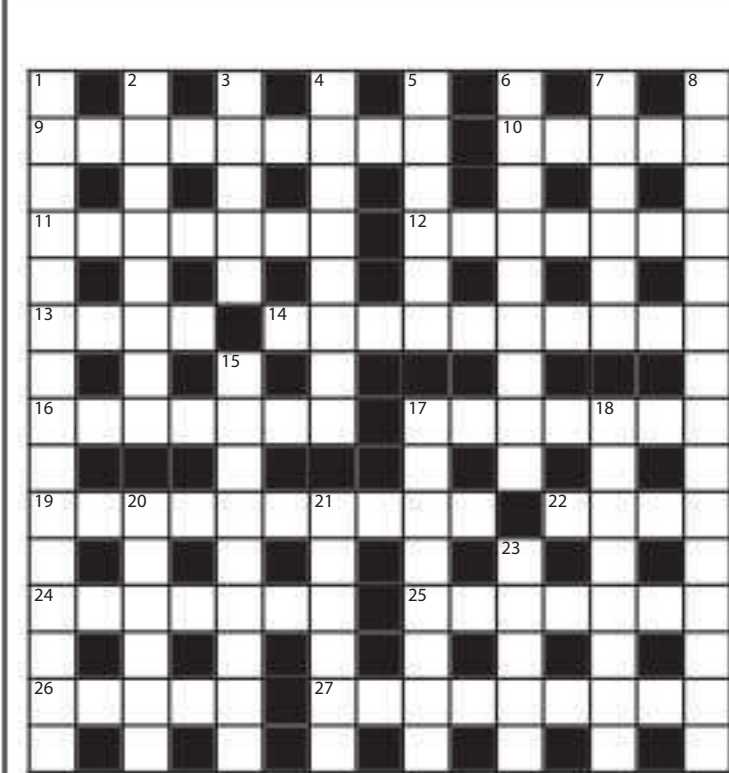
Perhaps true maturity is recapturing the innocent past. Long before the corruption started, what I really cared for and what I really valued. That is what I must once again cherish and pursue.

Yes, I would like to be mature. At least, I would like to be more mature than I am now. I would like to be able to choose my own way and live

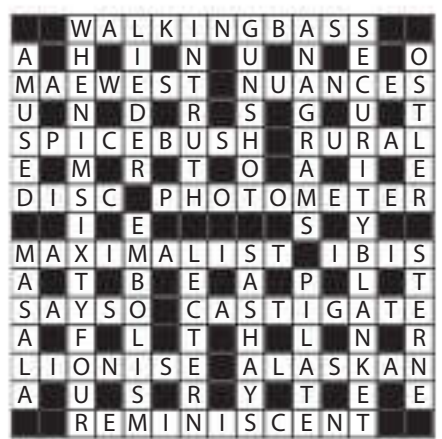
my own life, undeterred by my friends and associates. I would like to disregard what others think, even others that I care about, and go my way. I would like to be mature enough to live my life.

The writer is a US-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com

Crossword | No. 293573



Last Saturday's Solution



The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Justice delayed

Use two years to rebuild capacity

FIVE crore cases. That is the scale of India’s judicial crisis. The Supreme Court has cited 5.18 crore cases pending in the district judiciary while directing seven states to raise the retirement age of judicial officers from 60 to 62. Retaining experienced judges can provide some relief to courts struggling with vacancies and mounting caseloads. But it would be a mistake to confuse a temporary measure with a solution. The numbers tell a disturbing story. The district judiciary alone has 5.18 crore pending cases. Haryana’s district courts have over 15.5 lakh pending cases, while the Punjab and Haryana High Court has more than 4.2 lakh, including nearly 1.25 lakh pending for over a decade.

Significantly, Punjab and Haryana have opposed the proposed increase, even though the Punjab and Haryana High Court favours it. The states’ concerns over additional expenditure and the impact on opportunities for younger entrants merit consideration. The country also needs to confront the less convenient causes of judicial delay: unfilled vacancies, inadequate court infrastructure, repeated adjournments, overburdened prosecutors, tardy investigations and government departments that remain prolific litigants. The retirement-age decision can buy valuable time. That time must be used to undertake structural reform — fill vacancies within fixed deadlines, strengthen the district judiciary, rationalise procedures and expand mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution. Government departments must be made more accountable for avoidable litigation and delays.

There is another imperative: transparency. If judges are to be retained beyond 60 on the basis of suitability, the assessment process must be objective, not arbitrary discretion. The real test is whether the authorities use the two years to reform the system — or merely postpone the next crisis. Justice delayed is not just justice denied. It is a failure of the State.

Realty bites

RERA largely fails to compensate homebuyers

RERA — the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 — was meant to change the rules of the game for homebuyers. It brought developers under a formal regulatory framework, mandated greater disclosure and gave buyers a dedicated forum to seek redressal. Yet a troubling question now confronts the system: what is the significance of a favourable RERA order if the money never reaches the person to whom it is owed? In Karnataka, for instance, RERA orders have directed developers to pay homebuyers around Rs 1,081 crore, but only about Rs 110 crore has been recovered. For families who have already lost years to delayed projects, unpaid refunds or stalled construction, this is a systemic failure.

While RERA authorities can determine liability and order refunds, interest and compensation, execution proceedings may depend on the recovery mechanism of the revenue department. Buyers who have already spent years fighting a developer can therefore find themselves starting another bureaucratic battle after winning the first one. That defeats the central promise of RERA. A regulator’s job cannot end with issuing an order; its credibility ultimately rests on whether that order can be enforced within a reasonable time. The situation becomes even more difficult when financially distressed developers enter insolvency proceedings, where the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code can take precedence and the enforcement of existing RERA remedies can effectively be stalled. The weakest party in the transaction is then asked to navigate an increasingly complex legal maze.

India needs a RERA that makes developers pay when they are found to be wrong. The law must ensure that a refund or compensation actually reaches the aggrieved homebuyer’s bank account.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1926

Britain, Italy and Abyssinia

HOW powerful nations are almost incessantly filled with the desire to exploit the weaker ones to their own selfish advantage under the transparent garb of philanthropy, is evidenced by the recent agreement between Great Britain and Italy in regard to Abyssinia with the sinister purpose of mutual support in creating for themselves “spheres of influence” and in their respective activities of self-aggrandisement in that country. While Britain hopes to profit by the support of Italy in obtaining certain concessions in Abyssinia in the matter of utilising the waters of a lake for industrial purposes, Italy looks forward to British help in gaining sanction to run a railway through the Abyssinian empire. Although such is the importance of the economic interests which these two countries wish to create for themselves within the territories of a third weak nation, they never cared so much as to consult or even give prompt information of their intentions to that nation. And the manner in which these two powerful Western nations have thus entered into a pact to exploit poor Abyssinia speaks volumes of the avarice that underlies the much-trumpeted “humane” activities of imperialist nations. While the Anglo-Italian negotiations took place in December 1925, the Abyssinian Government was not informed of them till the beginning of June 1926. The worst aspect of this question will be clear when it is remembered that Abyssinia is herself a member of the League of Nations equally with Great Britain and Italy and had therefore the right to expect to be properly informed in time about such negotiations.

OPINION

The true meaning of freedom

No country can claim to be free unless it has an independent and fearless judiciary



JUSTICE DEEPAK GUPTA
FORMER JUDGE, SUPREME COURT

AFTER the marching has come to a halt, the drumrolls have fallen silent and the euphoria of India’s 80th Independence Day celebrations has lessened, I ponder, how free are we, the citizens of India?

Independence is not mere removal of the foreign yoke. We are an independent nation when the citizens have the freedom to think and speak without fear. We are independent when citizens can raise the voice of dissent and openly express their views. We can be called truly independent only when hunger and poverty do not decide the future of a child, whether it be in the fields of education, healthcare or basic human rights. We are a country truly independent when there is no caste or religious bias and equal opportunity is not denied to citizens on account of their belonging to the depressed classes or minorities. We can be truly independent only when we get rid of corruption, bias, bigotry and intolerance.

Looking back, one is proud that we have progressed a lot. Citizens are living a better life than before. India’s economy is in better shape than that of many other countries. Life expectancy has improved considerably. We are a global power heading towards a trillion-dollar economy. But what use is a trillion-dollar economy if a large proportion of the citizenry still lives below the poverty line?

In a short article, I cannot cover all aspects. Having spent almost half a century in the legal profession, I am concentrating on the legal fraternity.

We have a Chairman of the Bar Council of India who threatens students who raise the voice of dissent. The main role of the Bar Councils is to take disciplinary action against erring lawyers and ensure that the quality of legal education is maintained at a high level. It has failed miserably on both counts. Barring a few, the level of education provided in law colleges is much below par. Virtually no action is taken against lawyers who flout legal ethics and



FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS : Where there is no democracy, the people can never be free or independent. istock

demean the profession.

The Bar itself is no longer independent. There can be an independent judiciary only when there is an independent Bar. Lawyers who can rise above their political affiliations, who can rise above their ethnicity, and who can fight for the citizens and stand up to power. Fees have skyrocketed but *pro bono* work has nosedived. I leave it to members of the Bar to introspect as to whether they are truly independent or not.

No country can claim to be independent unless it has an independent and fearless judiciary. That can be achieved only when we have judges with integrity, intellect and, above all, a spine. The strength to stand up for justice, the courage to fight against injustice. Judges who can be true to their oath to act “...without fear or favour...”

The constitutional courts, i.e. the Supreme Court and High Courts, are not only arbiters of disputes but are also supposed to protect and uphold the fundamental rights of citizens. Our founding fathers gave so much importance to fundamental rights that the right to approach the highest court of the land to complain of breach of such rights is itself a fundamental right under Article 32. Sadly, in the last few years, constitutional courts have not shown the requisite sensitivity or strength.

One of the most important of all human rights is the right to liberty, which is guaranteed to every citizen of India under Article 21 of the Constitution. This liberty is violated with impunity, and the courts in many cases have become mute spectators.

Justice HR Khanna, in his coura-

The vast majority of judges are men and women of integrity, but the number of black sheep is increasing.

geous dissent in the ADM Jabalpur case, had said that even during an Emergency, a citizen could not be deprived of fundamental rights except in accordance with the procedure prescribed by law.

“Bail, not jail, is the rule” is the oft-quoted legal principle. In actual practice, however, it is jail, not bail, which has become the rule.

It is shocking that in a country where we swear by the rule of law and a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty, there are three undertrials for every convict.

Umar Khalid has been behind bars for more than six years and the trial has not even started. What about his right to liberty? What about his right to speedy trial? The Supreme Court, in a later decision, has itself questioned the validity of the judgment in Khalid’s case.

The process has become the punishment. People are condemned and their lives ruined by labelling them as anti-nationals. Unfortunately, courts do not protect the fundamental rights of these citizens.

Sonam Wangchuk was detained for about six months. Any student of law knows that a petition of habeas corpus must be decided at the earliest. In this

case, the Supreme Court kept adjourning it, with a request to the government to have a relook into the matter. Finally, when the powers that be realised that the Court was unlikely to decide the matter in their favour, the order of detention was withdrawn. Surprisingly, the Court then said that the matter had become infructuous. The Court should have decided whether Wangchuk’s detention was legal.

Democracy is the rule of the majority, but majoritarianism, where the voice of the other side is not heard, is anathema to democracy. Unfortunately, courts at all levels are moving towards majoritarianism.

In the Ram Janmabhoomi case, the apex court held that no other disputes concerning places of worship would be entertained or reopened. The judge who ostensibly authored this judgment later upheld in the Gyanvapi mosque case the order directing the ASI to ascertain whether a temple existed on the site where a mosque now stands. This was done on the specious ground that it was only an inquiry and not a decision on the matter. This order has opened the floodgates of litigation, which will impact the fraternity among communities and is, in my view, a decision taken to appease the majority.

When members of a particular community consumed chicken in a boat on the Ganga, they were denied bail for months. However, when members of the majority community consumed liquor on the same sacred river, they were granted bail within hours.

This is not the justice, the liberty, the equality, or the fraternity enshrined in the Preamble to our Constitution. This is not the free-

dom that our leaders fought for.

Dissent, the right to express one’s views freely and without fear, is not only a fundamental right but also an essential part of democracy. Obviously, when there is a protest, there will be inconvenience to some members of the public. No protest can be effective if it does not cause inconvenience. Now we have judges making suggestions as to how protests should be curtailed. Will such judges protect the right of dissent of a citizen?

The root of the problem is the manner of appointment of judges to the High Courts and the Supreme Court. The collegium system has failed. It has become totally opaque. The collegium takes extremely important decisions without giving reasons.

In the past few months, there have been a number of appointments to the Supreme Court. Some Chief Justices of High Courts have also been appointed. Almost all, if not all, belong to the upper castes. A majority are Brahmins. It is not as if there is a lack of talent among other communities and religions. Among the top 50 High Court judges in the country, there are many, some very high up in seniority, belonging to other religions and communities. They are men and women of impeccable integrity and capability. I am not casting aspersions on the persons appointed, but the Supreme Court, if it has to be the Supreme Court of the country, must have representation from all sections of society.

Despite the heavy expense and long time taken to get disputes decided, the people of this country have reposed great faith and trust in the judiciary. Unfortunately, that trust and faith are waning. Judges are under the unrelenting scrutiny of social media. Despite all this, even today, most of the people repose more confidence in the judiciary compared to the legislature or the executive.

The vast majority of judges are men and women of integrity, but the number of black sheep is increasing. It is for the judges at the highest level to introspect as to why this is happening. Steps should be taken to regain the lost glory. This can and must be done because if people lose faith in the judiciary, the judiciary itself becomes irrelevant. That will sound the death knell for a democratic India. Where there is no democracy, the people can never be free or independent.

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In a democracy, dissent is an act of faith. — J. William Fulbright

Navigating SIR hurdles

SURINDERJIT SINGH SANDHU

DURING my government service, there were days when the landline phone just would not stop ringing. I would keep answering it and saying to my boss, “Sir! Sir! Sir!” My little daughters used to tease me for repeatedly uttering this word. Once, I was sitting with an Additional Deputy Commissioner. His intercom rang six or seven times in just 10 minutes. Each time he took the call, he said, “Good morning, sir.” It was easy to guess that his boss, the Deputy Commissioner, was on the other side.

Since last year, we have been hearing the term “SIR” — Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. Though deletions during such an exercise because of deaths, migration, duplication, etc., are inevitable, the large number of exclusions sparked a political row, particularly in West Bengal. In recent months, SIR was conducted in Punjab, Haryana and several other states.

Earlier this year, a Booth Level Officer (BLO) called up and told me that my vote could not be mapped to the SIR held in 2002-03. I told her about my address in Chandigarh, where I had been posted at the time. I informed her that I had voted twice in Chandigarh. She tried to map my vote, but in vain.

When she came to deliver the enumeration forms for my wife and me recently, she told me that my vote had been mapped, but not my wife’s. After filling the forms, I went to her office to submit them. I asked her, “What about my wife’s vote?”

She told me, “The Electoral Registration Officer will send her a notice, and she will have to appear with the required documents.”

I asked, “Please map her vote with mine.” She replied: “Husband’s and wife’s votes cannot be mapped with each other; these can be mapped only with the father or mother.”

I found this shocking. My wife had held a voter ID for about 45 years, and suddenly she could lose her right due to a cumbersome and confusing procedure. She had been living with me for 49 years, yet her vote could not be mapped with mine!

Somehow, I located her mother’s vote, and the BLO was able to map it to the old SIR. Truth be told, the officer was very helpful.

I recall the time when Electronic Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) were introduced. It was a highly successful and hassle-free exercise in Punjab. SIR should take a cue from that experience. It must be kind, at least to senior citizens.

The writer is a retired IAS officer based in Amritsar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Teachers must initiate change

Apropos of ‘Teachers must rise to save education’, the real test of teaching is whether it transforms the careless into the careful, the incapable into the capable, and the unproductive into responsible citizens. NEP 2020 can succeed only when teachers initiate change rather than being passive implementers. Teachers must update their knowledge, use technology and AI responsibly, encourage critical thinking, nurture values and connect classroom learning with real-life needs. Attendance, examination results and certificates cannot be the sole measures of educational success.

MM GOEL, KURUKSHETRA

Parents must play proactive role

Refer to ‘Teachers must rise to save education’; teachers alone cannot be blamed for the decline. Parents, too, have a role to play. Education has become a business; students are ultimately paying the price. Teachers certainly must rise and speak, but they cannot do it alone. Parents, teachers and educational institutions must collectively reject the culture of numbers and profit. Education is not a commodity to be sold or a competition to be won. It is a responsibility to be honoured.

SHAILJA BANSAL, BATHINDA

Collective responsibility

Refer to ‘Preventive justice’; every child is a potential national asset. However, ensuring that vulnerability does not become a lifelong delinquency is a collective responsibility. Children wandering in streets, selling balloons at traffic lights, begging outside places of worship or working in factories should immediately draw the attention of government and civil society. India can learn from Finland and Japan, where child welfare, counselling, rehabilitation and social support are prioritised.

VIJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

Pilot’s Punjab Congress test

Apropos of ‘Pilot flies into Punjab as Cong battles rift; Baghel goes to Assam’; the million-dollar question troubling every concerned Punjabi is whether Sachin Pilot can steer the Punjab Congress, currently adrift, safely towards electoral success. The current political scenario portends trouble for the Grand Old Party. Let the state party leaders work among themselves to give the electorate a viable option, rather than making the people opt for undesirable alternatives.

DV SHARMA, MUKERIAN

Restore faith in planning body

The corruption cases allegedly involving retired IAS officers in connection with irregularities in Haryana Sheshri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP) oustee-quota allotments warrant an independent, time-bound audit of all such allotments made across Haryana in the past two decades. It should also examine whether legal opinions or court orders were ignored and identify all officials involved. Relevant files should be digitised and referred to the vigilance authorities wherever wrongdoing is found. Transparency, accountability and prompt prosecution are essential to restore confidence in the HSVP.

VIRENDRA SINGH MALHAN, ZIRAKPUR

Teacher’s exemplary act

Refer to ‘No student is beyond redemption’; of course, stealing is a bad habit, but at a tender age, students often do such acts. It is exemplary that a teacher could redeem a wayward boy to the extent that he became a brilliant student and later achieved success in life. Such teachers cleanse our society. All teachers should follow such an example, rather than curse or punish students.

AMARJIT SINGH BHOGAL, ADAMPUR

The economics of U-turns



AJIT RANADE
SENIOR FELLOW,
PUNE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

THE Reserve Bank of India recently gave a revealing lesson in economic policymaking. On August 5, Governor Sanjay Malhotra was asked whether the special FCNR(B) scheme, designed to attract foreign currency deposits from NRIs, might be closed before its scheduled September 30 deadline. He said there was no proposal to do so. Nine days later, the RBI advanced the closing date to August 31.

There may have been good economic reasons. The scheme had worked almost too well. Dollar inflows were strong, while the subsidy cost of providing assured protection against depreciation was mounting. There was the mounting headache of liquidity management and future foreign-exchange liabilities. The issue is why a categorical assurance was given when the possibility of an early exit was already being discussed.

Economic policy is full of such U-turns. Some are evidence of agility and learning. Others reflect poor preparation, political pressure or simple unpredictability. How do we tell the difference?

Donald Trump's tariff policy offers a glaring example of the latter. Since the tariff announcements of April 2025, duties have been imposed, paused, modified, negotiated down, threatened again and sometimes reimposed. Firms managing their supply chains have to brace for a tariff now, and also pay for uncertainty about what the tariff will be six months later. Policy volatility itself becomes a tax on investment.

India has its own examples of U-turns. The three farm reform laws were enacted with much conviction and then repealed after prolonged political agitation. The ethanol blending programme, pushed rapidly towards E20, is confronting concerns about vehicles, feedstock,



DYNAMIC : Economics cannot give watertight answers to many policy questions. AI GENERATED IMAGE

water use and consumer choice, and may yet require recalibration.

Pension reform is another example. NPS moved government pensions away from an unfunded defined-benefit promise towards a funded contribution-based system. Political pressure for restoration of the OPS produced the UPS, which restores an assured pension element while retaining contributions. Yet by March 2026 only about 1.24 lakh of 24.14 lakh Central employees had opted for UPS.

These are not all the same kind of reversals. Sometimes politics changes. Sometimes evidence changes. Sometimes the original policy was inadequately thought through. And sometimes the policy question itself is badly framed.

Economics cannot give watertight answers to many policy questions because economic behaviour is not governed by fixed parameters. A policy changes behaviour, and changed behaviour alters the environment in which the policy operates. A farm reform changes incentives but also political mobilisation. A production subsidy can create an industry, but that industry then becomes a constituency for continuation of the subsidy. Political economy is not an external disturbance to economics. It is part of the system.

During the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, IMF-supported programmes in Thailand, Indonesia and Korea emphasised tight macroeconomic policies alongside

Refusal to revise a view after contrary evidence is dogma, not consistency.

sweeping structural reform. Malaysia did not enter an IMF programme. It eventually imposed capital controls, pegged the ringgit and staged a strong recovery. Was IMF policy wrong? Malaysia became an important counter-example to the then IMF hostility towards capital controls.

The euro-area sovereign debt crisis of 2011 produced another episode. Greek debt was judged to be unsustainable. But the IMF changed its own exceptional-access framework. It did not impose immediate debt restructuring but gave generous aid to Greece. This was because European institutions and governments were firmly opposed to restructuring Greek sovereign debt. The contrast with the rigidity shown towards Asian borrowers in 1997 fed accusations of "double standards". Or was this a U-turn due to fresh thinking about fiscal austerity?

For years, the World Bank published its *Doing Business* rankings, which acquired enormous influence over how "business friendly" a country was thought to be. Yet ironically, in *Doing Business* 2010, India

was 133rd, Brazil 129th and Russia 120th out of 183 economies; China was 89th. Clearly the WB indicators were unable to explain why these poorly ranked BRIC economies were growing so rapidly. Then following a mini-scandal, the Bank discontinued *Doing Business* rankings in 2021. It has been replaced by another metric.

None of this means economists or policymakers should be condemned for changing their minds. Refusal to revise a view after contrary evidence is dogma, not consistency. The problem arises when institutions speak with greater certainty than the underlying economics warrants, or when reversals driven by political convenience are presented as economic necessity.

Credibility means being clear about the conditions under which the course may change. The RBI could have said that the FCNR(B) window would remain open until September 30 unless inflows crossed a specified threshold or financial-stability concerns arose.

Good policymaking requires qualities which can pull in opposite directions: humility (accepting that forecasts and models can be wrong), transparency (explaining what changed), accountability (acknowledging the consequences of a reversal) and decisiveness (uncertainty cannot become an excuse for paralysis).

Credit: The Billion Press
For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

BRICS no more a talking shop



MANOJ JOSHI
DISTINGUISHED FELLOW, ORF

THE BRICS summit in New Delhi at the end of the week stands out as a factor of stability and order, offering some hope to the Global South at a time when the international system is struggling to cope with the turbulence unleashed by two wars, rising protectionism and Donald Trump's disruptive approach to global affairs. As a founder member of the organisation, India sees its role as a special responsibility to advance the interests of the developing world, while safeguarding its own strategic autonomy. It is therefore not surprising that the Modi government is pulling out all the stops to ensure that the summit is successful. From the outset, India has played a responsible and creative role in BRICS.

The New Development Bank (NDB) and the \$100-billion Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) provide BRICS members with alternative development finance and a financial safety net, reducing dependence on Western-dominated institutions. Over the years, India has benefited from the bank. Its funding has supported the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System, while metro projects in Mumbai, Lucknow, Chennai and Indore have also received NDB financing.

India has used BRICS to promote cooperation in new areas of technology. During its 2021 chairmanship, the five original members signed the agreement on BRICS cooperation on a virtual constellation of remote-sensing satellites. The arrangement envisaged sharing satellite data for disaster management, climate monitoring and environmental protection.

India is now seeking to bring another of its strengths — digital public infrastructure — into the BRICS agenda. In January, the Reserve Bank of India proposed linking the central bank digital currencies of BRICS countries to facilitate cross-border trade and tourism payments. If implemented, such interoperability could eventually make international payments faster and cheaper.

Historically, China and Russia have tended to see BRICS primarily through an economic or geopolitical lens, particularly as a means of giving the developing world greater weight vis-à-vis the G7. India, however, has sought to widen the agenda. New Delhi has also used its influence to push counter-terrorism and transnational crime higher up the BRICS agenda. The BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan adopted during the 2021 Indian chairmanship was an effort to turn political commitments into more systematic cooperation.

BRICS members have consistently called for greater representation for developing countries in the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, as well as reform of the United Nations Security Council.

This brings the BRICS agenda to one of its most sensitive areas: the effort to reduce vulnerability to Western sanctions and excessive dependence on the dollar-centred financial system. BRICS has explored greater use of national currencies in bilateral trade, cross-border payment interoperability and alternative financial channels. It has not, so far, created a common currency capable of challenging the dollar.

This is inevitably viewed with some nervousness in Washington. Trump has threatened punitive tariffs against BRICS countries that seek to undermine the dollar or create an alternative monetary system. For the US, the dollar's international role is not merely an economic advantage; it is an important component of American geopolitical power.

India, however, has consistently avoided turning de-dollarisation into an ideological project. Its approach has been pragmatic: promote the use of national currencies, develop more efficient payment mechanisms and reduce unnecessary dependence on any single financial system.

New Delhi does not want BRICS to become an anti-American alliance, any more than it wants the US to dictate the choices available to the developing world. India's objective is a more plural international system in which developing countries have greater room for manoeuvre and a stronger voice.

BRICS has often been seen as a talking shop rather than a multilateral organisation. But as the above account indicates, it has been steadily working on a meaningful agenda that serves the Global South's interests.

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

Blame the West for the melting of the Himalayas



TIKENDER SINGH PANWAR
FORMER DEPUTY MAYOR, SHIMLA

ON the morning of August 26, a wall of ice, rock and water tore down from Langtang-Lirung through the Bhotekoshi valley into Nepal and Tibet. Villages vanished. This is not a natural disaster. It is the arrival of a bill the Himalaya did not run up. Even before the debris has settled, a familiar argument has begun to circulate: that this is a story of reckless mountain development.

Too many roads, too many dams, too many towns built where nothing should be built. And that the region has, in effect, brought this upon itself. There is truth buried in the development critique, and I will come to it. But the argument, as it is being made, gets the arithmetic back-

wards. The Indian Himalayan Region and its neighbours across Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet have contributed a vanishingly small share of the emissions that have pushed global temperatures up by roughly 1.8° C in the Himalayas. The mountains did not write this problem. They are simply where it is now being paid for, first and hardest.

To understand why the harm is now arriving in this form, one has to start in permafrost, the layer of soil and rock that has remained frozen, often for millennia, binding mountain slopes together the way rebar binds concrete. As the region warms, this permafrost is thawing. Slopes that held for centuries are losing their structural integrity, and what were once stable rock and ice faces are collapsing, exactly as investigators now believe happened at Langtang-Lirung. This is why the Hindu Kush Himalaya is, rightly, called the Third Pole. After the Arctic and Antarctic, it holds the largest reserve of frozen fresh water on Earth. But unlike the poles, tens of millions of people live in its shadow, along its river basins, inside the radius of what its ice can do when it lets go.

The emissions driving this thaw were not generated here. They were generated overwhelmingly by the industrialised economies

Continuing to build, and to leave standing, high risk infrastructure in these corridors is not resilience.

of the global North. The consequence, a slow motion existential crisis for mountain populations is being lived out entirely here.

This is why adaptation has become, for the Himalaya the central political question of our time. Adaptation is not a slogan. It has an unglamorous meaning: where we are permitted to build, and where we are not.

The IPCC's (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) Sixth Assessment Report identifies mountain regions and their river basins as global hotspots of climate vulnera-

bility. Two zones deserve to be named specifically. The first is any slope sitting above thawing permafrost, where the ground itself can no longer be trusted to hold. The second, and the more urgent for planning purposes, is the river basin. The valley floor; the terrace above the river; the confluence points where towns have clustered because that is where water and flat land meet. These are precisely the zones the IPCC identifies as most exposed to exactly the kind of cascading ice rock water disaster that struck the Bhotekoshi.

None of this is a story that belongs to Nepal alone. Cross the border and the same warning continues into Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and J&K. India's Central Water Commission tracks nearly 2,500 glacial lakes across the Himalayan states, of which a 2025 government assessment marked over 50 as carrying very high risk. Uttarakhand offers the starkest warning of all, because it has already lived this twice — in June 2013, and in February 2021. It is a pattern already in progress, and it should settle any argument about whether the decommissioning question applies only to Nepal.

It is in this context that a demand has to be raised that almost no one is willing to raise. Some hydropower projects in the most

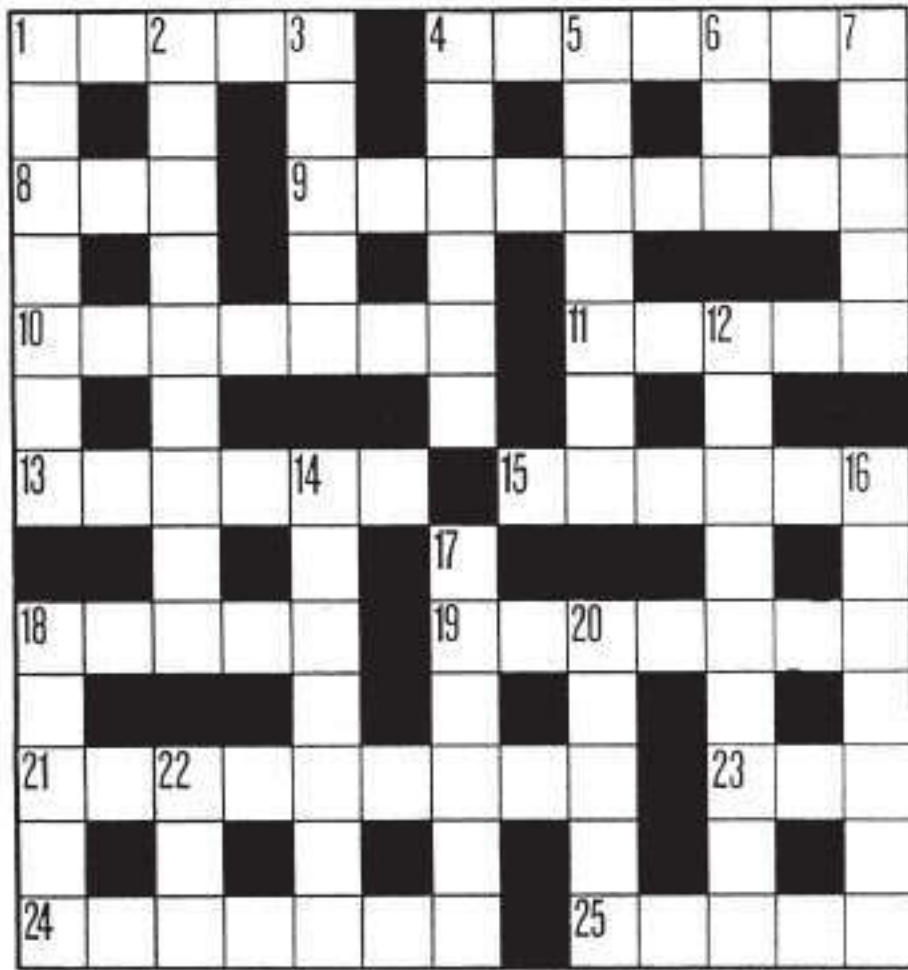
exposed Himalayan river basins need to be decommissioned.

Run-of-the-river hydropower was built on an assumption of hydrological stability that no longer holds. When 10 projects along a single river can be knocked out in a single morning, the calculus of steady flows, predictable glacial melt, manageable flood return periods has been overtaken by the physical reality of a warming Third Pole. Continuing to build, and to leave standing, high-risk infrastructure in these corridors is not resilience. It is the deliberate placement of capital and, more gravely, of people, in the path of a hazard we can now see clearly. Decommissioning is not an anti-development position. It is what adaptation actually requires when the physical evidence tells us a location has stopped being safe.

The second, harder truth: even as we insist, correctly, that the Himalaya is a victim of a crisis it did not create, we cannot escape our own responsibility for how our towns and houses are being built inside that crisis. Across the hill states, urban expansion has continued to follow the logic of the plains. Are our own building codes, land use plans and settlement patterns fit for the mountain?

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- General tendency (5)
 - Antagonistic (7)
 - Catch in wrongdoing (3)
 - Pure (9)
 - Unruly (7)
 - In agreement (2,3)
 - Half asleep (6)
 - Become interested in (4,2)
 - Take exception (5)
 - Companion in dancing (7)
 - Infallible (9)
 - Say further (3)
 - Implore (7)
 - Slacken (5)

Saturday's Solution

Across: 1 Far-fetched, 8 Logic, 9 Cyanide, 10 Wrestle, 11 Sweep, 12 Ration, 14 Gyrate, 17 Fence, 19 Comfort, 21 Luggage, 22 Grind, 23 Raring to go.

Down: 2 Augment, 3 Facet, 4 Ticket, 5 Hearsay, 6 Drive, 7 Deep-seated, 8 Low profile, 13 Open air, 15 Adoring, 16 Screen, 18 Niger, 20 Might.

- DOWN**
- Very involved (7)
 - Freedom and scope (5,4)
 - Throw water over (5)
 - Croaky (6)
 - A seedless raisin (7)
 - Climbing evergreen plant (3)
 - Provide (5)
 - Everybody (3,3,3)
 - An ethical reservation (7)
 - A self-contradiction (7)
 - Eradicate (6)
 - Author of Robinson Crusoe (5)
 - Allude (5)
 - In error (3)

SU DO KU

9			5	7		3	4
	7	3		9		1	2
		5	2	6			
	1			3	8		9
8	2		9	4			5
			8	9	7		
5	9		7		1	4	
4	6		3	1			8

V.EASY
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SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

5	1	6	4	7	9	3	2	8
8	4	9	1	2	3	7	6	5
3	7	2	8	5	6	1	4	9
6	9	3	2	4	8	5	1	7
1	2	7	9	3	5	6	8	4
4	5	8	7	6	1	9	3	2
2	8	1	3	9	7	4	5	6
7	3	5	6	8	4	2	9	1
9	6	4	5	1	2	8	7	3

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 7, 2026, MONDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1948
- Bhadrabad Shaka 16
- Bhadrabad Parvishite 22
- Hijari 1448
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 11, up to 5:05 pm
- Vyatatapa Yoga up to 6:41 am
- Variyan Yoga up to 3:38 am
- Punar Nakshatra up to 6:14 pm
- Moon enters Cancer sign 12:39 pm

FORECAST

SUNSET:	MONDAY	18:38 HRS
SUNRISE:	TUESDAY	06:03 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	36	24
New Delhi	34	24
Amritsar	34	26
Bathinda	35	24
Jalandhar	34	26
Ludhiana	33	26
Bhiwani	36	25
Hisar	37	25
Sirsa	37	25
Dharamsala	29	17
Manali	26	15
Shimla	24	16
Srinagar	30	16
Jammu	34	25
Kargil	29	10
Leh	27	13
Dehradun	27	22
Mussoorie	22	16

TEMPERATURE IN °C

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



OPINION

Alzheimer’s was not invented last Tuesday



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

LAST WEEK, a friend sent me a video of a young man who works as a personal trainer and nutritionist. The video was posted on Instagram, in which he claims that Alzheimer’s disease is an invention of greedy pharmaceutical companies selling false hope and that he can cure it through diet and a regular exercise programme. What startled me was not the claim itself but the number of likes and comments beneath it, as I saw several people agreeing with him and asking how they could buy his training package.

I felt obliged to reply, so I commented on his post that I believed he was misleading his viewers. Alzheimer’s disease has been with us for a very long time. What has changed is not the existence of the disease but our ability to detect it.

Physicians of earlier generations had few tools to separate it from what was casually believed to be a normal part of ageing, and fewer people lived long enough for Alzheimer’s to become common. I also reminded him that an unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity are documented risk factors for dementia, and I cited medical

journals for him to read. He promised to edit his video but kept trying to sell me what he claimed was an Alzheimer’s treatment package.

The frustrating part is that some of what he was saying was true. Large scientific reviews suggest that a substantial share of dementia cases worldwide are linked to risk factors we can modify. These factors include inactivity, obesity, diabetes, smoking, hearing loss, and social isolation. Exercise and a sensible diet genuinely matter. But there is a big difference in distance between saying “this reduces your risk” and “this cures the disease”, as the latter is clearly misleading.

During my clinical work, I sat with families who stopped a relative’s medication because someone online promised a natural cure and who then blamed themselves when the decline continued. I have also seen households spend their savings on supplements and programmes that do not work.

The Internet has always been a marketplace for bad ideas; some of these are less harmful than others. What troubles me is the newer species of misinformation where people who hold a real qualification

During my clinical work, I sat with families who stopped a relative’s medication because someone online promised a natural cure and who then blamed themselves when the decline continued”

in one field quietly extend its authority into another. A certificate in nutrition and personal training is a genuine achievement, yet it is not a licence to make a diagnosis, prescribe, or to tell a frightened family that a neurodegenerative illness will be cured by a meal plan.

This is why I read with interest that China’s Internet regulator now requires creators posting on medicine, law, finance and education to submit degrees, licences or certifications for verification, with platforms responsible for checking them. While this regulation prevents the public from being scammed, there are those who worry that it allows the government to easily censor independent analysts, economists, or journalists who question official state narratives.

In my opinion, the answer is not to silence the unqualified but to crowd them out. Many professionals who hold the relevant training are not active on social media and then complain about what fills the space they abandoned. If we do not explain Alzheimer’s disease to the public in clear, generous language, someone will certainly be selling false hopes.

MUSK PUSHES REGULATORY LIMITS WITH CYBERCAB

ABHIRUP ROY

Tesla’s race to deploy Cybercab robotaxis will put regulatory limits to the test as the EV maker begins paid rides in the sporty, two-seaters that run without a steering wheel, pedals or mirrors.

Just hours after an event in downtown Austin, Texas, to mark the rollout, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said it opened an audit of about 1,000 Cybercab vehicles to assess how Tesla determined the cars comply with federal vehicle-safety regulations.

US regulators limit commercial deployment of vehicles that do not adhere to decades-old federal safety standards that were written for human-driven vehicles and require manual controls. But industry experts said regulatory gray areas and Elon Musk’s litigious track record could give Tesla a chance to force the Cybercab into broad use anyway.

Amid a frenzy of fans and social media influencers in downtown Austin, Texas, Cybercabs were added to Tesla’s robotaxi fleet that now operates its best-selling Model Y SUVs. Tesla said Cybercab rides were open to everyone and executives described pricing plans.

The golden, butterfly-door Cybercab embodies Musk’s strategy of betting the company on self-driving software and robotics. That bet has pushed its stock valuation to \$1.4 trillion, more than the top several global automakers combined.

Unlike most other countries, where new vehicle models and technology need regulatory clearance ahead of launch, automakers in the U.S. can deploy them on the public roads by self-certifying that they meet federal standards.

“I don’t think there is a reasonable interpretation that can be made to suggest that the Cybercab can comply with the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards,” said Michael Brooks, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, a consumer advocacy group.

While NHTSA is pushing faster than usual to change vehicle-safety standards and separately drafting new rules to accommodate driverless vehicles, its efforts, experts have said, are likely to take longer to kick in than what Musk is promising.

Musk is not known to wait for regulations, though. “Tesla historically has tested limits and pushed boundaries on regulations,” said Philip Koopman, a Carnegie Mellon University engineering professor and autonomous-vehicle safety expert. “I fully expect Tesla to test the limits.”

Musk could come up with a “creative interpretation” of vehicle regulation, say that Cybercabs comply with federal standards and “flood the market” with them, Koopman said. “That could take NHTSA or state regulators years to resolve. — Reuters

Peoples of the Middle East must not walk alone

THE MECCA Pact could become one of the most important constructive political developments in the history of the Middle Eastern region. Signed by Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan, with Bangladesh reportedly considering participation and Iran’s possible involvement under discussion, it offers a framework for regional consultation, cooperation and security. Its central purpose should be diplomacy.

The Pact should help countries in the region resolve disputes through dialogue, mediation and regular contact, rather than treating military action as a first response. If it reduces tensions, prevents escalation and encourages negotiation, it could achieve far more than any conventional military alliance. History shows that alliances based primarily on military power often lead to war rather than peace. For decades, regional security in the Middle East has depended heavily on outside powers, temporary coalitions and separate agreements between individual States. The Pact’s first task should be to establish a permanent forum for communication.

Ministers, diplomats, military officers and senior officials who meet regularly are less likely to misunderstand one another. They can exchange information, explain concerns and address problems before small incidents become serious crises. Members could discuss threats to shipping, energy installations, borders and civilian infrastructure. These mechanisms should support diplomacy, not replace it. Military communication should prevent incidents and create space for negotiation, not prepare for confrontation. Mediation and diplomacy should therefore remain central to the Pact.

When members face disputes, the Pact should offer impartial fact-finding, confidential talks



The pact should help countries in the region resolve disputes through dialogue, mediation and regular contact, rather than treating military action as a first response.



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

The Nato model should not be copied. Nato is primarily a military alliance, with diplomacy too often taking a back seat. That philosophy belongs to the past.

and diplomatic good offices before any member considers force. Committees could examine border disagreements, security incidents and disputes over trade or resources, seeking consensus wherever possible. The Nato model should not be copied. Nato is primarily a military alliance, with diplomacy too often taking a back seat. That philosophy belongs to the past.

The future of international relations depends on finding a more civilised approach to resolving disputes. The new Pact’s cooperation may include defence, but defence should remain subordinate to diplomacy. Other countries may consider joining as affiliated members so long as their sovereignty and independence remain fully intact. A looser structure might also encourage wider diplomatic participation beyond the Middle East.

States may be more willing to join provided membership focuses on humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, maritime safety and counterterrorism. Iran’s possible participation would give it greater significance. Saudi Arabia and Iran

together with Türkiye are among the region’s most influential states, and their relationship affects security across the Gulf. If Iran joined, the Pact could provide a regular setting for dialogue and help transform rivalry into managed competition benefiting everyone.

Pakistan could play an important diplomatic role. It has close relations with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye while maintaining a long-standing friendship with Iran. Islamabad could help bridge differences between governments that have not always viewed regional affairs in the same way. Members could exchange information about military exercises, establish emergency communication and investigate incidents before accusations led to conflict. They could cooperate against piracy, drug smuggling and organised crime, while coordinating responses to humanitarian emergencies. The Pact should establish clear principles.

No member should use it to impose its political will on another. Military action should not settle disputes between members. Collective defence should be limited to protecting members from attack, not enabling unjustified offensive action. Decisions should be based on consultation, with force used as a last resort. The Pact could also use diplomatic and economic pressure to discourage non-member actors from harming civilians in the region. Communication with non-member states would remain crucial, since an organisation that engages only with its members could deepen divisions.

A flexible organisation built around diplomacy would be more valuable than a rigid alliance centred on military solidarity. Its true test will be whether it makes dialogue more normal, military action less attractive and regional cooperation more reliable. If it achieves those aims, the Mecca Pact could become an important foundation for a more peaceful and secure region.

Born not to rule... but to serve



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

IN GOD we trust... in leadership we offer trust. Yet the qualities of leadership are many; so are we asking too much of those whom we choose ‘democratically’ to lead us?

It is difficult to sustain that perspective, given that as we look around us, we see how few of the current crop of heads of government demonstrate appropriate levels of respect, dignity, and decorum... minimum requirements, one would think. So, let’s check out, in no particular order, to see what history, scholars and societies value as leadership qualities, and whether they are sustainable in today’s grasping political environment.

Humility is one of the first to come to mind. Not of the ‘bowing and scraping’, but that of which the Holy Quran (17:37) reminds us that “You should not walk on the Earth in a haughty style. You can neither tear the Earth apart, nor match its mountains in height,” while J M Barrie simply wrote of life being “one long lesson in humility.” Nor is humility a sign of meekness or weakness; after all, it is well-chronicled, in the ‘other’ book, that “the meek shall inherit the Earth.”

Humility is a strength of character, the ability to recognise the qualities of others, and to be sufficiently self-aware to appreciate them.

Leaders should be, in fact, on a perpetual journey of self-discovery, as the children

of their societies, reverse-engineering societal need, not want. As such, the best of them should be tagged humanist... ethical, compassionate, and empathetic... because they should inspire people to both do, and be, better, and continuously encourage them to be so! Yet, those qualities appear rare, though, as the scholar and poet Abu Al Tayyib Al Mutanabbi wrote, of those who, while living in an environment created through the good graces of those who came before, cannot hide their envy for, or scorn of them.

Maybe in the past, there was little thought of accountability as a quality of leadership; however, if one is to accept responsibility for their actions and decisions, they must also be accountable, therefore measurable for them, in the same way.

Academics often disagree, saying that responsibility is the imperative towards action in leadership, while accountability is where one stands alone, answering to the cost of that action: “uncomfortable,” writes Minaa, “but worth the discomfort,” while Thomas Paine wrote, “Men holding themselves accountable to nobody, ought not be trusted.”

Societies need leaders, and not everybody is putting their hand up! They want role models to be creative, innovative and visionary; to be collaborative and communicative, as agile, strong, and courageous as a warrior, to have the wisdom of ages, confident, and decisive. But mostly,

Leaders should be, in fact, on a perpetual journey of self-discovery, as the children of their societies, reverse-engineering societal need, not want

societies need their leaders to be resilient, not petulant, and for arrogance to be a memory of something left behind, along with nappies, skinned knees and elbows, crocodile tears, and teen angst.

Genuine leaders are born, not made, but during their perpetual tenures are educated and trained to be wiser and more compassionate, and significantly less full of their own importance. If only for this reason, we can look towards the established historical orders of monarchy and sovereignty for the best examples today’s world can offer.

For example, the title of ‘Sultan’ refers to wisdom and authority; ‘Shaikh’ to their elders, respected and beyond reproach; ‘Kings’ and ‘Queens,’ are hereditary monarchs with life tenure; ‘Pharaoh,’ refers to the lineage of their great houses; ‘Khan’ is symbolic of authority, even power; ‘Tsars’ held claim to entire Byzantine civilisations; ‘Emperor,’ was once the definition of supremacy and victory; ‘Shah’ is King of Kings; even ‘Ayatollah’ as a sign of God has an allusion to greatness.

And there, only by any other name, can today’s chosen democrats, as if by design and demand, appear and be, and behave with petulance, arrogance, and entitlement, lacking the dignity, grace, and gravitas of the older orders. Give me a king, or a shaikh, any day of the week.

EXPERTS TOUT ‘CONSCIOUS’ FOOD SYSTEMS TO FIX FARM WOES

SARA HUSSEIN

Farmers around the world are struggling with the impact of climate change, financial pressures and depleted soil - and industry experts say bringing consumers closer to the people who produce their food could provide a solution.

A group of farmers, scientists and development specialists are pushing for “conscious food systems”, arguing that many of the problems in today’s food production are the result of people being “alienated” from nature and each other.

Current food production systems are “not really fit for purpose,” said Andrew Bovarnick, head of food systems at the United Nations Development Programme. “It’s causing huge environmental problems... we have more food in the world, but there are more than ever people who are malnourished and starving,” he said.

Bovarnick spent years looking at technical solutions to food production challenges, but believes technology alone cannot solve the problem. Instead, he and other members of the Global Conscious Food Systems Alliance, meeting in Bhutan last week, want more “mindful” food production focused on protecting the environment, farmers and consumers, rather than maximising profit or output.

The problems in food production are well-documented. Intensive agriculture, the application of chemicals and extreme weather linked to climate change have degraded up to 40 per cent of land globally. Intensive farming practices themselves contribute to climate change, and farmland is increasingly being abandoned by producers who cannot make ends meet or survive harvests lost to extreme weather.

These are problems farmer Ashish Gupta confronts daily on his smallholding in India’s Himachal Pradesh, which he farms as part of a cooperative. “The markets are very cruel,” he said on the sidelines of the conference, lamenting the barriers that smallholders producing organic food face in reaching consumers.

Organic food might look more expensive, but Gupta urged shoppers to consider the environmental and social impacts of industrial agriculture, which can squeeze farmers and harm the soil and water.

His community struggles to survive a single harvest ruined by floods, and sees that “the farmers are getting more and more aged, and the newer generation is not interested in farming.”

For Gupta, a conscious food system is about making consumers consider who grew their food and how, building a connection that encourages people to pay fair prices and support sustainable farming. “We have to adopt certain principles of conscious food systems to make it more mindful, so young people can relate to the connection to the land in their hearts, not just the economics,” he said. — AFP

Nepal seeks climate justice after disaster

WHEN A WALL of icy debris from a glacial collapse on the China-Nepal border tore through his village last week, Pemba Chhrring Tamang watched the landscape he had known all his life disappear.

“The flood was one like I had never seen before,” said the 57-year-old, rescued from his Himalayan village in Nepal’s devastated Rasuwa district. “It destroyed everything, our homes, our village.”

The August 26 disaster, one of Nepal’s worst climate-linked catastrophes, brought grief but also anger.

“What has Nepal done to deserve this?” asked Tashi Lhazom, a Nepali climate activist and politician.

“It is among the most climate-vulnerable countries, but at the same time, it is also the most climate-friendly.”

The huge wave of debris killed more than 1,200 people and left more than 4,750 missing in Nepal and China’s Tibet region, smashing towns, roads, bridges and multiple hydropower dams.

Rescuers are still searching for survivors and the dead, while helicopters ferry food and medicine to those left with nothing.

While the exact cause of the glacial collapse is unclear, climate change is causing glaciers to melt worldwide, heightening the risk of such disasters.

“We have been hearing news about climate change, and there have been floods before - but never like this,” said Tamang.

Nepal, a largely rural nation of 30 million people that has contributed little to the greenhouse gas emissions driving global warming, says reconstruction could cost “billions” of dollars.

“We are suffering for a crime that we did not commit,” Lhazom said.

Nepali glaciologist Tenzing Chogyal Sherpa said wealthy industrialised countries driving global emissions should accept their role.

“They should take some responsibility, and there should be some accountability,” he said.

Scientists say the warming climate



People hold onto a cage on a makeshift zipline as they cross the Trishuli River from Koloni following deadly flash floods in Nuwakot district, Nepal, on Thursday. — Reuters



PAAVAN MATHEMA

The writer is Bureau Chief, Agence France-Presse (AFP), and is based in Kathmandu

Nepali glaciologist Tenzing Chogyal Sherpa said wealthy industrialised countries driving global emissions should accept their role. They should take some responsibility, and there should be some accountability

is already altering the risks facing the Himalayan region.

Disaster specialist Saswata Sanyal, at Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), said the region is warming roughly “at twice the rate” of anywhere else in the world. “We have seen cascading disasters, like what we saw on August 26, where one event triggers multiple events,” he said.

Nepal’s leaders say the country needs long-term international support to adapt to a rapidly changing mountain environment.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah said Nepal must “strongly raise” with the international community the disasters it has experienced as a result of climate change.

Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal called it a “warning signal”.

He said that the support to Nepal should not be viewed only “from an angle of aid or charity, but should be seen from a perspective of climate justice as well”.

For communities living beneath the world’s highest mountains, a seemingly small rise in global temperatures can bring devastating consequences, Lhazom said.

“Just a degree increase in temperature may not seem much to most people, but it has a very different meaning in the mountains,” Lhazom said. “A change in a degree

can translate to the loss of thousands of lives and livelihoods.”

Lhazom pointed at richer countries.

“Are those who are causing it doing enough for Nepal and other vulnerable countries? No,” Lhazom said.

The United Nations launched a “loss and damage” fund in 2025 to aid the impacts of climate change, though it has not yet begun distributing its limited cash.

A UN preliminary assessment estimated building damage from Nepal’s floods at \$158 million alone, warning that total losses - including damage to roads and bridges, agricultural land and humanitarian costs — would be far higher.

Khanal said the disaster underlined the “impetus and urgency” needed to build data-sharing mechanisms to help warn of future disasters, noting that neighbouring China had shared key data after the flood.

Glaciers across the wider Hindu Kush-Himalayan region are a vital water source for 240 million people in the mountains and another 1.65 billion downstream across South and Southeast Asia.

“With climate change intensifying, there is no indication that such hazards will stop,” said Dhondup Wangmo, a research fellow at the Tibet Policy Institute.

“In fact, they are more likely to occur in the future, potentially with even more tragic consequences.”

For Nepal and its neighbours, the danger does not end in the mountains. “It impacts the entirety of the Himalayan region’s civilisation,” Khanal said. In neighbouring India, Rushati Das, from the New Delhi-based Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSAs), said the Nepal disaster showed that climate change is “knocking on our doorsteps”.

“What happens high in the mountains does not remain confined there,” Das said.

“A disaster originating in one part of the Himalayan region can have consequences far beyond national boundaries, affecting river systems, ecosystems, livelihoods and communities across South Asia.”

EDITORIAL

Hong Kong needs robust strategy for climate resilience

The record temperature of 36.9 degrees Celsius logged by the Hong Kong Observatory last month is the strongest evidence yet that extreme heat is not just a distant or occasional inconvenience. The rising temperature underlines a growing challenge that many authorities around the world are still grappling with. The city must respond not merely with improved mechanisms for alerts when the mercury soars but with a complete climate-resilience strategy that protects workers, older people, low-income households and communities least able to escape the heat.

The city is not alone in feeling the heat in this regard. Some countries in Europe have endured their hottest summer months on record, while the average global sea-surface temperature again reached an unprecedented high. The combination of a warming climate and powerful natural weather patterns is raising the likelihood of heatwaves and extreme rainfall.

Hong Kong cannot insulate itself from the global trend. Its dense urban form, ageing population and poorly ventilated homes mean many households, especially those in substandard partitioned flats, are vulnerable. A sizeable outdoor workforce, including construction workers and street cleaners, is also at the mercy of the mercury in the high summer months.

The Labour Department's rapid move to revamp the Heat Stress at Work Warning system is therefore a necessary and welcome step. Higher warnings can now be escalated more readily when the Hong Kong Observatory issues its extremely hot weather special alert or temperatures generally reach 35 degrees Celsius or above. That followed concerns that red or black alerts had never been issued since the three-tier mechanism was put in place in May 2023. Even when the temperature soared to 36.9 degrees Celsius on August 9, the highest since records began in 1884, only the lowest amber warning was issued.

The episode may have given the impression that officials who design warning systems from air-conditioned offices do not fully feel the heat faced by those working outside. It also understandably left workers hot under the collar. A work safety warning system that appears disconnected from reality does little to show the government's commitment to occupational health and safety.

Officials say the revised mechanism with a lower threshold will make the issuing of higher alerts easier. It is estimated that the red warning could be issued four to seven days a year as a result, while the black alert could be triggered one or two days a year.

In question is not just the colour of the alerts or how many more higher warnings can be expected each year, but whether those affected by extreme heat can really take a break from work. As rightly pointed out by some unionists, the current guidelines for outdoor workers with heavy duties to suspend or take regular rests under the three-tier system are not legally binding. Outdoor workers are usually the ones with the least bargaining power. As some have argued, the revamped system would not mean much if workers and their supervisors still feel compelled to work because of deadline pressure or performance targets.

The labour authorities have a role to play in this respect. In addition to more frequent inspections at high-risk outdoor worksites to promote compliance, the implementation of the revised alert system should be closely monitored for necessary refinement. These pragmatic measures could help ensure the mechanism reflects reality and protects workers.

The protection from heat stress should also expand beyond the working class. Reports of elderly people hanging around air-conditioned shopping malls to avoid hefty home electricity bills and surveys showing that nearly four in five low-income elderly people reportedly suffer from physical or mental distress during extreme heat are reminders that global warming is no longer just an environmental threat but an issue of public health and social and economic inequality.

High-level policy intervention is called for. It is good that Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu has pledged to improve urban management and unite efforts to tackle extreme weather events and disasters. This requires visionary and comprehensive strategies to enhance the city's resilience in different aspects as heatwaves continue to take a heavy toll around the world in the foreseeable future.

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Trump threat will only spur the dollar decline

While loose talk over bond market interventions may not trigger an immediate sell-off, it will convince foreign creditors to keep trimming their US Treasury exposure

US President Donald Trump's thinly veiled threat to hold a gun to the heads of countries that refuse to maintain or expand their holdings of US Treasury bonds would be absurd coming from anyone other than the highly erratic US president. Nevertheless, it must be taken seriously by markets.

Questioned about Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's recent efforts to support the US government bond markets through official buy-backs, Trump said this tactic represents just one possible type of market intervention.

"We have many types of intervention. That's one. The ultimate intervention is our military. And, uh, if we have to use that, we will," he said.

As the single biggest holder of US sovereign debt, would Japan join ... the charge for such securities?

Making these kinds of threats could set off a wave of selling US Treasuries among the ranks of US creditors around the world. In turn, this would destabilise global bond markets, as well as the markets for equities and other financial assets.

The US dollar is still the world's primary reserve currency, albeit to an increasingly lesser extent as other candidates – the euro, yen and yuan – become more widely used. Most likely it will be a combination of all three currencies that reshapes the global landscape, seeing that Trump's administration has exposed the folly of relying too heavily upon any single currency.

Trump's behaviour is highway robbery on a grand scale. Even if

the highwayman in question is possibly becoming less of a terrifying figure amid speculation of his willingness to step down in favour of US Vice-President J.D. Vance as difficult midterm elections loom for the Republicans. Even if Trump does step aside, though, his administration's policies will live on in his absence.

The US government bond market is the biggest in the world. At least for now, it serves as the biggest pool of global financial liquidity underpinning international financial transactions. No one wants it drained by a sudden mass sell-off, but it might already be too late to stem that tide.

Japan is the biggest foreign holder of US government bonds, with more than US\$1.1 trillion worth as of June. Britain is second with almost US\$940 billion, followed by China (US\$633 billion), Belgium (US\$482 billion) and Canada (US\$459 billion). How might these countries react to the rapidly diminishing value of the world's leading reserve currency?

As the single biggest holder of US sovereign debt, would Japan join or even lead the charge for such securities? Japan does have a long-standing relationship with the US built on their military alliance. Times change, though, and Trump has been pushing Tokyo hard to pay the US more for its security umbrella and take up more of the burden for its own defence, all the while imposing tariffs on Japanese goods and other barriers to trade.

Meanwhile, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's stimulus plan and other domestic spending priorities are adding up quickly. Liquidating some US bond holdings could be one way of closing the fiscal gap. Japan's domestic bond market is big and liquid enough to absorb reflows of funds from the United States into it, as well as to absorb inflows from countries exiting the US market.

The same goes for China, where new inflows of fugitive international funds from out of the US could easily be absorbed. China has long resisted fully opening up its capital

markets to international flows, but again, the world is changing.

Having the US dollar serve as the world's principal reserve currency confers strong leverage upon the US; Beijing is aware of that. The yuan having a share of that privilege – along with others, such as the euro and the yen – could well prove to be useful.

The European Union has long striven to achieve a common currency on the continent. Towards that end, it is trying to more closely integrate economic and financial policies. In Canada's case, there is certainly no love lost between Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and Trump.

The message to investors at large is to continue diversifying out of US dollar assets in general

All of this adds up to the growing feasibility of an alliance among key powers outside the US to cautiously accelerate their sales of US government bonds and – for some – secure their share of the privilege that comes with reserve currency status. Trump might have shot himself in the foot, also hitting the US dollar in the process.

The message to investors at large is to continue diversifying out of US dollar assets in general – always with an eye to developments in the US – and into the key currencies mentioned above. That is the way of the future, and it should lead to a better balanced world financial order over time.

Anthony Rowley is a veteran journalist specialising in Asian economic and financial affairs



Anthony Rowley

LETTERS

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living. Owners typically see only a glossy proposal and a recommendation, while the documents needed to scrutinise a deal are often unobtainable.

Homeowners at Wang Fuk Court did what the law allowed – questioning a roughly HK\$330 million project, requisitioning a meeting, voting out their management committee – yet still could not escape the contract.

The consultation on amending the Building Management Ordinance is welcome. Four reforms deserve priority: stronger



Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po nearly three weeks after the fire. Photo: Sam Tsang

approval thresholds for large contracts, with tender documents published to all owners; a cap on proxy harvesting; mandatory declarations of interest, with false declarations criminalised; and a genuine mechanism for exiting contracts signed in questionable circumstances.

After Wang Fuk Court, this should be treated not as a routine legislative tidy-up, but as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to return control of buildings to the people who own them.

Victor Tan, Wan Chai

Zhu Rongji and the long runway

Zhu Rongji, who died last month aged 97, was 59 when he became mayor of Shanghai in 1988, the year I was born. It was the first time he had truly run anything. The premiership came a decade later. As a child, I knew him only as

the official on television who lost his temper when nobody else did. In 1998 he said he had prepared a hundred coffins: 99 for corrupt officials, one for himself.

That willingness to be disliked was earned. Orphaned by nine, Zhu graduated from Tsinghua and spent nearly 20 years in the political wilderness. He was around 50, when his old bureau chief Yuan Baohua brought him into the State Economic Commission.

What he did in that interval is the whole lesson. He had “no resentment against Heaven, no quarrel with men”, as Confucius put it. He emerged with his competence sharpened. We often offer “A vessel great, it is the slowest made” as consolation, as though the vessel forms itself while you wait. It does not. Zhu was not waiting; he was working, unwatched.

Nor did he forget who opened the door. In 2018, days before his 90th birthday, he travelled to pay respects to Yuan, then 102.

None of this is to say there was no pain. Restructuring the state sector cost tens of millions their jobs; my father lost his. But an appreciation of Zhu that omits the cost is a press release.

Zhu's life offers no reassurance that things work out; for two decades there was no evidence his would. It might offer a job description for the interval: be good at the work while nobody is watching, refuse to blame the weather, be willing to be disliked once the work matters, and keep faith with those who kept faith with you.

He took real command at 59 and did a lifetime's work in the 15 years that followed. For anyone counting, that's a long runway.

Luo Chen Jun, Singapore



Illustration: Mario Rivera

Time to look beyond air conditioning in HK

We must find answers in design and engineering to combat the discomfort of the sweltering heatwaves in summer – but not at the expense of the interests of others

The Labour Department recently upgraded its Heat Stress at Work Warning system, making it easier for higher-tier alerts to be sent out, so that employers and workers, especially those who have to work outdoors, can react quickly during very hot weather.

Unfortunately, the most we seem to be able to do is issue warnings and recommend passive mitigation measures such as relaxing the work schedule, resting in the shade and staying hydrated. We are sitting ducks as temperatures peak year after year.

This has been a testing summer with multiple record-breaking hot days across the globe. In 2024, Hong Kong's hottest year on record since 1884 saw 52 very hot days (33 degrees Celsius or higher) and just two extremely hot days (35 degrees or higher); the highest temperature hit that year was 35.7 degrees in September. This year, we have already seen three extremely hot days in August alone and a record high of 36.9 degrees – according to the Observatory in Tsim Sha Tsui; at the Sheung Shui weather station, the mercury hit 39.8 degrees. This is a terrifying rate of increase.

“
How much human action has contributed to the extreme weather is up for debate

How much human action has contributed to the extreme weather is up for debate. Are the heatwaves, super typhoons, storms and floods, and severe droughts around the world the result of irresponsible climate crimes we have committed? While it is easy to point fingers, empirical science demands solid evidence and data analysis.

What we do know, for certain, is the heatwaves in Asia are linked to a strong El Nino pattern developed in the Pacific Ocean when waters became warmer, affecting trade winds. No country in Asia was spared from the extreme weather and all have developed some form of advisory system and national processes to battle the heat.

Hong Kong was able to handle the heat a bit better but only because we are spoiled by the convenience of air conditioning. From high-end homes in wealthy neighbourhoods to tenement houses in dilapidated districts, condensation units are a familiar sight and strolling in the city's overly air-conditioned shopping malls has become a sport for common folk during the summer.

In contrast, European countries, for instance, were not so lucky. Many had no air conditioning but this was not only because of regulatory restrictions, historic preservation mandates or environmental concerns. The continent historically enjoyed mild and short summers, so buildings tended to adopt passive cooling measures, which used to be able to handle the warmest days; it would be a technical challenge to retrofit many of these structures. Also, given that energy costs in Europe are much higher than in North America or Asia, air conditioning is a luxury few can afford.

If architecture is the creation of an artificial environment and the objective is to provide a beautiful, functional and comfortable space for users, then we must find tangible answers in design and engineering to combat discomfort – including the sweltering summer heat – but not at the expense of the interests of others. Air conditioning may seem the obvious and most convenient solution but conventional models harm the environment by raising outdoor temperatures and releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

If there is an urgent frontier in the design and construction industry, it is to responsibly create buildings and development that offer healthy and comfortable environments even under extreme climate conditions.

Architects and engineers need to adopt design measures such as erecting exterior surfaces with good insulation to reduce heat gain, encouraging cross-circulation and air flow, applying heat-reflective or radiative cooling paints, adopting shading devices, installing photovoltaic panels and building roofs to capture, store and convert solar energy to electricity, as well as integrating greenery and water features into building and urban design to reduce the urban heat island effect. The goal is to implement all of our technical know-how to lower heat gain,

lowering our reliance on air conditioning.

We must hold on to the belief that not all the building technology to battle climate change has been conceived of and invented. While some economies, such as in the Middle East, continue to pursue taller, bigger buildings and vanity projects, China years ago banned any construction over 500 metres, shifting the focus towards creative solutions and new technologies that enhance constructibility, efficiency, sustainability – and user comfort and need.

“
Hong Kong was able to handle the heat ... because we are spoiled by ... air conditioning

A great prototype can be found in Yuncheng, Shanxi province, where 200 nozzles installed on the rooftops of residential towers spray a water mist to cool the air around the buildings. According to one resident, the mist was “cooling and purified the air” and “the temperature felt about four or five degrees lower”. The fine mist evaporates, never reaching the streets below, and the rainbows it creates were icing on the cake.

This low-tech solution, requiring no compressor or refrigerant, is an example of a creative but simple solution.

In the age of robotic technology and artificial intelligence, ingenuity can still offer solutions to pressing and immediate climate problems. Although robots and AI cannot really sense thermal discomfort, the recurring heatwaves must prompt efforts to explore if and how the technology can spark out-of-the-box thinking and offer solutions for this real and existential problem facing the world. Improving human life in this way would validate the technology's worth more than the generation of crowd-pleasing images or kung fu performances that offer spectacle but little further value.

Dennis Lee is a Hong Kong-born, America-licensed architect



Dennis Lee

“
If the first rung is disappearing, young people will naturally question the ladder

Generation Z is turning filial piety into a career path

Tough job and housing markets have graduates questioning whether the old bargain of hard work bringing progress still applies

Hong Kong has always had a simple answer to what young people should do with their lives: study hard, get a job, work harder, buy a flat and eventually complain about the next generation. That formula is becoming harder to sell.



Ken Ip

A whole lexicon has grown up around Generation Z's uneasy relationship with work. In mainland China, there are “full-time children”, young adults who stay home and receive an allowance from their parents in return for doing household chores and running errands. Elsewhere, there is the “kangaroo tribe”, an updated version of adults remaining financially dependent on their parents. There are Neets, or young people not in education, employment or training.

While the labels differ, the underlying phenomenon is harder to ignore. More young adults are struggling to make the traditional transition to independence.

Hong Kong offers an especially revealing case. Consider university graduates with a respectable degree and little work experience. They apply for dozens of jobs, perhaps hundreds, only to find that “entry level” increasingly means “entry level for someone who already has experience”.

Employers want experienced workers, but young people need jobs to gain that experience. A position for fresh graduates can demand several years of achievements before an applicant has even had a chance to begin.

Against this backdrop, becoming a full-time child looks less absurd than it sounds. If a young adult can stay at home, avoid Hong Kong's punishing housing costs, receive an allowance and help around the house, why rush into a poorly paid job with little security and even less prospect of progression?

This is not necessarily clever economic thinking. Living with parents while searching for work is one thing; turning dependence into a permanent lifestyle is another. Skills stagnate, professional networks wither and financial independence grows distant. The family home is a safety net, not a career plan.

Still, it would be too easy to blame young people when the incentives to move forward have weakened. Hong Kong's housing market is central to the story. Many parents accumulated property under conditions their children will struggle to reproduce, turning the family home into a form of intergenerational insurance.

Furthermore, Gen Z is entering the workforce just as artificial intelligence (AI) begins to dismantle the traditional career ladder. For decades, young graduates were told to accept junior roles as an investment in their future. Learn the ropes, make mistakes, build relationships and move up.

Now some AI models can perform basic research, analysis, coding, writing and administrative work. The broader problem with AI might not simply be that it eliminates jobs but that it eliminates the very roles through which humans learned how to do the high-level work machines cannot replace.

That helps explain a stark shift at universities. In the US, where tech founders once received rock-star treatment on campuses, tech executives have been met with scepticism or outright boos. The people who once represented the future now look like a threat to it.

Students are not necessarily anti-technology as they are among the first generation to live with AI as an everyday tool. What they are questioning is the bargain attached to it. If corporate productivity gains come from requiring fewer junior employees, where exactly are young people supposed to start?

This could also explain why some are less enthusiastic about corporate careers than their parents expect. They have watched previous generations work gruelling hours in finance, professional services and multinational companies while struggling with housing costs, stress and the elusive promise of work-life balance. The destination was supposed to be prosperity. For many, it became a mortgage and a WhatsApp group complaining about work.

It is tempting to dismiss Gen Z as entitled, but that misses a structural shift in the career bargain. The old bargain was straightforward. Effort produced progress. If the first rung is disappearing, young people will naturally question the ladder.

Companies must rethink how they cultivate talent. If every vacancy demands experience and AI reduces junior tasks, organisations need new ways for young employees to acquire judgment, creativity and professional instincts. Otherwise, the full-time child and the Neet will become less a social curiosity and more of a permanent labour-market symptom.

Gen Z is not rejecting work; it is rejecting the idea that any work is automatically worth doing. Hong Kong has spent decades teaching its young people how to compete. The harder question now is whether the economy is giving them anything worth competing for.

Dr Ken Ip is an assistant professor specialising in business innovation and entrepreneurship at Saint Francis University, Hong Kong



Dangling display prompts probe

Technicians examine an overhead round electronic display dangling in the air at Hong Kong International Airport's newly reopened Terminal 2, prompting authorities to pledge a detailed investigation. A spokesman said the incident occurred at about 8.30am yesterday, when a screen "experienced a technical fault", triggering its safety system. "The Airport Authority takes the incident very seriously and will conduct a detailed investigation into the cause, with a view to further enhancing the stability of the system," the spokesman said. Terminal 2's departure facilities reopened on May 27 as part of the airport's HK\$141.5 billion three-runway system upgrade. Passengers can check in, clear immigration and undergo security screening there before returning to Terminal 1 for departure. Photos and videos of the incident circulated widely on social media, with users outraged by a safety hazard months into the terminal's reopening. "Having spent a few hundred million Hong Kong dollars, the whole thing was about to collapse within a few months," one user said. Photo: Nora Tam

Future doctors advised to blend rigour with AI

At Global Education Summit, medical leaders say artificial intelligence will not replace practitioners but will reward those with better questions

Charlotte Kwan charlotte.kwan@scmp.com

Medical experts have stressed that Hong Kong's next generation of healthcare professionals must combine clinical rigour with emotional resilience, an open-minded approach to artificial intelligence (AI) and the drive to transform the sector. The remarks came during a panel discussion on the first day of the inaugural Global Education Summit, co-organised by the South China Morning Post and HSBC Premier. "We always talk about people going north, going to Shenzhen ... for medical services. But I would say that it's a good thing for a future doctor. You're going to be a doctor not just for 7 million people. You're going to be a doctor for 18 million people," Dr Chung Kin-lai, chief executive officer of CUHK Medical Centre, said yesterday. The discussion, titled "Powering Hong Kong's healthcare talent pipeline: from medical education to research and industry impact", explored how the sector was preparing young doctors and healthcare talent for this changing landscape. The summit runs for two days, and the opening day brought together about 5,000 policymakers, educators and parents from around the world to discuss regional talent development, AI integration and evolving academic pathways. With AI reshaping clinical workflows, medical leaders warned that traditional metrics for evaluating future doctors were changing. Chung noted that soft skills had become increasingly vital. "The old stuff when we

ask about the ingredients to be a good doctor ... are something like good language, good presentation, and also something like good memory," Chung said. "But nowadays, memory is not that important. When you ask the internet, when you ask AI, everything comes up. I think more important is your training of the other side - the soft side, your human touch. How you communicate with people, especially with empathy." Dr Kenneth Tsang, regional chief executive officer of IHH Healthcare North Asia and chief executive of Gleneagles Hospital Hong Kong, highlighted a generational divide in technology adoption. "What we found is that doctors in middle age and above are quite resilient when it comes to adopting AI. They actually resisted taking up AI," he said. "So we are now actually moving into finding the younger generation

of doctors who are very open and already, I would say, very knowledgeable about AI to join us and work with us on AI and healthcare." With AI tools more prevalent, panellists told students that innovation required asking insightful questions, not just memorising answers. "My advice is really right now trying to learn how to ask the question that no one asks or ask the right question," said Dr Ricky Chiu, chairman and chief executive officer of PHASE Scientific and adjunct associate professor at Chinese University, during the session curated by SCMP Learn, the newspaper's education arm. "If I ask AI what the best way to screen for cervical cancer is, AI will give me a textbook answer. There's nothing useful about that, right? But if I ask AI, how come these tests are available but yet all the women are still not doing that? And you've got a company." Chiu encouraged students to view

healthcare opportunities and career paths beyond traditional clinical roles, outlining three primary ways to contribute: treating patients; teaching doctors; and developing healthcare tools. "A doctor saves lives one at a time, and I think it's a great life's work. A good diagnosis can really change people's lives," he said. For students and parents considering medical studies, the experts also stressed that young people should ask themselves whether they understood it was a lifelong commitment before choosing this path. Chung warned high-achieving students against choosing medicine out of habit or simply because it was a top priority, noting the extensive training required could often take 12 to 15 years. Tsang emphasised that real-world clinical readiness hinged on humility, while Chiu urged parents to let their children make their own choices, ensuring medicine was a genuine "lifetime dream". Echoing the transformation seen in medicine, an adjacent panel discussed the qualities that tech and innovation leaders looked for in the next generation of talent. The panel featured industry leaders including Michael Yue, managing director and general manager of Google Hong Kong; Terry Wong, chief executive officer of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation; and Yiyin Zhao, managing director of Samsung Electronics Hong Kong. Experts discussed some qualities they valued in future talent beyond academic results, including curiosity, adaptability, problem-solving and resilience. They also stressed the importance of students maintaining "the attitude to keep learning" and the ability to build relationships, work with people, and have empathy for others.



Geoffrey Au of HSBC Life Hong Kong and Macau (left); Dr Chung Kin-lai; Dr Kenneth Tsang; and Dr Ricky Chiu take part in the first Global Education Summit yesterday. Photo: Edmond So

Dog owners split over crackdown on leash rules

Some welcome improved safety as authorities ramp up inspections but others say move fuels panic, hostility

Fiona Sun fiona.sun@scmp.com

Authorities' intensified enforcement against dog owners who fail to control their pets has drawn mixed reactions, with supporters welcoming improved safety and critics warning it is stoking panic and hostility. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department carried out inspections and enforcement operations across the city yesterday following a spate of dog attacks in recent weeks. Among those walking their pets at the West Kowloon Cultural District despite the heat were civil servant Mark Mak, 35, his wife and their two daughters. Mak, who owns a six-year-old dog named Mori, said he always leashed his pet in public to prevent it from wandering or coming into contact with other dogs and disapproved of owners who did not. "The inspections and enforcement are good for protecting the safety of people and pets. They should be continued as we don't want to see any more tragedies," he said. Finance sector employee Kim Chan, also in his thirties, walked his nine-year-old black labradoodle, Charcoal, at the cultural district. Chan said although his dog was well-behaved and non-aggressive, he always used a leash to protect it and avoid affecting others. "The measures can improve protection and remind dog owners of their responsibilities as some people, including children, may be afraid of dogs," he said. But an owner of a 10-year-old mongrel, who gave only her surname, Cheung, said the stepped-up inspections had created panic in communities. She cited growing hostility from others, including taxi drivers refusing to give her and her dog a ride. "Such measures only spread panic and make people think that having a dog is a problem," said Cheung, who is in her thirties. Staff patrolled the cultural district with signs reminding people to leash their pets, a measure also observed at tech hub Cyberport in Pok Fu Lam, where some dog owners walked with their pets. Retiree Betty Ngai, 63, and her husband were enjoying an outing with their four-year-old poodle at Cyberport. Ngai said she kept her dog on a leash for most of the time outside despite its small size, and supported the government's reinforced actions. Authorities stepped up enforcement against dog owners who fail to keep their pets under control during special operations over this weekend and on August 30. The department said officers would step up inspections at public places where dogs congregated, and take immediate enforcement action without warning if keepers were found not to have properly controlled their dogs in accordance with legal requirements. It earlier said it conducted operations in Yuen Long, West Kowloon, Cyberport and Kai Tak on August 30, and would prosecute three dog owners for failing to keep large dogs on a leash in public areas. Under the Rabies Ordinance, it is an offence to leave a dog unleashed in public areas or at any place from which it may wander into a public space. Offenders can be fined HK\$10,000 upon conviction. Under the Dangerous Dogs Regulation, any dog weighing 20kg or more must be secured in public with a leash of up to two metres. Anyone who fails to comply faces a maximum penalty of three months in prison and a HK\$25,000 fine. Last month, a 33-year-old pet training facility owner was mauled by a mixed-breed fighting dog registered as a mongrel. She was found dead nearby after the attack. A 60kg mixed-breed dog killed a miniature poodle and a bichon frise in separate attacks in Yuen Long last month.

Cheung, dog owner

Hotel food poisoning list now at 14 cases

Connor Mycroft connor.mycroft@scmp.com

Health authorities have detected seven additional suspected food poisoning cases linked to a hotel restaurant in Yau Ma Tei, raising the total number of affected diners to 14. The Centre for Health Protection yesterday said it had identified three additional food poisoning clusters involving the Astor restaurant at Eaton HK, after initially announcing two clusters on Thursday. "The centre's preliminary investigations revealed that all five clusters are epidemiologically linked," it said, adding that 14 people had been affected. It said that officers from the centre and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department jointly conducted an on-site investigation and required management to implement control measures. "All affected people had patronised the buffet there before the operation," it said. The latest clusters involve a man and five women who had buffet meals at the restaurant between August 29 and 31. Between 16 and 40 hours later, all six developed symptoms including nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and fever. The centre also said the number of cases in the initial two clusters had risen from seven to eight. None of those affected needed to go to hospital, it added. It urged anyone who ate at the restaurant between August 29 and September 2 and later developed gastrointestinal symptoms to seek medical attention immediately. The Centre for Food Safety had told the restaurant to suspend serving the "incriminated food items", but it did not specify these.

COMMENT & FEATURES

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Huckabee's clarity

US Ambassador Mike Huckabee has offered a model for how a genuine ally should confront one of Israel's most sensitive challenges by condemning wrongdoing without turning it into an indictment of an entire society.

In his Thursday interview with *The Jerusalem Post*, Huckabee denounced violence against Palestinians, demanded consequences for perpetrators, and stressed that they represent only a tiny minority of the roughly half a million Israelis living in Judea and Samaria. He also defended Israel's right to build in Area C under the Oslo Accords framework. Those positions belong together.

International discussion of the West Bank too often erases distinctions. A criminal attack by several Jewish extremists becomes a judgment on "the settlers," then on Israel itself.

Defenders of Israel can make the opposite mistake by minimizing lawlessness because hostile actors will exploit it. Huckabee rejects both distortions. He condemns violence by Israelis against Palestinians as firmly as he does violence by Palestinians against Israelis, while refusing to let masked attackers stand in for hundreds of thousands of Israelis who live peacefully in the West Bank. Moral clarity hinges on making both judgments at once.

His willingness to go to affected communities gives his words weight. After the recent attacks in Qusra, he pressed Israeli authorities and used severe language about the perpetrators. Going to the place, hearing the people affected, pressing the authorities, and then telling the public plainly what happened is far more meaningful than issuing distant diplomatic statements.

The same clarity applies to the E1 and Area C regions. Israel has moved forward with marketing the first 1,400 housing units in E1 between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim, drawing renewed condemnation abroad.

Huckabee has said Israelis have a right to build in Area C under the Oslo Accords. Supporting that right does not require excusing intimidation, assault, or property crimes against Palestinians. Jewish communities should not have their legitimacy erased because extremists commit crimes, and extremists should not receive immunity because they claim to act for the Jewish people.

The answer to accusations that Israel is indifferent to Palestinian rights cannot be reflexive denial whenever an Israeli commits a crime. It should be the confident application of Israeli law.

Arrest suspects when evidence warrants it. Investigate attacks seriously. Protect civilians. Prosecute offenders. A democratic state proves its legitimacy not by claiming that its citizens never do wrong, but by showing that wrongdoing has consequences and that no political or religious cause places anyone above the law.

The overwhelming majority of Israelis living beyond the Green Line are not storming Palestinian villages or taking over homes. They are raising families, working, studying, serving, and living under extraordinary political and security pressures.

Allowing a fringe to become the public face of that population is unfair to them and damaging to Israel. The answer is not to minimize the fringe, but to isolate it by condemning criminals, enforcing the law, and saying that their conduct does not describe a society, a settlement movement, or a country.

Huckabee's approach offers a better standard for discussing the West Bank by providing precision over slogans. Say who committed an act and who was harmed. Distinguish allegations from established facts. Demand consequences where crimes occurred. Defend Israel when accusations are false or inflated. Protect Palestinians when they are victims of wrongdoing. Refuse to let extremists dictate how millions of people are described.

Because Huckabee is a long-standing supporter of Israel, his criticism carries particular weight.

Israel does not need allies who flatter it into complacency or critics who seize every crime as evidence against the nation. It needs people willing to state the whole truth.

Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria are not synonymous with violent extremists. Palestinian civilians are entitled to protection from crime. Israel has legitimate rights in Area C. Those who violate the law should face consequences.

Huckabee cuts through the noise because he is willing to say all of it, and Israel and the world at large need more voices willing to do the same.

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• By COOKIE SCHWAEBER-ISSAN

Brad Lander had everything going for him. At only age 57, the politician and urban planner managed to defeat incumbent representative Dan Goldman in New York's 10th congressional district primary.

Given his very progressive stand, including strong support for illegals, as well as disdain for federal immigration enforcement, positions compatible with Democratic Socialist newcomers, Lander was a shoo-in to win in this November's midterm elections.

There was only one fly in the ointment. Lander himself is Jewish – something that has become a massive liability in today's very antisemitic atmosphere among the far-left.

It was only a few days ago when Lander was "targeted with insults and calls to leave Madison Square Garden, over allegations of being a Zionist." Getting in his face and screaming, one individual called him a filthy ball sack, followed by the F bomb, for being a Zionist.

Apparently, it wasn't enough that Lander accused Israel of having committed a genocide in Gaza, or his characterization of Judea and Samaria as being occupied. Nor was it sufficient that he referred to the Jewish state as having violated human rights standards.

One might have thought that advocating for recognition of a Palestinian state and standing up for Islamophobia would have earned him a few brownie points, but when you're Jewish, none of that seems to matter. Because, at the end of the day, you cannot rid yourself of that ethnic label which reduces you to a detestable creature in the eyes of antisemites.

But Lander is not alone in that unsolvable dilemma. Along with him are the likes of Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, Chicago Governor JB Pritzker, presidential hopeful Rahm Emmanuel, Georgia Sen. Jon Osoff, Sen. Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, and many others who now run the risk of being left behind for the great sin of having been born Jewish.

Because if prominent influencer and streamer Hasan Piker, the new political kingmaker, has his way, all future leaders will emerge from the Democrat Socialist party, and none of them will be Jewish!

With the possible exception of Bernie Sanders, also Jewish, but one who is already too old to run for public office, no other Jew will have his level of "protection," insulating him from the hateful rhetoric and sentiments that are openly being hurled at well-known and once respected Jewish politicians.

Even far-left Scott Wiener, whose controversial positions included "opposing a bill that would have barred registered sex offenders from running for local or state office, arguing the ban was too broad," as well as a law, authored by him, "that blocks federal immigration and customs agents from wearing ski masks to hide their identities during operations," was not safe as he, too, was on the receiving end of an antisemitic assault.

Harassed and cornered by activists in San Francisco in June 2026, he was berated by a demonstrator at a bar, repeatedly demanding he say "Free Palestine."

This was the darling of the trans movement – the man who, per his own website, authored and vigorously championed major key legislative bills that sought to protect and expand rights for transgender,



BRAD LANDER, a Democratic nominee for Congress, speaks during a press conference in New York earlier this year. (Michael M. Santiago/Getty Images)

nonbinary, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Yet the moment he hesitated to mouth the obligatory "Free Palestine" chant, identifying him as a willing sell-out to his own ethnicity, Wiener was seen as useless and belonging to the "others" category, similar to the separation that was made over the course of centuries between Jews and non-Jews.

SO WHERE does this leave Jewish political candidates or those already serving public office? What will become of their future?

According to an April 2026 article that appeared in the *New York Times*, titled, "Excruciating and Agonizing: A New Reality for Jewish Democrats," "while high-profile Jewish politicians continue to win elections, command significant national platforms, and anchor leadership roles across federal, state, and local governments, they are navigating a cycle marked by severe ideological litmus tests, targeted harassment, and shifts in traditional party alliances."

Keep in mind that five months have passed since the writing of that article, and what we are seeing is a consistent trend where Jewish candidates are either being sidelined or marginalized at a faster pace than ever before.

But it turns out that this is not true just of Jewish candidates. It also applies to non-Jews who are pro-Israel. Take Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman, a staunch supporter of the Jewish State. As a result of his unwavering position, Fetterman has been rebuffed by DSA members (Democratic Socialists of America).

One example of this happened after a contentious media appearance in which Fetterman defended his Israel stance against progressive critics. In response, the Pittsburgh branch of the DSA responded publicly by sharing a link to their organization's sign-up page for prospective members.

Of course, Hasan Piker went one step further, com-

pletely denouncing Fetterman, citing his loyalty to Israel as proof that he "no longer represents the values of the party's base."

But which party base is Piker referring to? Because many among the base of the Democratic Party are, themselves, Jewish.

While that might not be true of the DSA leadership, most of whom are extremely anti-Israel and anti-Zionist (another term for being anti-Jewish), the Democratic Party still boasts a sizeable contingent of Jewish leaders, as well as pro-Israel supporters, even if they are reticent to admit it publicly.

Fetterman, a faithful Democrat, has been carefully watching this trend, declaring that if his party ever decides to formally turn against Israel, that will be grounds for him to leave the party.

Whether he wants to admit it or not, that has already occurred.

Because by defining the Democratic Party as a "big tent" party, and failing to denounce or condemn the Democratic Socialists who loudly excoriate Israel, accusing her of the worst crimes committed against humanity, the traditional Democratic Party has effectively merged with those who hate Israel.

There is no other way to look at it. In fact, Democratic Party leaders will find it more and more difficult to skirt the "Israel" issue. One way or another, they will have to declare their position of support or opposition, making it the deciding factor of a unified or split Democratic "big tent" party. AOC is already figuring out how to navigate those choppy waters.

What has become clear is that this looks like the end of the line for Jewish politicians.

The writer, a former principal of Jerusalem elementary and middle schools, was a member of Kibbutz Re'im from 1994 to 1999. She is the author of Mistake-Proof Parenting, based on the time-tested wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs, available on Amazon.

Golda read right to left. Some still don't



• By ALIZA PILICHOWSKI

Michigan Attorney-General Dana Nessel stood before Jewish Democrats last Sunday and told them their survival was negotiable.

Honored at the Michigan Democratic Party Jewish Caucus's Summer Simcha in Birmingham, she asked the room what their Jewish values required of them in November. Then she answered. Jews, she said, have "a moral imperative to place the needs of the world above even our own self-interest and, yes, even our own survival."

She reached for Queen Esther to make the point. Esther, Nessel explained, offered her own life to save her people. Now, Nessel continued, it may be time for Jews to "follow in her path and sacrifice the comfort, safety, and security – and even the very future – of our own people in exchange for the opportunity to save the rest of humanity."

She asked what good it did to defend Israel's right to exist if the planet itself became uninhabitable: climate, AI, nuclear risk, inequality – these, she implied, outranked Jewish safety.

The inversion is not a small error. Esther risked her own life so that the Jews of Persia would live. She did not instruct her people to accept their own erasure for the sake of the empire. Mordecai's warning was the opposite of Nessel's counsel: silence would not save Esther, and deliverance would come from elsewhere if she failed.

Nessel turned a story of Jewish self-preservation into a brief for Jewish self-erasure. Critics across the spectrum said so immediately. Men-

achem Rosensaft, the son of Holocaust survivors, wrote that no people's survival should be treated as a political bargaining chip.

Others noted that no official would dare tell Black or Muslim voters their group's continuity must wait until the planet is saved. The charge was not merely that Nessel misspoke. It was that she volunteered other people's children.

Nessel has not formally endorsed Abdul El-Sayed, the Democratic Senate nominee, though she has said she will not support Republican Mike Rogers.

In a race defined by El-Sayed's record on Israel, many in the room and far beyond it heard a clear instruction: swallow the fear, stay on the ticket, and treat Jewish security as one interest among many rather than the first one.

"Come November, what do your Jewish values tell you to do?" was not an open question. It was a prod against walking away.

El-Sayed has given those voters ample reason to walk. He has called Israel a "rogue state." He has accused it of genocide and apartheid. Asked whether the Israeli government is as evil as Hamas, he answered, "Yes. Hamas – evil. Israeli government – evil."

He has repeatedly declined to say that Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state, calling the question "secondary" to whether Israel has a right to American tax dollars.

"The question is whether we want a politics where our money is sent over to Israel to fund genocide and apartheid instead of investing in our own kids."

That is not a policy disagreement. It is a refusal to grant the Jewish state the same legitimacy he assumes for

every other nation.

After a Lebanese-born attacker rammed a truck into Temple Israel in West Bloomfield in March, while over 100 children five and under were in the early childhood center, El-Sayed condemned the assault and then added that "hurt people hurt people."

The FBI described the attack as Hezbollah-inspired terrorism targeting Jews. El-Sayed later called his framing a mistake and apologized. The initial instinct still matters. Context was offered before the wounded community had finished counting its children.

He has also campaigned with Hasan Piker, the streamer who told his audience that if American Jews keep tying their identity to Israel, "eventually someone's going to come around and take action, not against the state of Israel, mind you, but against American Jews."

Piker called Israel "Jewish ISIS" and said Jews were "making antisemitism worse." El-Sayed eventually said no one speaks for his campaign but him, and that antisemitism is a scourge. He did not drop the alliance when it was still useful.

THIS PATTERN is not new.

In January 1931, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that the National-deutsche Jude, organ of Dr. Max Naumann's National German-Jewish Party, argued that patriotic German Jews must support any party that served Germany's interests "even if it is antisemitic."

In communal elections, the group issued posters urging Jews to "vote German," meaning not for East European Jews. Hitlerists painted swastikas on the posters and laughed. Naumann's circle insisted native German

Jews were Germanic tribesmen who happened to practice Judaism.

They treated Zionists as unpatriotic and Ostjuden as a disintegrating alien element. Germany came first. Jewish peoplehood came second, if at all. History recorded the result.

There have always been Jews who believed that loyalty to the nation or to abstract humanity would purchase safety. They have been wrong with grim consistency. Henry Kissinger once told Golda Meir that he was first an American, second secretary of state, and only third a Jew.

Meir answered that in Israel they read from right to left. The line was not a joke. It was a ranking. Jewish continuity is not an afterthought to be scheduled once the climate models look better or the party coalition holds.

Jews who live in America, or anywhere else, owe their countries honest citizenship. They owe the wider world the ordinary duties of decency.

"Tikkun olam" is not a license for suicide. Particular obligation does not cancel universal concern; it orders it. A people that has been hunted for millennia does not get to treat its own survival as the last item on a progressive checklist. Those who invert the order join a long and unlucky line.

They discover, often too late, that the world they elevated above their own people did not return the favor. Homelessness is not a metaphor when the people you trusted decide your existence is the problem they no longer need to solve.

Prioritize the Jewish people and the Jewish state. Then, from that secure ground, care for everyone else. The alternative has already been tried.

The writer is a certified interfaith hospice chaplain in Jerusalem and the mayor of Mitzpe Yeriho.

Israelis love to travel



ABOVE THE FOLD
• By MICAH HALPERN

It is time for Israelis to rethink their travel plans.

Here is the problem. Since the Hamas-led terrorist attacks on October 7, 2023, Jew-hatred has increased exponentially. Places are simply less receptive to Jews, and especially Israelis. My suggestion is that Israelis travel less, or even better, they become more selective regarding where they travel. Not out of fear, but out of prudence.

This is recognition of the hostility they face, and it is a maximization of pleasure and a reduction of tension.

Zionism was a response to antisemitism.

Early Zionists realized that there was no way to eliminate Jew-hatred. That sage insight into a fear of those who are different – the Jews – has, over the decades, proven to be true. They reasoned that the best way to avoid a harmful, senseless, and destructive bias was to create an independent society that could defend itself.

The Jewish state was created on that foundation.

The model of assimilation and accommodation in host societies adopted by Jews, living in host countries for generations, developed as a survival model. They tried to keep their heads down, keep a low profile, keep to themselves, and be quiet, law-abiding citizens.

The attempt to prove themselves loyal, however, failed. Loyalty alone was not enough. They remained outsiders. They remained unwelcome guests in country after country, decade after decade.

Jewish safety, Jewish life, could not depend on the tolerance of others. Creating a Jewish state was the solution.

TODAY, AS those age-old tensions once again rear their ugly heads, Jews in general, and Israelis in particular, have become moving targets while abroad. Jews – even assimilated Jews, even non-religious Jews, are identifiable. And that means that, for Jews, international travel is not risk-free.

A Pew Research Center study, supported by a Mako survey, reports that 92% of Israelis have traveled abroad at least once in their lives. Some 75% have traveled abroad in the past two years. While those numbers are astonishing in many ways, they are also extremely disturbing.

It is rewarding to know that Israelis, in such large numbers, have the economic capability to travel. It is admirable to know that Israelis have a zest for learning about other cultures, other cuisines, and other climates. With that, of course, comes the realization that Israelis sometimes, oftentimes, just need to get away. From the tensions. From the wars, from the internal conflicts. From October 7 and its after-effects.

Since October 7, Jew-hatred has increased exponentially. It has increased for Jews still living in host countries and it has increased for Israelis living in and passing through those countries. It has been stimulated, in some countries, by the actions and rhetoric of world leaders. It has been carried out by individuals and groups who have been swayed by the vile, vicious, blood libel untruths that a genocide is being perpetrated by the Jewish state.

Not by choice, but out of necessity, Israelis and Jews must change their ways and



PEOPLE AT Ben-Gurion Airport last month. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

learn to travel selectively and intelligently. It is time to explore, enjoy, and do business in places where the hosts have proven themselves as countries willing to protect their Jewish guests. It is time to go where Jews are welcome. Passports, hotel reservations, and a cosmopolitan environment do not guarantee a cordial reception.

Modern Zionism's founding thinkers, such as Leo Pinsker and Theodor Herzl, firmly believed that Jewish safety depended on transforming Jews from guests and minorities who petitioned for their safety, into a power that would and could defend

itself in its own home.

It is a colossal mistake to think that Israel and Zionism solved the issue of antisemitism. Rather, it removed Jews from the immediate reach of antisemites and antisemitism. Jew-hatred still exists. Today, an Israeli passport does not magically shield Jews from that hatred. If anything, in certain environments it magnifies the target.

IN 2025, THE Anti-Defamation League recorded 6,274 attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions in the United States,

the country Jews long held to be the “golden country.” While that number was down 33% from 2024, it is still way too high to be considered either acceptable or a statistical anomaly.

The Foreign Ministry recorded 45 Israelis who experienced anti-Jewish incidents between July 2025 and July 2026 while in the United States. That number included fights, spitting, verbal attacks, expulsions from cafés, refusal of service, as well as instances in which Israelis felt threatened. These are by no means all the incidents that occurred; merely those reported or needing diplomatic involvement.

Mathematically, it is highly unlikely that Israeli travelers will be attacked. Until it happens. Until it happens to you. Until you are that Israeli or that Israeli family.

The unfortunate, undeserved message that large swaths of the world have been sending out has been received. A July 2025 survey undertaken by the Israel Democracy Institute reported that 38% of respondents answered that they had changed their travel destinations to accommodate this new state of affairs.

I call that risk-based self-restraint. It is a proactive response; it is not giving the Jew-haters a victory and a reward.

Zionism never promised to eliminate Jew-hatred; it promised that Jews would no longer be defenseless.

Israel exists so that Jews have a place where the state – not a foreign government, and certainly not a hotel manager – is ultimately responsible for the security of Jews.

The writer is a columnist and a social and political commentator. Watch his TV show Thinking Out Loud on the Jewish Broadcasting Syndicate.



NEW FRENCH Jewish immigrants arrive at Ben-Gurion Airport last month. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

Every day brings Israel closer to becoming a safe haven

• By ANITA FRIEDMAN

Happy New Year. A blessed year. A sweet year of peace.

This is what we wish for ourselves every year. The symbols of the holiday – the pomegranate, date, apple dipped in honey, and even the head of a fish – represent our desire for goodness, for ourselves and for the world.

Even the beet, a symbol of the traditional prayer that “all those who wish us harm should disappear,” expresses a hope that they disappear only from our lives and our surroundings, and perhaps even become our friends.

Yet alongside the holiday symbols and prayers for goodness, the signs of antisemitism and the evil closing in around us are also increasingly evident. And as we pray to our God for peace and redemption, with the same fervor, many are praying for the opposite.

The day before writing these words, I read in *The Jerusalem Post* about an antisemitic demonstration taking place in a Jewish neighborhood in Toronto, within the boundaries of the world's fourth-largest Jewish community, after Israel, the United States, and France.

From the description, I understand that this was not really a “demonstration,” but rather a dress rehearsal for a violent torchlight march and an attack on the local Jews as symbols of civilization itself.

At the head of the procession was an academic and lecturer at several academic institutions in Ontario, equipped with a sound system and carrying a carefully structured lesson plan: first, antisemitic blood libels in the style of “Jews rape and eat children,” followed by direct threats of annihilation, and finally rhythmic chants of “*Khazir Khazir al-Yahud*” – a call for violence against Jews.

Anyone who thinks this is an extreme and isolated event is mistaken. There are several such events every day, in the squares and streets of cities around the world. Antisemitism is being shouted openly, and all too often it encounters a sympathetic local public and government policies that understand and accommodate it. Toronto is, in this case, a shop window displaying the world as a whole.

How did it happen that the “Overton window” of 2026 allows blood libels and calls for murder to become legitimate rhetoric in public discourse, while the local police do not arrest those taking part and remove them from the illuminated part of the world?

And can we even call the free world “enlightened” when it has become so fashionable and acceptable to wish for the destruction of a particular people, under the thin disguise of a demonstration for justice and morality?

There is much to think about this

Rosh Hashanah regarding the future of Zionism as a global network, of which WIZO is a part. If in the past Israel was under threat while Jewish communities were relatively protected, the situation is slowly being reversed, exposing communities to dangers that only our parents' generation can remember.

Dangers that will require us to stand together firmly, in anticipation of tectonic shifts in the map of the Jewish world and its presence across the globe. Every day's news brings Israel closer to becoming a safe haven that saves lives.

There is still much work ahead of us, as a people and as a country, and the next generation will not be without its challenges. But for now, at least for a few days, the symbols of the holiday will occupy our thoughts.

With their help, prayers for the good of a small people will overcome the wishes for its destruction voiced by the multitudes who hate it; our wish that “our good deeds multiply like the pomegranate” will overcome the many pomegranate – like blood libels about our “evil deeds”; and the holiday candles will symbolize and remind us of our hopes for a good year, a blessed year, a sweet year of peace – and, if possible, may all those who wish us harm disappear, and God forbid, may it not be we who disappear.

The writer is the chairperson of World WIZO.

Why is Israel polling American Jews about its election?

American Jews have every right to care deeply about Israel, but their political preferences should not become a surrogate Israeli electorate

• By STEPHEN M. FLATOW

A recent *Jerusalem Post* report carried an intriguing finding: A majority of “connected” American Jews surveyed by the Jewish People Policy Institute would prefer to see Israel's opposition defeat the current governing coalition in the upcoming election.

My first reaction was not surprise at the result. It was: Why are we asking?

The survey was conducted by JPPI, an Israeli think tank headquartered in Jerusalem. Its “Voice of the Jewish People” panel surveyed 804 American Jews. Fifty-four percent preferred an opposition victory, while 14% favored the current coalition. Another 24% said it was not their place to express a preference.

That last group may have had a point.

JPPI itself acknowledges an important limitation: Its sample is not representative of all American Jews. Rather, it is intended to reflect the views of Jews who are relatively connected to Jewish life, Israel, or Jewish identity. That qualification matters.

The political composition of the respondents matters as well. Sixty-two percent reported voting for Kamala Harris in 2024, compared with 30% for President Donald Trump. Their Israeli preferences tracked their American political identities closely. Strong liberals overwhelmingly favored the Israeli opposition, while strong conservatives were far more likely to favor the coalition.

In other words, the poll tells us something quite predictable: American Jews who identify with the political Left in the United States are more likely to prefer the Israeli Center and Left, while conservative American Jews are more sympathetic to Israel's Right.

I have no reason to believe JPPI designed the survey to produce an anti-government result. Indeed, that makes the underlying question more interesting, not less. Even a fair and professionally conducted poll can be asking the wrong question. Why should the political preferences of Americans who cannot vote in Israel be measured as though they constitute a meaningful constituency in an Israeli election?

That may be interesting sociology. It is less clear why it should carry political weight in an Israeli election.

AMERICAN JEWS certainly have every right to an opinion about Israel. They can support or criticize the prime minister. They can object to government policy, demonstrate, write articles, contribute to organizations, and argue passionately about Gaza, settle-

ments, judicial reform, religious pluralism, or any other Israeli issue.

A relationship with Israel that permits only applause would not be much of a relationship.

But there is an important distinction between American Jews having opinions about Israel and Israeli institutions converting those opinions into a political metric about who should govern the country.

Only 8% of those surveyed are Israeli citizens eligible to vote in the election. That means 92% of the respondents are being asked whom they would prefer to govern a country in whose election they cannot cast a ballot.

Israelis will live directly with the consequences of that election. They will pay Israeli taxes. Their children will serve in the IDF. They will be called into reserve duty. They will live with government decisions affecting security, terrorism, education, housing, the economy, and war and peace.

That is why Israeli citizens vote.

The inclusion of Israeli-American dual citizens makes the survey even harder to categorize. Those respondents are different from American Jews merely expressing an opinion about Israel. They are members of the Israeli electorate who happen to reside abroad.

Indeed, JPPI also asked respondents whether Israelis living outside the country who fly to Israel specifically to vote are legitimately exercising their franchise.

So an Israeli institution is polling Americans – including Israeli voters living in America – about the political choices of Israelis and about the participation of Israelis abroad in the Israeli electoral process. It begins to resemble a hall of mirrors.

There is another phrase in the survey that deserves examination: “connected American Jews.” Connected how?

I was not asked to participate. To my knowledge, neither were my children. Yet Jewish education, charity, communal involvement, and Israel have been central parts of our family life for decades.

That does not invalidate JPPI's panel. No poll can ask everyone.

But it does illustrate the danger of allowing a survey panel to take on the aura of representing “connected American Jewry.” Connectedness can mean synagogue attendance, Jewish education, philanthropy, organizational involvement, religious observance, attachment to Israel – or simply being sufficiently interested in Jewish affairs to join a survey panel.

Those are not necessarily the same thing.

THERE IS also a broader question that Israeli institutions should consider when examining Amer-

ican Jewish opinion. American Jewry faces enormous challenges concerning Jewish continuity and identity.

Pew Research Center's major study of American Jews found that 27% of Jewish adults identified as Jews of no religion, rising to 40% among Jews under 30. Among non-Orthodox Jews who had married in the preceding decade, 72% had married non-Jews. Pew also found significantly lower levels of Jewish communal participation and attachment to Israel among Jews of no religion.

None of this means that secular or intermarried Jews are lesser Jews, or that they have no stake in Israel. They plainly do. But it raises a question of priorities.

Perhaps the most urgent issue facing American Jewry is not which Israeli political bloc should form the next government. It is whether future generations of American Jews will possess enough Jewish identity, knowledge, and connection to care about Israel at all.

Israel has every reason to care deeply about the condition of Diaspora Jewry. Israelis should be concerned about antisemitism in America, Jewish education, assimilation, intermarriage, synagogue life, and Jewish continuity. And American Jews should care deeply about Israel.

The relationship between the two largest Jewish communities in the world is indispensable. But mutual concern does not require creating an informal overseas electorate.

I would make precisely the same argument if JPPI's survey had found that 54% of American Jews wanted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition returned to office.

My objection is not to the result. It is to the notion that the preferences of people who overwhelmingly cannot vote in an Israeli election should acquire political significance simply because someone in Jerusalem decided to poll them.

American Jews should have a strong voice in the future of American Jewish life and in the relationship between American Jewry and Israel. When it comes to deciding who governs Israel, however, Israelis already have a perfectly good polling mechanism. It is called an election.

The writer is an attorney and the father of Alisa Flatow, who was murdered in an Iranian-sponsored Palestinian terrorist attack in 1995. He is author of *A Father's Story: My Fight for Justice Against Iranian Terror* (now available in an expanded paperback edition on Amazon.com) and is the chair of the Religious Zionists of America-Mizrachi. An oleh, he divides his time between Jerusalem and New Jersey.

NOT A ZERO-SUM GAME:

How to prevent an Israeli-Turkish clash in Syria

• By ELIE PODEH
and EITAN YISHAI

A dialogue between a serving Mossad director and a Syrian foreign minister is no ordinary occurrence. Several days after speaking by telephone, the two met in an effort to defuse tensions following an Israeli strike on an airbase in north-western Syria.

According to Israel, Turkey intended to deploy radar systems and unmanned aerial vehicles at the base, followed by air-defense systems and military personnel. Damascus and Ankara denied that there were plans to establish a permanent Turkish presence there.

The incident reflects Israel's growing concern over Turkey's expanding involvement in Syria. Indeed, Ankara has become one of the new Syrian government's most important partners. It is helping to rebuild the Syrian army, training officers and soldiers, and investing in infrastructure.

In doing so, Turkey seeks to translate its long-standing involvement in Syria into broader regional influence. From Israel's perspective, the deployment of Turkish-made radar and advanced air-defense systems could restrict the Israel Air Force's freedom of action in Syria and Lebanon and hamper operations intended to prevent Iran from reestablishing its presence or transferring weapons to Hezbollah.

These concerns should not, of course, be dismissed. Turkey's military involvement in Syria is real, and it is unfolding amid a severe deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations. Israel cannot remain indifferent to the possibility that a regional power pursuing a hostile policy toward it might deploy advanced military capabilities in Syria.

Yet even justified concerns



TURKISH FORCES operate a tank. Syria need not become an arena in which Israel and Turkey conduct their broader rivalry, the writer says. (Stoyan Nenov/Reuters/Ayal Margolin/Flash90)



can lead to miscalculation and an excessive response, producing an unwanted escalation. A widespread assumption in Israel holds that the new Syrian government has subordinated itself to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's interests and ambitions. This, however, is far from reflecting the reality.

Turkey's influence in Damascus is considerable, but it is not unlimited. President Ahmed al-Sharaa has been careful to cultivate relations with the United States, the Gulf states, and other regional and international actors, partly to avoid excessive dependence on Ankara. Syria certainly needs Turkish assistance, but this does not mean that it wishes to become a Turkish client state.

Indeed, Damascus's willingness to engage with Israel indicates its desire to diversify its relationships and preserve an independent sphere of action. Moreover, the fact that Syria has not denied the contacts between the two countries suggests that it does

not regard relations with Israel as something improper or illegitimate that must be concealed.

Israel should therefore avoid interpreting every instance of military cooperation between Turkey and Syria as evidence that the latter is becoming an Erdogan forward base. Such an approach, which treats relations among the three states as a zero-sum game, could itself generate escalation.

It is possible that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has an underlying political objective: manufacturing a security crisis for electoral purposes. If so, both Syria and Turkey appear to have chosen to lower the temperature. It is essential to distinguish between the existence of a genuine threat and political manipulation. The problem is that most members of the public lack access to intelligence information and are therefore unable to distinguish between the two.

BEYOND THE political dimension, the strike in Syria reveals a contradiction in Israeli policy. The current government is not necessarily interested in strengthening Syria's central government, based on the assumption that a weak and fragmented Syria gives Israel greater freedom of action and prevents the reemergence of a threat from the north. In the short term, limited Syrian weakness offers Israel tactical advantages and has also enabled it to seize additional territory under the mantle of security.

Israel's long-term interest, however, lies in the existence of a stable Syrian state governed by a regime that constitutes a clear address, exercises control over its territory, restrains armed organizations, combats smuggling networks, and prevents Iran and Hezbollah from rebuilding their presence.

These goals can be achieved only if the Syrian government stabilizes and its army becomes strong enough to

confront threats from within and without. Israel will not benefit from prolonged disorder or from a Syrian government that depends entirely on Turkey for its survival.

The crisis surrounding the strike on the airbase also illustrates the dangers of acting without agreed mechanisms for verifying information and communicating intentions. Even defensive measures or preventive actions may be interpreted by the other side as preparations for aggression.

Since Sharaa came to power, Israel and Syria have exchanged numerous messages, both directly and through the United States. Meetings have also taken place to advance a security agreement, although these talks were suspended by Israel – or so the Syrians claim.

A trilateral or quadrilateral Israeli-Syrian-Turkish-American mechanism could therefore be established to prevent military friction, provide advance notification of signif-

icant deployments and exercises, clarify red lines, and manage crises more generally. Washington could also help verify disputed information and provide assurances to all three regional parties. The existing channels of communication between Israel and Turkey, together with the developing dialogue between Israel and Syria, suggest that the foundations for such a mechanism are already in place.

This framework should complement, rather than replace, Israeli-Syrian negotiations over security arrangements, the stabilization of southern Syria, and the establishment of mutually accepted rules of conduct. Peace or normalization between Israel and Syria does not appear to be on the horizon, but a non-belligerency agreement is certainly within reach.

Syria need not become an arena in which Israel and Turkey conduct their broader rivalry. The decision to resume dialogue following the strike demonstrated

that escalation is not inevitable. The challenge now is to transform improvised crisis diplomacy into a stable and enduring coordination mechanism.

Moreover, given the new alliances taking shape in the region – such as the “Mecca Pact” among Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Turkey – an Israeli initiative in Syria, whether through the establishment of a coordination framework or the signing of a non-aggression agreement, could demonstrate flexibility and creativity in adapting to the regional alignments emerging in the post-October 7 era.

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The specter of revolution and revolt is haunting the IRGC



• By SALEM ALKETBI

From the seething streets to the armed peripheries of the country, the signs are multiplying in Iran, and they are increasingly difficult to dismiss as isolated incidents.

The Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), the institution that forged much of Iran's influence abroad, must now devote a growing share of its resources to protecting the regime on home soil.

The IRGC retains an arsenal of missiles, extensive military and security networks, and the capacity to strike Iran's adversaries. Yet this question takes on particular urgency when viewed against the full range of domestic developments.

The problem for Tehran no longer comes from a single front, but from a territory to defend that is constantly expanding, from the rising cost of that defense, and from the mounting pressure on its resources and room for maneuvering.

The signs are coming from the highest levels of the Iranian regime. In August, the military and security leadership underwent a sweeping reshuffle. Ahmad Vahidi took command of the IRGC, Mostafa Izadi was named his deputy, and Hossein Taeb, the former head of IRGC intelligence, returned to lead the Guard's Basij.

At the same time, Mohsen Rezaei was appointed secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and the supreme leader's representative to that body. These are not simply posts handed to familiar figures: these appointments symbolize the mobilization of the IRGC's men, the security apparatus, and unconditional loyalists at a moment when protecting the clerical regime has become inseparable from the war it wages abroad.

The return of Hossein Taeb carries particular significance. The Basij, the paramilitary mobilization force tied to the Revolutionary Guard, is one of the regime's most important levers for surveilling Iranian society, controlling the streets, and suppressing demonstrations. Taeb spent years at the heart of



AN IRANIAN cleric visits the IRGC Aerospace Force's National Aerospace Park museum in Tehran last year. (Majid Asgarpour/WANA via Reuters)

the IRGC's intelligence operations. He is not merely an administrator returning to his post, but the symbol of a security apparatus that has confronted protest and dissent through repression, infiltration, and intimidation.

In August, Iran International, a media outlet opposed to the regime, published a recording presented as coming from a closed-door meeting of the Media and Cyberspace Headquarters. According to that recording, the discussions centered on the possibility of new protests, on the shrinking social environment favorable to the Basij, and on the need to expand surveillance of opposition activity on social media.

This event followed the assassination of Hamidreza Rajabzadeh, a pro-regime religious singer, in an incident that unsettled circles close to power. While the motives remain under investigation and

accounts differ, the political climate revealed by this assassination is telling. A repressive security apparatus, meant to inspire fear in the streets, is beginning to show heightened sensitivity about the safety of its own men and figures within the very society it surveils and subjugates.

On another front, the weapon of executions reveals the bloodiest face of this fear. According to the UN high commissioner for human rights, Iranian authorities have executed at least 56 people on national security charges since March 19, including 27 in cases tied to the protests earlier in the year, while more than 100 others await execution.

These numbers reveal a shaken regime that perceives the return of the street as a direct threat to its power and that raises the cost of dissent each time popular anger moves closer to forming a politi-

cal movement that endangers its survival.

In August, Germany joined 31 other countries as well as the EU high representative in a statement condemning the execution of protesters and denouncing the use of the death penalty to silence dissent and intimidate society.

THE REGIME'S fears do not stop at the cities. It dreads the return of uprisings and street anger. On the periphery, the danger has evolved: it no longer consists of protests alone, but has taken the form of armed resistance.

In the Kurdish areas, opposition reports have cited IRGC reinforcements and military deployments near the Iraqi border, while other sources have noted troop movements and access restrictions in the border zones of Kurdistan.

The significance lies not in the scale of the forces deployed, but

in what they reveal. Tehran finds itself compelled to maintain intense security and military control over its Kurdish front, even as it must divide its capabilities between simultaneous external and internal threats.

Balochistan has seen a more pronounced shift. In December, the People's Fighters Front was established as a new Baloch armed structure, following the merger of Jaish al-Adl, a Baloch armed group opposed to Tehran, with other Baloch factions, in an attempt to overcome years of division and build a more coordinated framework of struggle against the regime. This merger quickly materialized on the ground, with the front claiming attacks against security forces and the IRGC around Zahedan and other areas.

This does not mean the front has become a force capable of threatening the regime on a national scale. It does mean, however, that the regime faces a better-organized armed opposition on its eastern periphery than before, which imposes continuous pressure on its security, military, and intelligence resources.

The dilemma is all the more brutal for a dictatorial regime born of the 1979 revolution. After decades of preaching the export of revolution abroad, it must now devote a growing share of its apparatus and resources to preventing the emergence of conditions conducive to a new revolution against it on its own soil.

The bitter irony is that the IRGC, created to protect the revolution before becoming its most important instrument beyond the borders, now finds itself on a mission it cannot delegate to a party, a militia, or a proxy: protecting the theocratic regime inside Iran itself.

This is where the notion of “strategic depth,” on which Iran built much of its regional influence, takes on its full meaning. From Iraq to Syria, through Lebanon and Yemen, Tehran pushed the front lines far from its territory and resorted to proxy warfare to impose costs on its Arab adversaries and on Israel, through allies, weapons, funding, training, missiles, and

drones.

The greatest gain lay in that distance, which ensured that confrontations took place on other people's territory while the heart of the Iranian regime remained as far removed from their costs as possible.

But the logic that governed this strategy for decades is beginning to reverse. Instead of pushing danger away from its borders, Iran is now compelled to devote a growing share of its capabilities to dealing with the threat within its own borders.

With persistent fear of popular uprisings on one side and the expansion of armed resistance in certain peripheral areas on the other, these pressures are turning into an internal source of capability depletion.

The repressive apparatus is increasingly focused on Iran's interior. Intelligence resources are being mobilized to surveil the population, track dissidents, monitor digital activity, contain armed groups, and protect regime figures. All of this reduces the Guard's room for maneuvering outside Iran.

However, this does not mean the IRGC has lost its tools of external action, nor that the regime is on the verge of collapse. It still possesses a significant missile arsenal, dense security services, a capacity for repression, and vast networks of regional influence.

Yet the reality is that Tehran spent decades forcing its adversaries to spend money and resources protecting themselves from its actions. The equation taking shape today compels it, in turn, to devote more of its means to its own protection.

At this point, the most important question will not be how many missiles remain in the IRGC's warehouses, but rather how many men, how much money, how much capability, and how much flexibility it has left to continue exerting pressure on its adversaries outside Iran, when the Iranian interior and the street itself have become a growing source of anxiety and fear threatening the regime's survival.

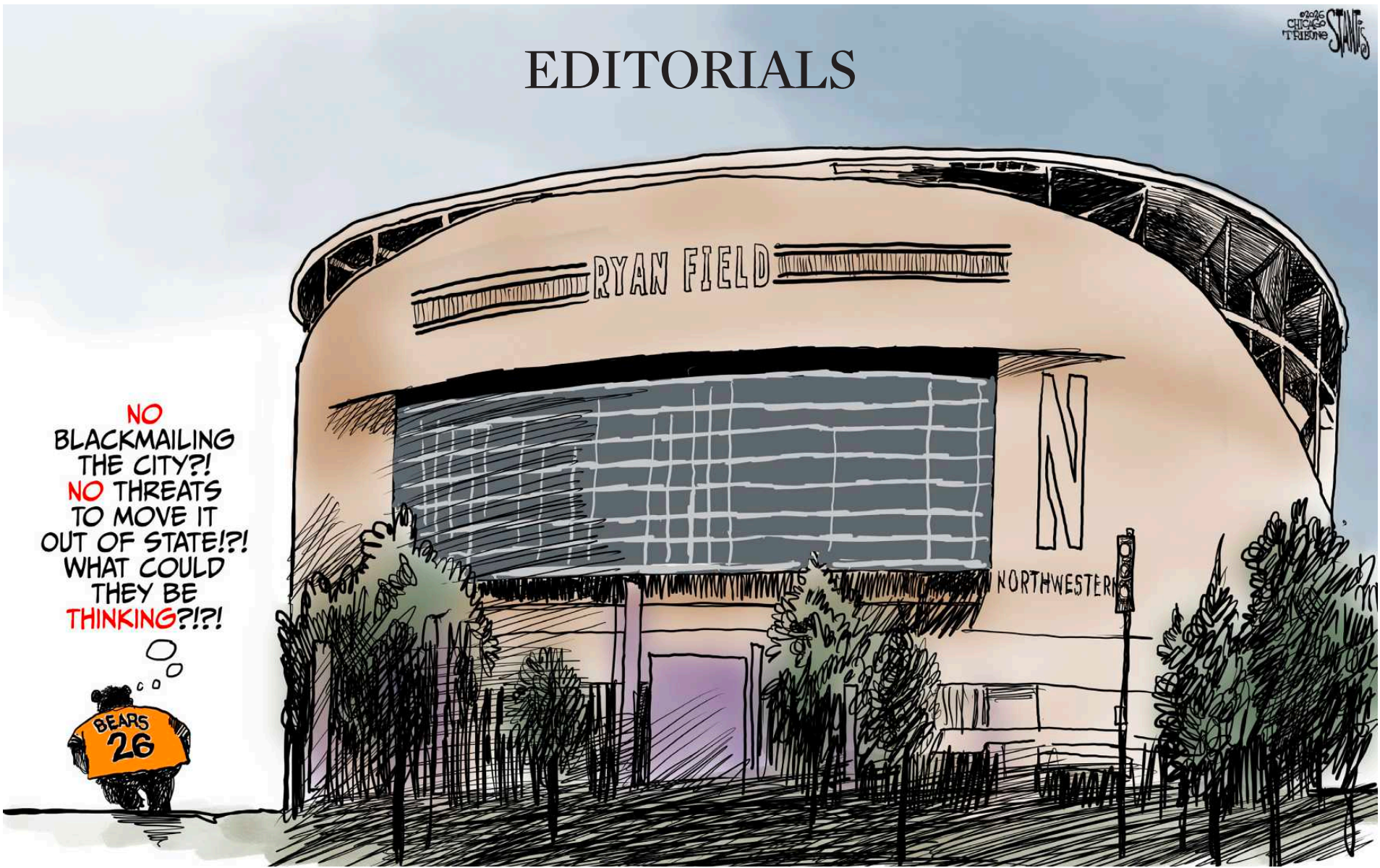
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‘Premium for everybody’

WHY THE RADICAL RYAN FIELD WILL CHANGE THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERIENCE

The future of college football stadiums has arrived and we think it looks like Northwestern University’s Ryan Field.

We had a tour of the almost completed Evanston stadium from its pro bono developer, Pat Ryan Jr., this past week and two of our tour guide’s favorite phrases have stuck in our minds: “experiential” and “premium for everybody.”

Ryan, of course, is the scion of the stadium’s benefactor, Patrick Ryan Sr., the philanthropically minded billionaire whose family’s donations to Northwestern go far beyond the stadium. Still, just this one gift was enough to bring the new stadium into fruition: The university, we were told, came up with about \$300 million toward the total cost of about \$875 million with the Ryan family donating the vast majority of the remainder. As we’ve admired before, there was no ask for public money and no wrangling with the legislature of two different states in order to get the most expensive college football stadium in history built.

Indeed, the only substantial ask (beyond a permit to build) was the right to stage six concerts a year in what surely will be a very desirable music venue, especially given the new car smell, the capacity, the level of comfort and (last but by no means least) Evanston’s significantly lower amusement tax than is applied in Chicago.

Soldier Field and Wrigley Field will have formidable new compe-

titition. Far more so than they think.

Six concerts was too many for many neighbors who objected to the deal. They gained some buffering landscaping and more distant Uber pickups but lost the main fight. All that remains to be seen is whether or not the neighbors will come around when they can hear the music for free from their porches and nobody disturbs their sleep. We’ll keep an ear out. But the wildcat has bolted.

By any standards, this new stadium is very different from the classic Big Ten “Big House” model of concrete giants derived from Roman colosseums with nose-bleed seats that feel like they are located in the next state over.

Northwestern will seat only 35,000 fans and graduates of rival schools likely will scoff that is all the program, which traditionally does not have a winning football team, can hope to fill.

But in Ryan’s head (and he’s quite the studied developer when it comes sports stadiums), there was far more to it than that. This stadium, he proselytized, was the first college stadium to be built on the new NFL model.

He argued to us that Ohio Stadium, Michigan Stadium, the Rose Bowl and the like all were developed when attending was the only way to see a game. Now, he rightly noted, you can see a college football game on your own exciting HDTV, in a fun bar with a lively atmosphere, or even

on your phone. He argued that colleges need to take a page from the NFL playbook and understand that if a fan is going to the trouble and expense to actually attend in person, the experience surrounding the game (time with family, friends, fellow alums or students) actually is just as important as the score and likely far more memorable. Plus, from a Northwestern perspective, little is gained from a sellout that turns their home turf into Columbus Northwest or Ann Arbor West. Ryan made the case that the university would benefit more from selling out to its own fanbase. And while he didn’t exactly say so, we understood that requires some capacity for realism. To serve the Northwestern fan’s experience.

So while seating at the new stadium is limited, relatively speaking, it’s actually a much bigger campus than the old Ryan Field (the ticketed area is 520,000 square feet larger), because it contains so many experiential igniters, so to speak, including a wide variety of food and drink in expansive areas for socializing. Whereas in most Chicago stadiums heading down (or up) for a hot dog can mean missing a crucial play or watching it on a monitor, the new Ryan Field offers an excellent view of the field from its open concourses. If you know the tight Wrigley Field experience of standing at the back of the bleachers with a beer and still watching

the game and then imagine that extended to the circumference of an entire bowl, you get the idea.

College football is, of course, now awash in money for good or ill. In all areas of the game. This new stadium rides that tide.

In terms of ticket prices, which can soar to astronomical levels by historical standards, buyers now expect a comfier seat than the traditional benches found in many college stadiums. Thus, Ryan Field has real seats with cup holders and very ample leg room. And it has a lot of premium locations, which will be ideal for concerts, since it now is axiomatic in the music business that cheap, bad seats are now by far the hardest to sell. Artists picking stadiums look first for seats that can command a lot of money. Then they look at the amusement taxes.

Ryan was careful to note that there will be many cheap tickets at Ryan Field and there is indeed a “safe standing” section, a terms derived from innovative European soccer stadiums, with which the new NU joint has a lot in common. But at the end of the day, the smaller capacity is in many ways another version of what has gone on with U.S. airlines, which are frantically adding premium seats and amenities that command higher fares.

Other soccer-like traits at Ryan Field include a very high proportion of the seats being under cover and the striking sight that what

Americans across the land have come to know as the Upper Deck experience just does not exist here. But many a Premier League team will be envious of the huge screens with 8 mm resolution, the best in the Big Ten.

Saying there are no bad seats in the house is a marketing cliché, but it’s actually true here, not least because starting fresh with modern materials meant that the typical steep climbs could be avoided and the cantilever can create a quite remarkable level of intimacy. Or so it felt to us as we walked around amid more than a thousand workers rushing to get the stadium ready for its Oct. 2 opening.

For the record, Ryan said that whether or not Ryan Field becomes the (enviable) new home for the Chicago Stars FC women’s soccer team is “up to the city of Evanston,” although we can imagine how much the club is salivating. There is no additional permitting required for NCAA events. And it’s also worth noting that the plan calls for several community-driven events on its grounds, including holiday markets and the like.

So. You’ll have to check it out for yourself. But Ryan Field is a game-changer. College football won’t be the same in Evanston after this place opens, regardless of how many games Northwestern wins or loses, and that might be true a lot further afield, too.

Quotes of the week

“Chicago violence is unchecked and at record levels. It has never been worse! This weekend 41 people were shot, 3 DEAD. These numbers are becoming normalized. It is out of control!”

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

“I find him to be a sorry individual, and if he was serious about driving violence down not just in Chicago, but across the country, he would not be engaged in endless illegal wars. The president is investing more to bomb children than he is to feed children.”

MAYOR BRANDON JOHNSON RESPONDING TO PRESIDENT TRUMP

“To think that the promise and hope and joy and anticipation of Trump 2016 could, over the course of 10 years, collapse into this ugly, warmongering — taken as a whole, mentally ill heap of crazy with some of the most unstable and lunatic people seemingly directing the president’s actions. If I had any clue that anything remotely like this was even possible, I would never have gotten involved in supporting Trump in the first place. And I’m very ashamed that I did.”

FAR-RIGHT COMMENTATOR MILO YIANNPOULOS AFTER HE WAS DEPORTED

“I’m still a socialist. DSA is anti-Black. They got issues, and they got to work with them. ... There’s still gonna be people who support me. It’s OK.”

ALD. JEANETTE TAYLOR ON LOSING SUPPORT FROM CHICAGO DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS

“There can be no greater pain than losing loved ones, homes and livelihoods. Without making excuses, we have mobilized the entire state machinery on a war footing and are working around the clock to save lives and provide relief to every citizen in the affected areas.”

NEPALESE PRIME MINISTER BALENDRA SHAH ON DEVASTATING FLOODS THAT HAVE KILLED THOUSANDS

“The way things work today is that the tax levy has nothing to do with the actual value of the properties. It only has to do with how much money politicians want to raise.”

NICO TSATSOULIS

OPINION

How architecture changed after 9/11



Edward Keegan

Architecture provides the background for most human activity, but buildings were very much in the foreground on Sept. 11, 2001. When the World Trade Center towers fell on live television that day, they were — and remain — the two tallest buildings to ever disappear from any city’s skyline.

Immediately after, there was much speculation about whether we would continue to build tall buildings. That morning, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill design partner Adrian Smith was meeting with Donald Trump Jr. to review plans for a 2,000-foot-tall Trump Tower in Chicago. Not only did the client and architect scale back the building’s height based on the events in New York, but also, the drawings for that scheme were never publicly released. As completed in 2009, Donald Trump’s Chicago building is officially 1,389 feet tall, although that’s to the tip of its spire; its highest occupied floor is at 1,116 feet, which puts its perceived height at about the same level as the Aon Center and 875 North Michigan Avenue.

The Chicago-based Council for Vertical Urbanism (CVU) is the arbiter of tall buildings throughout the world and has coined the term “supertall” for buildings between 300 and 599 meters in height (or 984 and 1,965 feet). On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, there were just over two dozen buildings in the world that the CVU characterized as supertall, including five structures in Chicago: the Sears Tower, now known as Willis Tower, at 1,451 feet; the Aon Center at 1,136 feet; the John Hancock Center, now known as 875 North Michigan Avenue, at 1,128 feet; the AT&T Corporate Center, now known as the Franklin Center, at 1,007 feet; and Two Prudential Plaza, at 995 feet.

And taller buildings have continued to rise in the years since 9/11. The Burj Khalifa, the world’s tallest, was completed almost a decade later in Dubai, designed by the same folks as Chicago’s Willis Tower, 875 North Michigan, Franklin Center and Trump Tower. Chicago has increased its supertall buildings from five to seven with the addition of Trump’s building and The St. Regis Chicago.

Building codes for tall buildings have evolved in the past quarter century, and today’s skyscrapers incorporate many advancements that make new buildings safer. But most of these elements, such as larger and stronger fire stairs, remain largely hidden from view during everyday use.

The 48-story-tall 71 South Wacker, developed by the Pritz-



Architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Dirksen U.S. Courthouse, left, and the Kluczynski Federal Building in Chicago on Feb. 12. ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE



The afternoon sun glints off Trump Tower in Chicago on April 15, 2025. TERENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

ker family, was the first major Chicago commercial building to be designed in Chicago following 9/11. The clients scrapped a more architecturally ambitious scheme by Norman Foster in the immediate wake of the terrorist attacks. As completed in 2005 based on a design by Pei Cobb Freed partner Henry Cobb, the tower has a double-height glazed lobby along Monroe that’s protected by large planters that can thwart a vehicular attack. Airport-style security screening was neatly integrated into the low-slung bustle on the north side of the tower.

At the Federal Center on Dearborn Street, post-9/11 security alterations have severely compromised one of the city’s

most powerful urban designs. The three-building complex was designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in the 1960s as a tour de force of urban planning in which almost every line in each of the three buildings — the Kluczynski Federal Building, the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse and the Loop Station Post Office — is tied together across two city blocks through a gridded paving pattern.

Mies was replacing a monumental domed neoclassical masonry structure that Henry Ives Cobb designed in 1896. In bold contrast, Mies’ steel and glass structures express an open and transparent federal government that transcends function to create a neat and

orderly series of civic spaces. The Federal Center as designed and built was an exemplar of a truly democratic architecture. The post-9/11 bollards that now line the streets are made of the same granite as the plaza, but they impede the overall grid and destroy the elegant integration of the complex that was essential to Mies’ original vision.

Trump’s plans on 9/11 for a 2,000-foot-tall building would have created not just Chicago’s tallest building but also would have reclaimed the “world’s tallest” mantle for the city. In the years since, only Santiago Calatrava’s ill-fated Chicago Spire would propose that lofty a peak in 2005. And not only has Chicago given up the chase to be home to the tallest building in the world; we’ve also built just two supertall buildings in this period. All the while, New York — the site of the attacks — has built 15 such structures, although none have been proposed to be the world’s tallest.

That race — as well as large quantities of supertall and even megatall (taller than 2,000 feet) buildings — has continued mostly in the Middle East, East Asia and Southeast Asia. Chicago retains a hand in many of these structures that have begun in the offices of our architects and engineers. These include the current tallest (Burj Khalifa, Dubai, 2,717 feet tall by SOM) and the building that’s expected to surpass it (Kingdom Tower, Jeddah, 3,281 feet tall by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Archi-

ecture).

All buildings hold some symbolism; to the 9/11 terrorists, the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers were a symbol of America more powerful than most Americans would have recognized at the time. Their erasure has given them even more power in our collective imagination.

The Twin Towers were the tallest buildings in the world for a very short period of time — from their completion in 1973 until they were surpassed by the Sears Tower the following year. By 2001, they were just the fifth and sixth tallest buildings in the world, although they remained the tallest in New York.

Chicago and New York’s now 25-year absence from the highest reaches of the height race is evidence of culturally and financially mature cities that can (and should) focus on building more qualitative and sustainable metropolises rather than chasing the metric of height.

Our skylines remain distinctive — and tall — without going much taller than where we are now.

Edward Keegan writes, broadcasts and teaches on architectural subjects. Keegan’s biweekly architecture column is supported by a grant from former Tribune critic Blair Kamin, as administered by the not-for-profit Journalism Funding Partners. The Tribune maintains editorial control over assignments and content.

Chicago’s housing market shouldn’t have a hidden inventory

By Tomas J. Philipson
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

A real estate listing service that dominates Chicago’s market was built to give buyers and sellers a transparent view of what’s for sale. Now it is steering inventory out of the open market and into hidden private networks — a shift serious enough that it has drawn scrutiny from a federal courthouse and Congress.

The question is not whether the government should dictate how homeowners sell their property. It is whether powerful market gatekeepers can legally use the monopoly they have on listing information to limit competition and keep available homes out of the public’s view.

From an antitrust perspective, the answer should be no. A dominant market gatekeeper should not be able to use its control over essential market information to restrict competition, disadvantage rivals and leave consumers with fewer choices. And at a time when Chicago’s affordable housing is already in very short supply, this is having significant ramifications for the city’s residents who are most in need.

At the center of the fight are Compass, the nation’s largest real estate brokerage and Midwest Real Estate Data (MRED), the dominant Chicago listing service whose monopolistic position makes it a gatekeeper to the city’s housing market. MRED has pushed a strategy in which many of the homes in its net are marketed privately, out of the public’s view. Compass is partnering with the listing giant in this effort, committing to providing



High-rise residential buildings line the lakefront, as shown on Aug. 30, in Chicago’s Edgewater neighborhood. BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

MRED with nationwide inventory. Chicago-area buyers are already competing in a tight market. The Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University reported that the inventory of single-family homes for sale in the Chicago metropolitan area was down about 14% in March from a year earlier. Prices, as a consequence, remained near record highs. When homes are scarce and expensive, the last thing buyers need is to wonder whether some of the most coveted available inventory is effectively hidden from them.

It is ironic that this paywall effect is happening in Chicago as

the city helped pioneer the opposite idea of transparent housing markets.

More than a century ago, Cook County real estate brokers helped develop the modern listing exchange. Instead of each broker guarding a separate list of properties, brokers shared information so buyers and sellers could find one another more easily. Today’s multiple listing services, or MLS, grew from that basic idea — the idea that the real estate market works best for consumers when it remains transparent so that everyone has a fair shot at obtaining affordable housing and no

single company could monopolize knowledge of what was for sale.

As a free-market economist, I have no objection to a homeowner choosing to sell a house privately. If a family values privacy over maximum exposure, that is their choice. But that is very different from a dominant market gatekeeper building a system in which more inventory is systematically kept from the broader public market. When a self-serving gatekeeper in that position helps divide inventory between what the broad public can see and what only market insiders can see, the result is a less transparent and

competitive market.

The response to the antitrust issues involved has been bipartisan. U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald, R-Wis., chair of the House Judiciary Committee’s antitrust subcommittee, recently opened an inquiry into whether private-listing arrangements could reduce competition and harm consumers. U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., followed with her own inquiry.

Consumer choice directing a market economy to efficient outcomes depends on consumers knowing the available opportunities to choose from. They should not have to wonder whether the home that would be perfect for them is sitting in a database they cannot see. Free markets depend on buyers and sellers being able to find one another and competitors having a fair opportunity to compete.

Chicago helped pioneer the modern listing marketplace that has led to enormous gains in allocating houses efficiently. This was enabled because transparency and shared information made housing more competitive. Chicago should not now become the testing ground for turning that infrastructure into a gatekeeper. A free housing market needs open competition. Chicago should make sure its most powerful gatekeepers are not making that market less free.

Tomas J. Philipson is an emeritus Daniel Levin professor of public policy studies at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and a former acting chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers.

OPINION

Will hesitation on data centers cost Pritzker in 2028 presidential bid?

By Patrick McNamara
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

What do U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the state of Texas and Pope Leo XIV all have in common? All three are encouraging a slowdown in artificial intelligence and data center development.

In the meantime, while data centers grow into a wildfire of bipartisan unpopularity in Illinois, Gov. JB Pritzker continues to shift responsibility to the Illinois legislature and delay any definitive action to slow data centers besides cutting tax incentives. While this won't hurt him in his reelection campaign this fall, it could be crippling baggage in a Democratic presidential bid in 2028.

Despite early polls, Pritzker has a strong case for a 2028 bid as a candidate on three major pillars:

1. Pritzker balances a progressive agenda with economic growth, leaning on his business success, which can appeal to independents in the general election.
2. He can build a strong Midwestern coalition that can have an edge in key swing states such as Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.
3. Lastly, Pritzker can self-fund his campaign and raise a war chest for other Democrats.

However, Pritzker's hesitance to deploy a comprehensive solution to data centers could be his Achilles' heel in the primaries. While the old adage says slow is smooth and smooth is fast, Illinois is lagging far behind progressive states such as New York and Maine that have passed moratoriums on data centers. Even swing states such as Pennsylvania have adopted stricter, commonsense policies such as banning nondisclosure agreements and protecting energy bills. Beyond that, Illinois has now fallen behind Republican states such as Texas that have paused to assess data centers' effect on the state's energy grid. And Darren Bailey, the Republican candidate for governor in Illinois, is breaking away from President Donald Trump to resist a data center blitzkrieg on Illinois' natural resources.

Alongside the Iran war and affordability issues, data centers



Gil Quiniones, CEO of ComEd, from left, Gov. JB Pritzker and Brad Davis, Meta director of data center community and economic development, flip a ceremonial switch to open Meta's new \$1 billion, five-building, 2.4 million-square-foot data center in DeKalb on Nov. 29, 2023. TALIA SPRAGUE/TRIBUNE

Alongside the Iran war and affordability issues, data centers are arguably the most important issue of this election cycle, and one of the only issues with bipartisan support, especially in Illinois.

are arguably the most important issue of this election cycle, and one of the only issues with bipartisan support, especially in Illinois. Pritzker recently said: "I don't think specifically that we ought to be giving away or selling off a bunch of farmland for data centers. ... We're not going to have these massive campuses. That's not something that right now, anyway, is even possible in the state of Illinois."

Yet, in Illinois, massive data

center backlash and lawsuits are tearing across the state in places such as Grayslake, Joliet and my own hometown, Yorkville, where one of the largest data campuses in the world is planned. Republicans and Democrats alike are getting boosts from being opposed to data centers. In some cases, such as in Abilene, Texas, 60% of the jobs that data centers create are filled by nonlocal labor, and 90% of the jobs can be nonpermanent. If Pritzker can't handle data

centers in his own backyard, will Americans trust him to handle them everywhere?

Pritzker needs to change course quickly, or else he'll enter the primaries as a laggard on the issue of data centers. With a recent Gallup poll showing that 75% of Democrats are opposed to data centers being built near them, presidential hopefuls will be jockeying to position themselves as the one who was against data centers earliest and most often. It's a bad look as a progressive candidate to move slower than Texas and the Vatican.

A single policy can be a lightning rod in a crowded primary field. Andrew Yang stood out in 2020 because of his policy on universal basic income, and in

2016, Trump stood out by focusing on building a border wall.

Any candidate who can provide a novel and popular solution to data centers will benefit from a strong track record on a hot-button issue. For Pritzker or whoever prevails, the golden ticket could be a strong policy on data centers.

If Pritzker doesn't lay down a moratorium soon and a comprehensive overhaul after that, he'll be back in Chicago drinking Malört after the Iowa primary in 2028.

Patrick McNamara is a founder of a startup that supports food manufacturers in producing food safely. He has served in AmeriCorps and is involved with various nonprofits.

Voice of the People

Editor's note: We asked readers to share their thoughts about the road and bridge construction in Chicago that is causing headaches for many. Here are their letters.

CDOT has a lot to answer for

In my industry, there's a phrase: You can do something good, fast or cheap. Pick two of the three. The meaning is that, for example, if you do something good and fast, it likely won't be cheap. Why can't the Chicago Department of Transportation pick even one of these three?

Much has been written about the simultaneous Chicago River bridge closures, so I'm going to focus instead on the Canal Street viaduct project as an example of complete mismanagement. The project kicked off in the summer of 2023, with the full closure of Canal from Jackson Boulevard to Adams Street. Projected to take 18 months, work in earnest began late. If the contractor, F.H. Paschen, wasn't ready to begin work until after winter, why was the road closed early? The 18-month mark came and went, with a partial reopening of Canal occurring in late December 2025, more than two years after the initial closure.

Phase 1 is finally complete, but that doesn't mean it was done well. Before the stretch of road reopened, cracks appeared in the new concrete deck. These cracks were noticed; most were marked with spray paint and arrows and eventually filled in. What does that spell for the viaduct's longevity? Cracks may not seem like a problem, but the pedestrian bridge at Florida International University experienced cracking, too, before it collapsed, killing six.

Lastly, there's the cost. News releases and updates about the viaduct reconstruction didn't mention the price tag. A similar project, the reconstruction of the Harrison Street viaduct between Canal and the river, completed several months late in October, cost roughly \$21 million. That project needed to be built over railroad tracks, so the delay there is more understandable.

Is CDOT or its contractor covering cost overruns on the viaduct project? How much are those? What about the cracking?



A road closure due to ongoing construction of the Chicago Avenue bridge on April 28. ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

What is the warranty period and projected life span of Canal?

CDOT has a lot to answer for. It should focus on recent management failures and address those so the next projects don't suffer the same fate of being bad, slow and expensive.

— Brian Kaempfen, Chicago

Mismanagement of repaving

Street repaving in my neighborhood (East Rogers Park) has been a disaster this year. We started seeing notices months ago in our alderwoman's weekly newsletter that our street was scheduled for grinding on a certain date. The date kept slipping week after week. The Chicago Department of Transportation finally posted no-parking notices (for a 10-day stretch) shortly before we left for vacation, so we parked on another street. When we returned, nothing had happened.

Notices went up a few times after that — again, false alarms. A crew managed to do the asphalt stripping two weeks ago, leaving many areas with extremely rough concrete substrate and manholes sticking up — enough to damage a car. That day, we experienced a half dozen debris-hauling trucks idling their diesel engines in violation of Chicago ordinance before the stripping machine finally showed up.

Next, another set of no-parking signs went up and came down (except for several that were mistakenly left up), with no work

having been done. Recently, signs once again appeared prohibiting parking for the next two weeks. This all affects several adjacent blocks with dozens of cars.

Despite paying extra for permit parking, we are unable to park on our block for indeterminate lengths of time, usually for no reason.

Is the problem overextended contractors? CDOT ineptitude? Why can't our alderwoman ride herd on this chronic disruptive disorganization on behalf of her constituents?

Surely there's a way to hold the city and contractors to a more dependable timeline and/or notify affected residents of the actual date work will occur.

— Andrew S. Mine, Chicago

Department of Vehicular Chaos

Thank you for soliciting comments on Chicago drivers' headaches. Words cannot express my feelings on the Chicago Department of Vehicular Chaos. It's also known as the Chicago Department of Transportation, which is an oxymoron.

There has never been any consideration of the inconveniences caused by CDOT. A great example is CDOT permitting a major street construction project on Grand Avenue while closing the Chicago Avenue bridge. Travel west was a nightmare, and the department couldn't have cared less.

Its practice of permitting

construction projects at the same time in adjoining areas, causing the most inconvenience to vehicular traffic, wins the award for most perversity.

— Richard Prince, Chicago

It's progress, so don't kvetch

Regarding headaches and frustrations about street construction and the letter "Blown tires at O'Hare, Midway" (Aug. 30): We complain about the construction, and we complain about the repairs needed. So how is this supposed to work then? At what time can the work be done?

When someone talks to me about the headaches, I tell them that Chicago is alive. When there is movement in construction on buildings or streets, that means a city is alive!

I remember when Detroit was almost dead from disinvestment and people were leaving the city. Yes, more can be done in Chicago, but let's not complain about progress.

— Elena Duran, Chicago

A surefire fix for headaches

Traffic delays due to construction on Chicago streets and bridges are nothing new this year. Rather, they are something to be expected, especially during the summer season. Such delays are no less inevitable than death and taxes.

Let's face it. There's never going to be optimal city management of road closures and detours to everyone's liking, no matter how many public hearings of driver angst and outcry take place. With new administrations coming and going just about every four years now, Chicago has a history of ever-changing, inconsistent traffic management policies that fail to live up to stated goals.

But the frustration that goes with the observed delays can be reduced considerably at the individual level by relying less on autos and more on bicycles and adult tricycles to get around town, especially in the most congested areas near downtown during rush hour periods.

If riding a bike or an adult trike is a doable option, hundreds of miles of city-designated bike lanes offer a healthier, more-cost effective alternative during the summer and beyond. Your heart, lungs and nerves will thank you for it. So will Mother Nature and your wallet, with zero emissions and zero fuel costs.

I'm talking about manual-pedal bikes versus e-bikes that add to your electric bill, and the electricity may be generated by fossil fuels. Zero parking costs are a bonus.

Over the past several years in the city, I have noticed a gradual shift away from ferrying children and groceries using autos to using bikes for the same purposes. In the summer, why not take advantage of the best weather Chicago has to offer by hitting the bike lanes instead of the auto lanes?

Further, using a bike lane, whether in a construction zone or not, one can get through every major intersection waiting for, at most, one red light to change, not multiple red lights typically experienced by drivers at the same intersections.

Yes, rain can slow down a bicyclist's time, and severe summer storms can cause a bicyclist to reschedule a planned ride, but auto traffic can get unbearably snarled and commute times can fast skyrocket when major weather events do strike in construction zones.

Which stress would you prefer to face?

— Mark Grenchik, Chicago

An annoyance but worth it

Regarding ongoing road construction in Chicago: Although I live in Naperville, I sometimes feel that my driveway is the only area not under construction these days. No matter which way you travel, barricades, signs, and construction trucks and workers are all over the place.

The end result will probably be worth all this hassle and mess, but for now, it is just an annoyance to all commuters.

— Arlene Hogan, Naperville

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OPINION

To Save My Home, I Fly the American Flag

Loui Ridi
A businessman in Toledo, Ohio, who owns a home in Qusra in the West Bank, where he was born and raised.

QUSRA, WEST BANK

SINCE Aug. 9, my home in the West Bank village of Qusra has been under siege. Dozens of Israeli settlers have surrounded it as well as other homes in my village, throwing objects at my house, destroying the fence around my property, and even cutting off our water and electricity in an apparent effort to drive out my family and our neighbors and take our village over.

I live in the United States full time, but built this house in Qusra, where my mother and much of my family still live. When Israeli settlers began attacking our village, I was in Toledo, Ohio, where I live, so my brother and nephew went to stay at the Qusra house to prevent them from seizing it. As access to our village started to be cut off, my brother called me to tell me he and my nephew had begun rationing food. I decided then that they wouldn't face this alone. I packed my bags and began my journey to the West Bank carrying the only defense I could think of: an American flag.

I'm a U.S. citizen, and have been for the past 17 years. But I was born and raised in the West Bank, in Qusra, where I am writing from now. Throughout my childhood, I watched our land and freedom be stolen from us by Israeli policies that expanded illegal settlements and deepened Israel's military occupation of the West Bank. Now, those policies have emboldened settlers to make me a prisoner in my own home. As a Palestinian, I have next to no rights here. That's why I've put an American flag above my house: I hoped that my American identity might afford me a degree of protection that my Palestinian identity could not.

Illegal activity by Israeli settlers in the West Bank is nothing new. For decades, they have taken over Palestinian hillsides and family olive groves, choking our economy as they seize tracts of Palestinian agricultural land. Israel subjects Palestinians to military law in all of the West Bank. Israeli settlers in the West Bank, by contrast, live under civilian laws and are granted many more freedoms.

If you're Palestinian, something as small as a visit to the grocery store or as urgent as an emergency visit to the hospital becomes an hours-long journey of humiliating checkpoints, iron gates and military outposts. International human rights groups have called this system apartheid. The settlers who attack our villages — radicals with racist ideology toward Palestinians — are often armed. Being harassed by them has become a daily occurrence for many; walking in your front yard is a death wish for others.

Just a month before the siege on my village, a Palestinian man in a neighboring village, Jalud, reported that Israeli settlers had seized the house he was building for his newly engaged son to start his married life. Years of hard work and money gone in an instant.

Israeli settlers follow a playbook: They build outposts in Palestinian villages that are considered illegal even under Israeli law. Those outposts become springboards from which settlers menace Palestinian communities, using tactics that Amnesty In-



AMMAR AWAD/REUTERS

Israeli settlers are trying to seize my house in the West Bank, and I barely have rights here.

The author and another man installing the flag at his house in the West Bank last month.

ternational declared to be carried out "with full political, legal and financial state backing." These outposts are often retroactively legalized by the Israeli government. Then, the Israeli army will declare the Palestinian area a "closed military zone," ostensibly to keep the settlers out but also effectively controlling all aspects of life there. And eventually, under these absurd conditions, many Palestinians are forced to flee our own homes. This is part of why more than 36,000 Palestinians in the West Bank have been forcibly displaced in one year alone.

Since I arrived at my house a few weeks ago, I've awakened to settlers walking freely in the hills around my property. I can hear Israeli soldiers exchanging jokes with the very settlers whom they claim to be impeding. The Israeli military dispersed some of the settlers and said it had detained one Israeli. But the settlers came back and many have remained under the military's watch. The prime minister and president of Israel have condemned their actions, and the police have made arrests elsewhere in the West Bank. But in Qusra, the Israeli police have said they've arrested only one of the settlers assaulting our homes, while the Israeli military reportedly arrested six Palestinians before releasing them. Because the Israeli Army declared my own land a "closed military zone," it can take days to get food to our house. If I try to take a walk on my property, Israeli soldiers yell at me to stay inside, threatening to use force if I set

foot in my own front yard.

I am effectively a prisoner in my own home.

The U.S. Embassy, and my elected representatives, have helped mitigate the situation. Ambassador Mike Huckabee described these settlers as "terrorists." My congressional representative in Ohio, Marcy Kaptur, helped ensure my safe travel upon arrival, and has checked in on me regularly. And on one occasion, when my relatives were trying to bring me food and water and were held for hours at an Israeli checkpoint, the U.S. embassy intervened so they could pass.

None of that should be necessary. What these settlers are doing to my family is illegal under both international law and Israeli law. There is a simple solution to this: The Israeli government should dismantle all illegal outposts and hold every settler responsible for this violence accountable. It has both the authority and the responsibility to do this.

As Israel's most important ally, the United States can do so much more to stop settlement expansion and violence in the West Bank. Most countries and the United Nations regard all Israeli settlements in the West Bank as unlawful. Yet, for decades, successive administrations in Washington have provided tens of billions of dollars in military funding to Israel while offering diplomatic cover to its government. There have been measures to punish settlers: Under

President Joe Biden, for instance, several settler groups and individuals were placed under sanctions. But almost as soon as he entered office, President Trump rescinded them. Decades of inaction from multiple administrations have effectively enabled the very system that keeps my family trapped inside our home.

As I sit in my home now, surrounded by violent settlers and with even more said to be making their way to our village, the American flag continues to fly from my roof. I will keep flying it as a signal to the American people and the U.S. government to take action against this violence, end the siege on Qusra, and impose sanctions on these settlers.

The hope that it might afford my family a measure of protection that my Palestinian identity alone could not speaks to the profound dehumanization of my people. My life should not suddenly become more valuable because I am an American citizen — and yet, that's exactly what has happened. The attention my family has received is a reflection of my passport, not the righteousness of my fight.

Every Palestinian family facing settler violence possesses the same fundamental right to live safely in their home. I raised the American flag because I needed the world to pay attention to protect my family. But no Palestinians should need a foreign flag above their home for their humanity to be recognized.

The U.S. Military Must Learn to Say No to Trump

Frank Kendall
The secretary of the Air Force from 2021 to 2025 and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress.

I ATTENDED a military retirement ceremony last month at which Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was the presiding officer and featured speaker. It was eerily, even alarmingly normal. In a large room full of current and retired senior military officers, everyone was playing the same game of "Let's pretend everything is fine."

Denial is one of the two approaches the nation's senior military leaders seem to have taken to cope with Donald Trump's presidency. When they aren't ignoring how abnormal things have become, they turn to the other approach, claiming that they have no responsibility for the actions the armed forces have been ordered to take because those orders were "policy" choices outside the scope of their duties. This is a cop-out, and it is putting our democracy at risk.

General Caine has even advocated this strategy. In a recent speech to graduates at the National Defense University, he talked about the need for "perfect beautiful clarity" on the distinction between two questions: Can we do something? Should we do something? The "can" question was a military matter, he explained. The "should" is "at the policy level, and we don't do that," he said.

The message is that a senior officer's only professional obligation is to tell the president and the secretary of defense whether the military can do whatever the president ships asks it to do; that a senior military leader has no duty to say whether the military should do the things the president wants, and that it would be wrong to try. It isn't that simple.

The Trump administration is committing acts that military officers should consider outrageous and unacceptable. The military has conducted extrajudicial executions of alleged drug dealers at sea and of a country's head of state, along with several of his family members. The administration has kidnapped another head of state. And the



ILLUSTRATION BY SAM WHITNEY/THE NEW YORK TIMES. SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY SAUL LOEB AND ARI ELIAS/GETTY IMAGES

president started a war without even consulting Congress, much less obtaining congressional authorization. In an indication of what may be still to come, the president has put National Guard troops on the streets of Democratic-governed cities without local leaders' request or consent.

Many lower-level officers I have spoken with are privately appalled but afraid to challenge what they are seeing. The collective hope seems to be that if they can all just go on as if nothing unusual is occurring, this time will pass and nothing bad will happen to them — no loss of position, no demotion or forced retirement, no loss of reputa-

tion, no removal from a promotion list by Pete Hegseth, the secretary of defense.

But all officers take an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic." This demands that they think about what the military should or should not do and advise the president and the secretary of defense on the policy choices they make. It also means that there are some lines that they cannot cross, even if ordered to do so by the commander in chief. The country's top military leaders serve at the very nexus of the application of military force and policy; that role requires them to be more than

Senior leaders' failure to reject White House commands is a cop-out.

mere military technocrats. As secretary of the Air Force, I recommended many officers for four-star positions. These jobs require the character and courage to do one's duty and behave honorably whatever the personal consequences. I have been asked by some retired officers if it is fair to expect a senior military leader to stand up to or refuse to accept an immoral, unethical or illegal order from the president or the secretary of defense — particularly when a senior leader gets supposedly independent guidance from a government lawyer to accept the order.

But fairness is irrelevant. It also isn't fair to send some people into combat and not others, yet the responsibility comes with the job, and no one is forced to accept these positions.

At the start of his second term, Mr. Trump removed one of the finest officers I have ever known, Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., as chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I always thought well of General Caine, but he lacks the experience and stature that General Brown had. Mr. Trump and Mr. Hegseth do not want candid, sound and independent advice from senior military leaders, including General Caine. They want personal loyalty and compliance with their orders. To ensure this result, the president and secretary of defense replaced senior military lawyers with loyalists who seem willing to support legal justifications for the things the executive wants to do, however frivolous or flawed. For the most part, Mr. Trump seems to be getting what he wants from his lawyers and from his generals.

Our senior military leaders, including General Caine, might face even tougher tests from here. Although General Caine has indicated that there are no plans for the use of troops in the midterm elections, Mr. Trump has refused to rule out the possibility. No pretense of normalcy, no artificial distinction between policy and military matters, and no lawyer's justification can relieve our senior military leaders from their oath, the burdens of their conscience, or of the judgment of the men and women they lead, the American people and history. From all of these, there is no place to hide.

OPINION

Putin Is Coming for One of Russia’s Greatest Traditions

Natasha Kiseleva

The author of “We Will Meet Again” and the forthcoming “Accusative Case.”

BERLIN

A NOVELIST I know recently wanted to do something that is now forbidden in Russia: publish a story about two women in love.

To do so, she had to hide her characters’ genders by writing in the present tense (present-tense verbs carry no gender in Russian) and by choosing names that both men and women use, Sasha, say, or Zhenya. Yet only a few years ago, none of these linguistic gymnastics were necessary. From the late 1980s through the first two decades of President Vladimir Putin’s rule, literature enjoyed near total freedom in Russia.

That may surprise those familiar with the Kremlin’s systematic takeover of journalism, television, movies and more. But consider that before 2024, Ficbook, the internet’s largest Russian language fan fiction archive, contained an easily accessible trove of gay fantasies depicting Mr. Putin getting intimate with other world leaders, including President Joe Biden and President Emmanuel Macron of France. My first book, “We Will Meet Again,” featured an array of anti-Kremlin and queer characters and was published in 2020 without a single cut.

But after Mr. Putin declared all-out war on Ukraine in 2022, he unleashed a devastating crackdown on free speech at home. That was initially confined to criticism of the war. Over time it spread, attacking a range of cultural expression. Now, for the first time since the Soviet era, the Kremlin is placing literature squarely in its cross hairs.

On Sept. 1, new professional standards went into effect in Russia, dictating what it means to be a writer. A writer, the standards say, is anyone who “realizes the artistic concepts in a literary work,” and those who “revise (process, dramatize) literature,” including proofreaders. If such a person wants to receive certain grants, be eligible for state-funded literary awards or receive a government pension, he or she must now possess state-sanctioned knowledge of Russian history and culture and receive a degree from a university.

This is not merely bureaucratic theater. The consequences will be far-reaching. After all, many of Russia’s literary giants — Joseph Brodsky, Anna Akhmatova and Ivan Bunin among them — never obtained a college degree. Lawmakers have made no secret of the reason these standards exist. Literature is “a matter of state importance,” they wrote, central to the country’s identity. The Kremlin must control it.

Shortly after the full-scale invasion of



MARTHA VERSCHAFFEL

The Kremlin is back to restricting free speech, even in literature.

Ukraine, Russia’s Parliament outlawed all forms of “L.G.B.T. propaganda,” and the authorities set up an “expert center” to determine whether books were in compliance. The center created lists of objectionable literature that included Russian classics by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, as well as works by Western authors like Susan Sontag and Stephen King. Last year, the police used the law as a pretext to raid publishing houses in connection with a teen romance novel with L.G.B.T.Q. themes. Then prosecutors charged three employees with “extremism” for their role in distributing that book and others like it.

The employees’ predicament became known as the Publisher’s Case, seemingly the

first criminal case brought over the content of books since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The case ended in August after the employees spent a year under house arrest, pleaded guilty, surrendered tens of thousands of dollars in fines and received suspended prison sentences of up to four years.

Strikingly, the books at the heart of the case broke no laws at the time of their publication. Mr. Putin signed the “L.G.B.T. propaganda” law at least a year after they were published. That is precisely the point: The Kremlin is creating an environment of uncertainty and fear, based on arbitrary punishment. The aim, in the publishing industry and beyond, is to promote self-censorship and eliminate dis-

senting speech.

Reporting this piece felt like a foray into investigative journalism. To communicate with writers still inside Russia, I exchanged voice messages that disappeared in an hour. One writer would speak to me only through an intermediary. A dozen others did not answer at all. No one explicitly refused to speak with me — a refusal would have had to be put into words — and the silence tells its own story.

From relative safety abroad, Russian exiles can test the boundaries of free speech in their home country. When they speak openly and often about literary censorship, the government brands them “foreign agents.” (Russia’s Ministry of Justice did this to me in August.) At one point, the best-selling Russian author Alan Charoit, a transgender man who now lives in France, planned to send copies of his fantasy novels to friends to distribute at home. But after the Publisher’s Case he abandoned the idea, because he “refused to take part in the system,” he told me.

In 2022, the line between acceptable and unacceptable speech was clear. That year, three poets who performed anti-war verses at a monument to the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky were brutalized and imprisoned. When the writers Boris Akunin and Dmitry Glukhovsky became outspoken critics of the war from abroad, they received lengthy prison sentences in absentia. Today, you no longer need to speak publicly against war to fall afoul of the Kremlin. You no longer need to be a prominent person. You need only to be involved with a text — as a writer, an editor, a publisher, a distributor, or a vendor — that the authorities take issue with, now or in the future.

Nobody knows where the lines are anymore. The rules must be interpreted not only for what they prohibit today but also for what they make possible tomorrow. When a law that expanded what constitutes “drug propaganda” took effect this year, publishers started using artificial intelligence to review manuscripts and the books in their archives for compliance. The systems flagged classics by Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Bulgakov and Leo Tolstoy, which suddenly appeared on Russian e-book platforms with drug-related warnings.

The danger is not that writers in Russia who fail to meet the state standards are now suddenly forbidden from writing books. The danger is that publishers will think twice before working with them. Books that have not been approved simply won’t be released, and a generation of new voices may disappear before they are ever heard.

The novelist in Moscow used an old Soviet expression to explain that now writers must produce two books at once. There’s the one that can be published and the one “vo stvo!” — “for the drawer.”

In Germany, the Far Right Is on the Cusp of Wielding Power

Hans Kundnani

A visiting professor at the London School of Economics and the author of “Eurowhiteness: Culture, Empire and Race in the European Project.”

THE far-right party Alternative for Germany, or AfD, is set to make a major breakthrough.

Saxony-Anhalt, a former East German state of around two million people, is relatively small. But the significance of the election there on Sunday could be seismic. The AfD is on track to win overwhelmingly and perhaps even secure an overall majority, which would mean that it could form a state government for the first time in its history. Long confined to the opposition, the party now stands on the cusp of wielding power — regionally, at least.

The rise of the AfD has already made coherent and stable government difficult at the national level. Its success in last year’s federal election, in which it came in second, with 20 percent of the vote, forced the center-right Christian Democrats to form a government with the center-left Social Democrats. The two parties have squabbled since Friedrich Merz became chancellor, and the AfD has surged in the polls. Now it is by far the most popular party in Germany.

What makes the AfD’s rise especially shocking is that it is much more extreme than other European far-right parties that either are already in power, like Giorgia Meloni’s Brothers of Italy, or could be soon, like Marine Le Pen’s National Rally. Whereas those parties have sought in some ways to detoxify and moderate themselves, the AfD has become more radical over time, deepening its ties to neo-Nazis and promising to repatriate migrants. As it has done so, it has grown more popular.

Last year, Germany’s domestic intelligence agency classified the party as “right-wing extremist.” But the scale of the party’s support means it is too late to ban it. Instead, it has fallen to Mr. Merz’s government to stop it. Yet, preoccupied with remilitarization and foreign policy, it is seemingly incapable of doing so. For Germany — and the rest of Europe — the implications are truly alarming.

At the heart of the matter is the economy, which is going through a deep structural crisis. Over the past two decades, the German economy was often described as Europe’s strongest. In reality, its extreme dependence on exports made it quite fragile. This fragility has now caught up with it: Germany’s manufacturing industry, the basis of its economic success, is being hit by a combination of American tariffs and Chinese competition — what is often referred to as China Shock 2.0. This economic decline un-

derpins the AfD’s recent surge in support.

The AfD actually began with economic issues. It was created in 2013 as a direct response to Angela Merkel’s insistence that there was no alternative to bailing out Greece — hence its name — and was originally a party of fiscal hawks who opposed a redistributive European Union. After the refugee crisis in 2015, it repositioned itself as an anti-immigration, anti-Islam party; two years later, it got into the Bundestag, leading some to imagine that it had become focused only on cultural issues. But alongside xenophobes and nativists, fiscal hawks retained a home in the AfD.

Central to their concerns was maintaining the so-called debt brake, a constitutional amendment that limited government borrowing. During his 2025 campaign, Mr. Merz promised to keep it, even as it prevented much-needed investment. But after the Christian Democrats won the election, he reached an agreement with the Social Democrats and the Greens before the new Parliament had been formed to amend the constitution, exempting military spending from the brake. This democratically dubious move alienated many right-wing voters. It was around this point that the AfD overtook the Christian Democrats in the polls for the first time.

Mr. Merz didn’t dismantle the debt brake entirely. That would have made it possible to begin to solve some of Germany’s problems. Instead, as nonmilitary spending remains subject to the debt brake, Mr. Merz has continued to cut back the welfare state and told Germans that they need to work harder so that the economy can regain its “competitiveness.” This approach — increasing military spending while cutting elsewhere — may appeal to foreign policy analysts, but it is politically disastrous. A significant part of the AfD’s appeal lies in its focus on job losses and declining prospects.

Germany’s remilitarization has also been disastrous in another way. Since 2022, center-right parties in Germany have largely abandoned their commitment to the idea of Germany as a “Friedensmacht,” or force for peace, and now speak more about preparing for a full-scale war with Russia. Mr. Merz, for his part, says he wants Germany to possess “the strongest conventional army in Europe.” This has allowed the AfD to present itself as the party of peace — not unlike the way that President Trump positioned himself in opposition to the “forever wars” undertaken by American Democrats and Republicans alike.

The increase in military spending has caused some to wonder whether Germany could become “Europe’s next hegemon.” But that is a fantasy. For one thing, it is far from clear that Germany’s spending plans

The government seems incapable of stopping the advance of the AfD.



NIKITA TERYOSHIN

will translate into real military capabilities, to say nothing of a revival of the economy. For another, Germany is increasingly isolated within the European Union, not least because of its unconditional support for Israel and willingness to block any measures against it, like suspending the European Union’s association agreement with it. Perhaps most important, there is little support for military power, let alone war, among German voters.

When Mr. Merz was running to be chancellor, he promised to reduce the AfD’s popularity — chiefly by taking tougher measures against immigration, including what in the coalition agreement was called a “deportation offensive.” Then, on the night of the

election, he declared that his “absolute priority will be to strengthen Europe as quickly as possible so that, step by step, we can really achieve independence from the U.S.A.,” producing much excitement among supporters of greater European autonomy. A year and a half in, both objectives remain further away than ever.

Two more regional elections later this month are likely to produce further advances for the AfD, deepening the sense of national crisis. Some Christian Democrats, in a panic, are already speculating about Mr. Merz’s future. Yet what the country needs is not a different chancellor but a completely different approach. Until then, the AfD will continue to inch closer to power.

OPINION



JEREMY DENNIS

People expected us to drop out, get drunk, do crime. I failed at all of that.

But I was a failure at that, too. I didn't drink. I got decent grades. I didn't drop out. And my suffering — and I did suffer — was of the internal I'm-so-misunderstood-I'm-an-artist-OK? variety. As such, it didn't scan. To be understood as Indian required that you be traumatized, poor, dark and enrolled in the tribe, and I hit only one of those marks. By failing to fail, failing to suffer, I became not-Indian among my own people.

IT WAS confusing for outsiders when they met Indians who were relatively happy. Or had enough leisure time to play Dungeons & Dragons or listen to Styx or really want to see the musical "Cats." All of which were true of me. What a pity to learn we weren't clinging with red claws to the fabric of life. One white Princeton professor advised me that I couldn't be both an academic and a "medicine man"; one had to either adhere to tradition or abandon it.

Some time or another, I was asked directly how bad life had been. Not so bad, I said. There was never a follow-up. Relative happiness, modest success, a kind of pleasant humdrum, was not for us. I could see the outsiders' eyes glaze over when confronted by a so-so Indian. If you seemed like a so-so Indian and withheld stories of your trauma, you began to lose your material substance.

But in the 1980s there were beginning to be lots of Indians doing so-so. Casino gambling had come to many reservations. Some were becoming rich. Leech Lake, not so much, but the standard of living was getting somewhat better. My mother called to tell me she could now get a decent prime rib on the reservation. And then I was starting to understand that I hadn't been only telling lies about who Indians were; I had been consuming lies as well.

Where I had grown up and how I had grown up weren't a separate place or way of

being at all. The impassable frontier I had perceived between a Princeton and a not-Princeton, and yes, between civilized and savage, wasn't drawn out there in Leech Lake; it was created in Princeton. The biggest lie seemed to be that places like Princeton are the opposite of places like Leech Lake Reservation and therefore separate, distinct, unrelated.

It feels like common practice, among reservation Indians and everyone else, to imagine that reservations are the antithesis to the matter of America, unmetable in the crucible of the American melting pot, dark in contrast to American light, hopeless in comparison with American hope, a ruin in a valley staring up at the city on a hill. But that lie hides a paradox: When Indians were included in the Declaration of Independence only to be excluded from its provisions (mentioned only as "merciless Indian savages"), this gave us a kind of backdoor reali-

ty, a kind of legal existence defined by negative space. So, too, with the flimsy binary that had till that point ruled my life: By suggesting that Indian life was the opposite of American life, it accidentally suggested that we were, in fact, alive.

AFTER my first year at Princeton, my stories of suffering began to wear thin. For outsiders, sure. But for me as well. My lies had an ancillary, refractory effect: The more I created a story of the place I was from that wasn't true and the more I told stories about myself that weren't true, the more I started to see what was true of my reservation and myself. And I began to miss both my community and, well, me.

What I missed wasn't the suffering and poverty and beer bellies and Pendleton vests and half-tinted glasses. It wasn't our broken English and our fractured Ojibwe. The longer I was away and the more stories I spun, the more Leech Lake felt like a real place with complicated people. It was in our ordinary complications, rather than the extremity of our troubles, that our personhood existed. In our affairs and subsequent divorces, in our inability to win the state championship, in our need for co-signers for car loans and in all the many good and bad decisions we made.

I became a person, an Indian person, when I drank warm Coke rolling around the bottom of the canoe or when my friend Sean flipped the Risk board before storming out to check our nets. There, at home, no outsider could erase me. I began to miss home when I came to realize that Indian life is its own pursuit. There were so many forces, veritable legions, arrayed against Native people and places. So many opportunities for suffering. So much effort spent on our erasure. So many clear messages that the pursuit of happiness was for others, not for me. At Princeton, age 18, I pursued pursuit. It was the next best thing.

It has been said that Native people have a great future behind us. Our cultures and our dominance figure as the past. I am ashamed to say I grew up believing this. After college, with a prestigious degree in hand, I spent a couple of years in grad school. It was the life toward which I had been led. But I was being pulled — in the manner of filings to a magnet — back to the reservation. I realized I didn't want any of the roles that America would have me fill. I didn't want to be an emissary from the past greatness of Indian society. Nor did I want to be a super-Indian whose story was all the more super because of what I had overcome. It seemed to me that the mediocrity of becoming a so-so Indian was the best way to avoid capture.

I quit graduate school and returned to Leech Lake to pursue work, real work, and the connections to real Indian human beings on my reservation who I didn't know existed until I left them behind. I got a couple of unglamorous jobs and traveled in the luxury of doing downright uncool Ojibwe tribal work: hunting, trapping, fishing, making anything I could out of birch bark except wastebaskets destined for the tourist trade.

It was on the reservation, during a mediocre meeting at my unglamorous job, that I checked my home answering machine and learned I had an offer on my first novel. I remember everything — the light in the room, the Indians in the meeting doing so-so Indian things. I have never again smiled quite as much as I did that afternoon with my ear pressed to the landline. A friend looked up and was confused at how contorted my face was. "You OK?" he asked. Never. Better. And now that I've been doing it for a while — by "it," I mean my so-so Indian life and my so-so writing life — it has, much to my surprise, made me deliciously, ecstatically, brashly so-so. In a word: I'm happy.



THOMAS RUFF, "TINY008," 2026. THOMAS RUFF/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/VG BILD-KUNST, GERMANY. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWISLOCK

ture but the program, which is to say the functions that the buildings would contain. The twin towers had roughly 10 million square feet of office space and a shopping mall below ground; the Port Authority and George Pataki, the governor of New York at the time, thought that the most efficient thing to do was just to put it all back. The program called for the same amount of office and retail space, to which they would add a memorial, a museum and some sort of cultural venue.

If the desire to rebuild quickly was one mistake, it is worth remembering that another one was believing that the trauma would never heal, which is why many people felt that nothing at all should be built other than structures to honor the dead. Serious consideration was given to a proposed master plan by a consortium led by the architect Rafael Viñoly that envisioned reconstructing the twin towers as a largely empty skeletal framework, a permanent symbol of loss. The sense of the void was more important than anything that might fill it.

By the time the trauma faded, as trauma does — and as it had to do for the city to come back — it was too late to change the program and build the housing that should have taken up a significant part of the rebuilt ground zero. The state could have wrested control of the site from the Port Authority and Mr. Silverstein and changed the terms of the plan to something more in the long-term interest of the city, but that did not happen. Neither did a proposal by Daniel Doctoroff, a deputy mayor in the Bloomberg administration, that the city offer the Port Authority the land underneath LaGuardia and Kennedy Airports in exchange for the World Trade Center site, allowing the city to control the development and build what it most needed, which would have included housing.

To be fair, there is plenty to be pleased about. The memorial by the architect Michael Arad and its accompanying park by Peter Walker achieve a meaningful balance of commemoration and tranquility. Mr. Arad's design — in which the footprints of the original twin towers were excavated, thus making the

Twenty-five years after 9/11, some regrets about what replaced the Twin Towers.

void tangible, and then surrounded with a waterfall and the inscribed names of those who died — is deeply moving. And the park is a good neighbor to it, if a bit reserved. The Perelman Performing Arts Center by the architecture firm Rex has an elegant facade, though a somewhat overactive, tech-driven interior. And it, too, is a bit aloof — windowless, a glowing cube set on a plinth.

And the transit station by Santiago Calatrava, called the Oculus, if more than a bit overwrought, at least demonstrates a commitment to the idea that grandly conceived public space for transportation need not be a thing of the past — even though it also doubles as entry to the replacement of the old underground shopping mall, filled with stores that should have been on the street where they could have brought to the neighborhood the urban energy it deserves.

At least the planners put back some of the streets, quiet and bollard-protected though they may be. They understood that the street, not the building, is the fundamental building block of the city, and they had no desire to replicate the superblock, with its deadening, chilly plaza that was so windswept that it was often closed off to pedestrians. We did learn something over the last generation about how cities work, even if not enough.

There is another good thing that came out of our anguished process. In the immediate aftermath of Sept. 11, we seemed to be hearing mainly from the most extreme voices — some people saying that it would be disrespectful to the lives lost to build anything at all and others demanding nothing but office buildings. Some even wanted the twin towers reconstructed just as they had been, as if the attacks had done nothing to us and we had learned nothing from their urbanistic downsides.

Happily, none of these views prevailed. The life of the city must go on. We needed to commemorate and to build new, to refuse to make a choice between these two extremes and instead to find a balance between looking back and looking forward. And for all the angst, for all the compromise, for all the politics, that is indeed what we have done.

OPINION

Successful People Have One Habit in Common

Angela Duckworth

A professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and the author of the forthcoming book "Situated: Find the People and Places That Bring Out Your Best."

I WAS once stranded with my 86-year-old mother in the Atlantic Ocean. We were on a snorkeling excursion off Miami, and the two of us were quickly swept behind our boat, my mother overtaken by the current. In her panic, she'd inhaled water into both lungs and lost consciousness.

Attempting to tug her to safety, I thrashed and kicked with all my might, but the ocean swallowed my efforts whole. Lungs burning, legs heavy, I changed tactics. I used one hand to keep her head above water and waved the other wildly in the air, shouting for help as I did.

Ultimately, what saved my mother's life that day, and mine, too, was not fighting the current on my own. It was calling for help. The rescuers who came to our aid knew more than I did about how to handle this kind of emergency. Together, they got my mom onto the boat deck, then to solid ground and finally into the hands of expert medical staff who could care for her properly.

Most people understand the importance of asking for help in a life-or-death crisis. We know we should wave to the lifeguard during a rip tide or call 911 if our house catches fire. But in our personal and professional lives, Americans are encouraged to pursue rugged individualism over interdependency. "Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects. But help from within invariably invigorates," wrote the journalist Samuel Smiles in his 1859 book, "Self-Help," which reached a wider audience in America than in his native Britain and spawned an entire literary genre of the same name. Heroic tales of self-made Americans abound—like Thomas Edison, who tested thousands of filaments in his quest to invent the lightbulb, or Steve Jobs, a loner who transformed technology.

You might think I'd love the image of the solo striver triumphing over every challenge. After all, I'm a psychologist who wrote a book called "Grit" about the necessity of passion and perseverance for achieving long-term goals. The truth is, I hate it. Without exception, every high performer I've studied credits a host of supporters for success. Research has found that a willingness



BYO JINYONG LIAN

to ask for help is crucial to achievement.

Consider Nicolai Tengen, the chief executive of the world's largest wealth fund. I interviewed him recently as he was putting the finishing touches on a book he'd been writing about leadership. After praising personal qualities like energy and grit, Mr. Tengen's book spills more ink than you can believe about his assistant, Grete Starheim. He trusts

Being willing to ask for help is crucial for achievement.

her to speak on his behalf, and he believes her when she tells him he's wrong. "Why should such important people end up in the shadows?" Mr. Tengen asked. "Is it embarrassing to admit that you need help?"

Or consider Conan O'Brien, who told Harvard's graduating class that he always reminds himself that he'd done nothing alone. "If I could invite everybody, alive or dead, who has contributed to my being your com-

mencement speaker today, all of Cambridge and half of Allston would be crammed shoulder to shoulder," he said.

Mr. Tengen and Mr. O'Brien aren't just being modest. Studies show that knowing when to ask for help is an essential skill for children's learning and achievement. College students who proactively seek assistance from others typically outperform those who avoid doing so. In adulthood, seeking support is an effective strategy for regulating our emotions, and having a support network is a reliable predictor of overall mental health.

Research also shows that entrepreneurs are more successful when brought together to learn from one another. That is why one venture capital firm, Y Combinator, favors funding co-founders over solo founders. It also links founders in what it calls batches, with group office hours, group dinners and an internal messaging platform for sharing knowledge. "Even if you could do all the work yourself, you need colleagues to brainstorm with, to talk you out of stupid decisions and to cheer you up when things go wrong," Paul Graham, one of Y Combinator's founders, once wrote.

From an early age, we suffer from what cognitive psychologists call the illusion of self-sufficiency, overlooking how much we owe our skills to other people. In one experiment, two groups of children were given a machine they'd never seen before. In the first, none managed to figure out how it worked on their own. In the second, the vast majority succeeded after seeing someone else use the machine and getting hints along the way. Still, after the experiment, 70 percent of the second group claimed they would have learned to use the machine without help.

Being a successful self-starter doesn't mean pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. It's raising your hand and asking a teacher to explain, once again, a concept you still don't understand. It's calling up a former boss for advice. It's announcing to your team that you're stuck on an important problem and need their collective brain to solve it. It's not just stoically making the best of a bad situation — it's proactively making your situation more supportive. Don't assume you're being a burden when you reach out asking for help. Research shows we consistently underestimate how happy it makes others to lend a hand.

"Do it yourself" is no way to live. Take it from my mom, who, five years after a cry for help saved her life, recently celebrated her 91st birthday.

Cancel the Met Gala Instead

Robin Givhan

A contributing Opinion writer and a Pulitzer Prize-winning fashion critic.

THERE are many questions to be asked about the Metropolitan Museum of Art's decision to dedicate its spring Costume Institute exhibition to the designer John Galliano, and then to cancel it when the backlash came.

Did organizers, including the Met trustee Anna Wintour and the Costume Institute curator Andrew Bolton, think that, after Mr. Galliano's stint in rehab and a multitude of apologies, the past had been forgiven — or perhaps even forgotten? Did Ms. Wintour's loyalty to her talented but troubled longtime friend so cloud her judgment that she thought she could just will his slate clean?

I understand the outrage and the objections over "John Galliano: Horizons." But the exhibition should not have been canceled. Instead, the Met Gala should have been canceled.

The ball has long overshadowed the exhibition. In the fashion ecosystem, it's the Super Bowl and the Oscars rolled into an hours-long red carpet featuring extraordinary artists, flashes of buffoonery and lung-suffering fans waiting and waiting . . . and waiting for Rihanna or, perhaps, Beyoncé.

The gala traditionally takes its dress code from the exhibition. Did Ms. Wintour expect guests to arrive wearing vintage Galliano? Did she want them to show up dressed like a pirate or one of the other outlandish characters that Mr. Galliano would often portray when he took his bows as the creative director at Dior? Did she want a circus?

In 2011, a French tribunal found Mr. Galliano guilty of making hateful remarks about Jews and Asians. His antisemitic comments were vicious and bigoted, and were not a one-off incident fueled by a singularly bad alcohol-drenched night. Mr. Galliano was a repeat offender.

The designer was fired from Dior. He tried to make amends by studying the Holocaust and antisemitism. Ms. Wintour stood by him. Three years after his professional conflagration, Mr. Galliano was hired as creative director for Maison Margiela. Now he works with Zara.

Mr. Galliano has been a design force for more than four decades. He was among the first generation of designers brought into luxury conglomerates to energize dusty brands and make them palatable to a younger, global consumer. His vividly realized runway dramas were a how-to for the Instagram era.

And then he set it all aflame with hateful words. Or perhaps he has in his heart.

This is a worthy subject for an exhibition. Maybe I had too much faith in Mr. Bolton, but I wanted him to mount a show that would examine Mr. Galliano's profound failings closely and without hesitation — not as unfortunate asides to his career but as something central to it. I also wanted him to help museum visitors understand the ways in which Mr. Galliano's creativity had always been



VINCENT ALBAN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

fuels by dark musings about cultural outliers.

"I believe deeply in the responsibility of museums to examine difficult histories with rigor, candor and care," Mr. Bolton said in a written statement. "I also recognize the pain and concern this exhibition has caused. After extensive discussion, I support the decision not to proceed."

I believe Mr. Bolton could have helped people understand how antisemitism takes root and grows in the mind of someone like Mr. Galliano. He regularly romanticized the disenfranchised and idolized hierarchies. In the collections he showed under his own name, as well as those from his time at Dior, he fetishized royalty as well as homelessness. He took liberties with Hinduism and Maasai culture. Trying to understand Mr. Galliano could help us make sense of other contradictions in character, of how hate hides in shadows.

It could also help us, perhaps, understand something of ourselves. Or of the animal instincts that drive the fashion world. Or perhaps of Ms. Wintour herself, and what propels her toward the sometimes perverse creative gesture in her search for the new.

The Met is the world's most prominent museum with a department dedicated to fashion — not historical costume, but the kind of fashion that's part of contemporary life. Almost every time I've visited the Costume Institute, I've overheard people remark that a dress or a coat or a pair of shoes on display reminds them of something in their own closet. The Costume Institute, no matter how rarefied its collection or how high-minded its exhibitions, speaks intimately to people because it explores an enduring question: How do you construct a personal identity for all the world to see? How did Mr. Galliano construct his identity? Critics of the now-canceled exhibition are

right that the designer should not be venerated. The proposed exhibition on Mr. Galliano's work was an acknowledgment of his influence, not a judgment of his morality. Hagiography was not preordained.

The Met Gala was an entirely different concern. And that's what should have been canceled. It never should have been attached to this exhibition.

In addition to Ms. Wintour's enduring, and perhaps blind, loyalty to Mr. Galliano, she rules over the gala, which has raised more than \$200 million for the Costume Institute. The department, which relies on the gala for its funding, has been building a nest egg so that it is not forever dependent on Ms. Wintour's party-planning expertise. This would have been a fine year to reconsider its relationship to the so-called party of the year, which has also been a point of protest over the war in Gaza and the growing clout of America's billionaires. There surely would have been protests against Mr. Galliano, too.

Museums help society undertake painful conversations, to contextualize art and craft and to explore confounding contradictions. I am desperate for our cultural institutions to have an intellectual spine at a time when the political currents are eroding access to terrible truths and our ability to sit with anger and pain. Perhaps I'm naïve, but I thought museums were where these hard considerations were supposed to happen. Canceling the exhibition will not make the pain go away — or prevent someone else from causing more of it.

In explaining his opposition to the exhibition, Elisha Wiesel, the chairman of the Elie Wiesel Foundation, said, "If someone had screamed the worst racial epithet you can imagine, said, 'You're a horrible Black person and your ancestors would have been hung from a tree,' you could not imagine them being honored by a prominent cultural institution."

No one has to imagine enslavers and racists being honored. They are revered by this very nation. Look around. Our public squares are still filled with odes to Thomas Jefferson, Woodrow Wilson, Robert E. Lee and assorted other hallowed figures who degraded Black people. When activists forced the dismantling of some of the public monuments to them, some were pointedly reinterpreted in museums. That's where we should put our dangerous desires and base instincts under a microscope.

Perhaps if the Costume Institute weren't so firmly tethered to a pop culture juggernaut, critics would have been more willing to believe that a serious and meaningful look at Mr. Galliano's life was possible. They might have allowed that a survey mounted now, while he is alive, would force people, including Mr. Galliano, to wrestle with his words and deeds in the context of today's politics and emotions. The past, after all, is not past.

There's no exhibition. Some may reasonably breathe a sigh of relief. But nothing else has changed.

An exhibition would have assessed Galliano's accomplishments, not his morality.