



Unity in diversity

INDIA bloc is more divided than before, allowing the BJP to push ahead

Twenty-three Opposition parties aligned under the banner of the INDIA bloc met in the national capital on Monday, against the backdrop of countryside concerns related to economic distress, inflation and the chaos in the educational sector. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha) Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and the Trinamool Congress (TMC)'s Mamata Banerjee were among those who attended. Mr. Kharge announced five key decisions at the close of the meeting. The bloc resolved to write to the Chief Justice of India over concerns of electoral fraud and vote manipulation; demanded the immediate resignation of the Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan; called upon the central government to convene an all-party meeting to address the deepening economic crisis, farm distress and price rise; agreed to hold coordination meetings every two months, with the next one scheduled in Hyderabad in August; and committed to daily parliamentary coordination during sessions. The decisions signal a collective resolve to press the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on governance failures, particularly in the areas of economy and education, and to hold together an institutional framework for Opposition coordination.

The meeting followed evident fissures within the alliance that surfaced during the recent round of Assembly elections, in which constituent parties found themselves on opposing sides in several States. The shadow of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)'s departure loomed large. The DMK, once the INDIA bloc's most powerful southern anchor, stayed away entirely, having formally announced its boycott on June 4. The decision stemmed from a bitter fallout following the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, where the Congress cut its long-standing ties with the DMK to join a coalition government led by actor-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam. The DMK's future plans vis-à-vis the Opposition remain subject to considerable speculation. The Aam Aadmi Party too chose to stay away, having formally declared that it was no longer part of the bloc. The TMC, yet another large constituent, is facing severe internal challenges after its electoral defeat in Bengal. The Left-Congress relationship too has soured, with both sides trading accusations of being ineffective in combating communalism, or even worse, complicit in it. Taken together, these absences and tensions expose how fragile the coalition can be in a moment of crisis, and how deep the structural conflicts of interest run among its partners. That said, there appears to be a broad, if reluctant, consensus among the participants on two overriding imperatives: that checkmating the BJP remains essential to the political survival of each constituent party and to the health of Indian democracy, and that the Congress, for all its deficiencies and contradictions, remains the unavoidable pivot of any credible national, secular and progressive formation in India.

Strategic afterthought

The government must be transparent with the Nicobar project

For a project so often invoked as a matter of national security strategy, the ballooning Great Nicobar Island development, now estimated to be at ₹91,000 crore, rests on a remarkably thin strategic record. The Centre has long cited the "strategic" character of its centre-piece—a transshipment port at Galathea Bay—to withhold information on its environmental clearances. Yet, the Public Investment Board (PIB), a Finance Ministry body, found in August 2024 that the port "lacked strategic objectives". That label arrived only afterwards, from the Ministry of Defence and seems less like a founding rationale and more of an afterthought, retrofitted to a balance sheet. Both the PIB and the Public-Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC) cleared the proposal, yet the PPPAC refused ₹12,230 crore in Viability Gap Funding, telling the Ports Ministry to find the money within its own budget—an unusual rebuke for a venture sold as nationally vital. If the port cannot stand on commercial returns, and if its real purpose is military, the case for a commercial transshipment hub dissolves.

Great Nicobar sits at the southern tip of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, wrapped in tropical rainforest and ringed by reefs of rare ecological value. The project—port, international airport, power plant and township—would clear vast tracts of that forest, much of it primary, and disturb the nesting beaches of the leatherback turtle and the habitat of the endemic Nicobar megapode. Scientists who have studied the island warn that the loss would be irreversible, and that no afforestation elsewhere can replace what is felled here. The island's indigenous inhabitants have objections of their own, running alongside the ecological ones but not reducible to them. Tribal councils have said that consent was secured without full disclosure, and asked that an ancestral land and the resettlement promised after the 2004 tsunami not be overridden by the project. Their criticism is not a refusal of all development. The quarrel is with scale, secrecy and sequence—a project conceived at a magnitude the island cannot absorb. The remedy is transparency. The Centre should release the High-Powered Committee report in full, account openly for the true cost to the public exchequer, and weigh it against an environmental loss that the exchequer can never reimburse. A project of this scale owes the country at least that much.

A troubling judgment and endorsement of the SIR

The judgment of the Supreme Court of India, delivered on May 27, 2026, on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, has thrown up many disturbing questions about the powers, the role and the conduct of the Election Commission of India (ECI) in the context of the exercise of its powers in the preparation and revision of electoral rolls.

Although this case is related to the operationalisation of the SIR in Bihar, the issues dealt with by the Court and its findings have far-reaching implications for the right of Indian citizens to be included in electoral rolls. In its 124-page judgment, the Court dealt with all the important points raised by the petitioners against the SIR but refused to concede even a single one of them. On the other hand, the Court accepted all the arguments made by the ECI and further elucidated them.

Revisiting electoral roll revision

When the SIR was begun in Bihar just a few months before the Assembly election in Bihar, in 2025, serious reservations were expressed about the advisability of undertaking such a comprehensive and intensive revision of the electoral rolls in such haste. Apart from the inexplicably compressed timeline for completing the intensive revision of the electoral rolls, serious questions were raised about the statutory backing for such an exercise. There have been a number of articles in this daily highlighting the ECI's deviations from statutory provisions in the implementation of the SIR. So, in light of the Court's judgment upholding the ECI's actions and methods, it is useful to revisit the statutory and constitutional provisions governing electoral roll preparation and revision and assess the judgment accordingly.

Article 325 of the Constitution declares that there shall be one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency in the country and that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in such a roll solely on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or any of them. Article 326 says that the elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies shall be on the basis of adult suffrage—which means every citizen who is 18 years and above is entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election. The other condition for inclusion in the roll is that he should not be disqualified under the Constitution or any law. Article 327 empowers Parliament to make laws for dealing with all aspects of elections including the preparation of electoral rolls. Article 324 confers the power to prepare the rolls and conduct the elections on the ECI. Preparation of electoral rolls which



P.D.T. Achary
Former Secretary
General, Lok Sabha

includes revision is governed by the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. Section 21 of the RP Act deals with preparation and revision of the electoral rolls. Sections 21(2) and (3) which contained the framework of revision say in (a)(i)/(ii), electoral roll shall be revised before each general election to the Lok Sabha or the Assembly and before each by-election, (b) the roll shall be revised in any year if directed by the ECI; and Section 21(3) says that the ECI may do a special revision of the roll for any constituency or part of a constituency at any time after recording the reasons for such revision. Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules says that the revision of the rolls under Section 21 (2) of the Act before the general election or by-election can be summary or intensive, which clearly implies that such revision just before the general election can be only summary considering the elaborate scheme of an intensive revision under the rules.

The framework

The question, then, is: under which category of revision does the SIR fall? The Court says that it is traceable to Section 21(3) which deals with a special revision in any constituency or a part of a constituency. But the clause does not permit an intensive revision but only a special revision. SIR is a special and intensive revision of the rolls. Intensive revision according to Rule 25 is done only under Section 21(2) and not 21(3) of the Act as the judgment claims. A careful reading of Sections 21(2) and (3) of the RP Act 1950 and Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules 1960 would reveal that an intensive revision of the roll in a State can be undertaken only when the general election or by-election is not due. It is obvious that an intensive revision is not contemplated by the law when the elections are due because of the comprehensive nature of the revision which requires a much longer time to complete.

Now, as regards the special revision under Section 21(3), it is actually meant to be done in a constituency or a part of a constituency and not the whole State or the country. The claim made in the judgment that "any constituency" means all constituencies does not square with the context. The word "any" may mean "all" in some contexts whereas it would mean "single" in some other context. The words "or a part of constituency" following "any constituency" make it clear that the special revision is meant to be done only in a constituency or part of it. When intensive revision is clearly provided in Section 21(2) there is no need to provide the same in Section 21(3). Special revision may become

necessary in some constituencies because of, say, the large-scale influx of people into that area from a neighbouring area. Special revision is done in a manner fixed by the ECI whereas intensive revision under Section 21(2) needs to be done as per the prescribed procedure.

The analysis above would show that the entire SIR exercise is being done under a wrong provision of law. In the States of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal, the SIR was done a few months before the Assembly election. Under Section 21(2)(a) read with Rules 25 only a summary revision was possible before the Assembly election. But the ECI went ahead with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in clear deviation from the scheme of the law, resulting in the deletion of millions of voters from the electoral rolls without providing them any effective redress.

The issue of citizenship

The judgment grants great freedom to the ECI in the matter of determining the documents to prove citizenship. The crucial point is whether the ECI can determine what documents are required to prove citizenship. This is a function to be performed by the Home Ministry as it administers the law on citizenship. The ECI's role is to verify citizen-related documents. What actually happened was that the ECI announced a list of documents and asked the voters to produce them. The ECI was simply usurping the role of the Union Home Ministry. It is extremely surprising that during the hearing the Supreme Court did not ask the Union Home Ministry to file an affidavit containing the list of documents required to prove citizenship. The Court has now conceded the ECI's authority to determine the question of citizenship for the purpose of inclusion in or exclusion from the electoral rolls, while leaving the larger question of citizenship to the competent authority, namely the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry of Home Affairs will now have to decide the cases of millions of Indian citizens who will never be able to vote in their lifetime and who will face numerous disabilities arising from the denial of citizenship, albeit on a tentative basis.

The Court has hitherto applauded the work done all these years by the ECI since its establishment. But the SIR judgment speaks about the "cumulative inaccuracies in the voters list" and the "structural deficiencies that pervaded the entire roll" in the past. It is a damning indictment of the preparation and the revision of electoral rolls done by the ECI in the past. The judgment need not have gone to such an extent in order to justify the SIR of 2025.

The top court's verdict raises constitutional concerns and casts a shadow over past electoral rolls

The Oman CEPA, a new gateway for India's exports



Anant Goenka
President,
The Federation of
Indian Chambers
of Commerce and
Industry (FICCI)

India and Oman share one of the oldest trading relationships, with commercial and maritime links dating back thousands of years. From the movement of spices, textiles and frankincense to enduring people-to-people ties, trade has long been a cornerstone of this partnership. The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which came into force on June 1, 2026, reaffirms and strengthens this historic relationship by providing a modern framework to deepen trade, investment and economic cooperation for the future.

India is among the top suppliers for Oman and bilateral trade has grown from \$8.94 billion in FY2023-24 to \$11.8 billion in FY2025-26, reflecting the growing complementarities between the two economies.

An expansion of India's trade ties

The CEPA comes at a time when India is actively diversifying its trade partnerships and integrating more deeply with global value chains. Following agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Australia, the European Free Trade Association, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the European Union, the Oman CEPA further strengthens India's presence in a region that is central to its energy security, trade and strategic interests.

The CEPA offers significant opportunities for Indian exporters. Oman has offered duty-free access on 98.08% of its tariff lines, covering 98.38% of India's exports by value. Before the agreement, only 15.33% of India's exports entered Oman at zero duty under the Most Favoured Nation regime. The CEPA, therefore, provides an immediate competitiveness boost across a broad range of sectors. In textiles and apparel, India already commands a 43% share of Oman's woven apparel imports and 31% of knitted apparel imports. The removal of the existing 5% tariff will strengthen the competitiveness of Indian manufacturers against China, which is the other dominant supplier in this market. In the case of chemicals, India already supplies nearly 39% of Oman's inorganic chemical imports, making it

one of the leading players in the market. Tariff free access will only amplify this further.

Likewise, engineering goods will also benefit. Oman imports over \$3.7 billion worth of mechanical machinery and \$3.3 billion worth of automobiles annually, where India's market share is only 5% and 2%, respectively. Preferential market access under the CEPA can help Indian exports of engineering goods expand significantly and deepen their presence in Oman's infrastructure, construction and industrial sectors.

In pharmaceuticals, where India holds around 10% market share, the agreement's value lies not in tariff reductions but in regulatory facilitation. Products approved by leading international regulators will benefit from fast-tracked approvals, reducing compliance costs and accelerating market entry. As Oman's pharmaceutical market continues to expand, Indian companies will be well-positioned to capture a larger share. Duty-free access for products such as meat, eggs, honey, butter and processed foods will further strengthen India's already strong position. At the same time, sensitive sectors such as dairy, cereals, edible oils and several agricultural commodities have been kept outside tariff concessions, ensuring that domestic producers remain protected.

Streamlined procedures

Significant trade facilitation measures have been introduced. Oman will accept certificates issued by India's Export Inspection Council (EIC), eliminating duplicative testing and inspections, while also recognising India's organic (NOP) and halal certification systems. There are dedicated sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBT) provisions, which will enhance regulatory transparency and cooperation, and streamlined customs clearance, including fast-track processing for perishables, which will reduce costs and improve export efficiency.

Another forward-looking aspect of the CEPA is its strong focus on services and professional mobility. Bilateral services trade stood at \$863

million in 2024, with India enjoying a surplus of nearly \$447 million. Yet, India's share in Oman's global services imports remains just over 5%, indicating substantial untapped potential.

Oman has undertaken binding commitments covering professionals in sectors such as accounting, engineering, information technology, health care, education and consulting. Oman also raises the quotas for intra-corporate transferees, facilitating greater mobility of Indian professionals and specialists. Provisions relating to AYUSH and traditional medicine further create opportunities for Indian health care and wellness services in the Gulf.

Strategic location advantage

Beyond trade statistics, the CEPA has a larger strategic significance. Oman occupies a unique position at the crossroads of the Gulf, the Indian Ocean and East Africa. Its ports at Sohar, Duqm and Salalah are emerging as major logistics and industrial hubs. For Indian businesses, Oman can serve not only as a destination market but also as a gateway to the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and East African economies.

The India-Oman CEPA once again demonstrates the evolution of India's trade policy from tariff negotiations to comprehensive economic partnerships encompassing goods, services, investment, mobility and regulatory cooperation. Its benefits will extend from textile clusters in Tamil Nadu and the gems and jewellery industry in Gujarat to engineering hubs in Maharashtra and Punjab, and from pharmaceutical manufacturers in Telangana to seafood exporters in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

The real test will now lie in implementation and utilisation. If businesses actively leverage the opportunities created by the agreement, the CEPA can significantly expand India's export footprint, strengthen economic integration with the Gulf, and support the country's broader ambition of becoming a globally competitive manufacturing and services powerhouse. For India, the agreement opens not only the Omani market but also a broader gateway to the Gulf and beyond.

The agreement boosts exports, services, investment and professional mobility

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nepal's claim

The reports, "Not seeking mediation on border dispute: Nepal PM" (June 8), "No role for third parties in bilateral matters between India, Nepal: Centre" (June 3), and "Nepal PM sparks row, says his country has encroached upon Indian territory" (June 1), are interesting points of contrast. But the candid

admission by Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah, of Nepal's encroachment on Indian territory, should shock New Delhi. Did India have any inkling of such an encroachment? The Ministry of External Affairs should take cognisance of the issue. In all fairness, the Nepal Prime Minister should volunteer to return the encroached territory to

India as a gesture of goodwill.
C.W. Aravind,
Bangalore

The difference now

Today's youth engage with public issues differently from previous generations. The recent Gen Z mobilisation over educational policies and systemic failures has shown

how a discussion or idea on social media can rapidly evolve into large-scale protests. This growing participation reflects a generation that values transparency and accountability in governance and seeks a greater voice in shaping its future. Constructive engagement with their concerns would be far more

effective than dismissing their voices.
Nallaneth S. Kumar,
Kollam, Kerala

Border crossings

When I visited the Petrapole-Benapole border in West Bengal in 2002, it was striking to see hundreds of people carrying headloads of rice across the border under the nose of

the BSF. In these circumstances, one wonders whether the "concerns" over the format of a High-Level Committee on Demographic Change amount to intellectual overreaction.
K. Chellappan,
Chennai

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

The trust deficit in India-Bangladesh ties

More than hundred days have passed since the Tarique Rahman government took charge in Bangladesh. However, contrary to early expectations from his leadership, India-Bangladesh relations have remained more or less the same as in the difficult months of the interim government.



Kallol Bhattacharjee

Actions, not rhetoric
India reached out two weeks before Mr. Rahman became the Bangladesh Prime Minister. The first outreach was by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar who visited Dhaka on December 31, 2025 to condole the passing of Mr. Rahman's mother, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. The second time was through Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, who carried Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation letter, and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla who on February 17 participated in the swearing-in ceremony of Mr. Rahman. But sources in the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) say such gestures in themselves are insufficient. An influential segment within the BNP feel that as a goodwill gesture towards the new government, India should have reversed some of the retaliatory steps that it had taken during the interim government's rule under Muhammad Yunus. These steps included the restarting of transhipments for goods from Bangladesh, full restoration of visa services including business and medical visas, and stopping the restrictive market access for Bangladeshi goods. None of these measures have been implemented so far, as per Dhaka. They argue that, by not reversing these decisions, India has not delivered any advance incentives to Mr. Rahman who will have to engage with the Jamaat-e-Islami and several anti-India student outfits before normalising ties with India.

Bangladeshi diplomats have pointed out that Dhaka expected less rhetoric on illegal immigration, and more focus on issues such as the renewal of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty

that the presence of the deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in India will not hold ties back, a departure from the hardline stance that the interim government had taken. Here also, Dhaka feels that such attempts have not found appreciation from the Indian side.

As proof they refer to the aggressive use of 'illegal immigration' in official communication from Delhi following the victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in West Bengal and Assam. Bangladeshi diplomats have pointed out that Dhaka expected less rhetoric on sensitive issues such as illegal immigration, and more focus on issues such as visa restoration and the renewal of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty.

Dhaka had sent Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman to Delhi on April 7-8 for a brief visit, to test the waters, where he met National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Mr. Jaishankar. However, the election campaign in Assam and West Bengal around Bangladesh-related issues and a flurry of interviews by exiled PM Sheikh Hasina have displayed that Mr. Rahman's BNP, despite winning a landslide majority in Bangladesh, has not managed to impress India. While a senior diplomat in Dhaka said that Bangladesh was assured that the language around State elections would not reflect New Delhi's foreign policy, the Ministry of External Affairs' strident position on illegal immigration have generated 'a sense of betrayal' in Dhaka's secretariat.

According to reports, Mr. Rahman, sensing that the window for restoration of ties with India is not opening as per expectations, is in the final stages of considering visits to Malaysia and China that are likely to take place in the last week of June.

Bangladesh's dilemma
This turn to China however cannot hide the fact that it is incumbent on Bangladesh, as much as it is on India, to repair bilateral ties.

Bangladesh's ties with India remain broken because of the 2024 uprising and the subsequent interim rule whereas its ties with China, the U.S. and other players have prospered since August 2024. Further, a pragmatic assessment shows that without steady assurance from India on the main river Padma (Ganga), Bangladesh's other plans are not expected to proceed smoothly beyond 2026. River affairs expert Ainun Nishat has stated that a delay in the renewal of the 30-year-old Ganga treaty will put the Ganges-Kobadak irrigation project in a challenging situation affecting vast portions of western and central Bangladesh. The lack of predictable water supply will affect the upcoming sowing seasons, hurting Bangladesh's economy that is already dealing with the crippling effects of the energy crisis because of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran.

The compounded effect of these disruptive forces will increase pressure on the Tarique Rahman government that is already under criticism for its inept handling of the worst measles outbreak in the country that has claimed the lives of at least 600 infants. Critics have targeted the government for its weak handling of the health crisis as well as the growing incidents of sexual violence, which is a symptom of the breakdown of law and order in the country that is yet to make a recovery since the protests of August 2024. Rivals, including Sheikh Hasina's Awami League that are mobilising on the ground despite a ban, will be strengthened if Mr. Rahman fails to renew the Ganga river agreement with Delhi before the deadline of December 31, 2026.

Such material factors on the ground call for pragmatism in both the capitals as the challenges will soon overwhelm Bangladesh, reverting it to instability, which again is not in India's immediate or long-term interests.

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A boost for the Karnataka workforce

The notification on minimum wages is a step in the right direction

STATE OF PLAY

Mohan Mani

In May, the Karnataka government released the notification on minimum wages, equalising wages across 81 sectors of employment, with an average wage increase of 60% over existing levels. As per the notification, the minimum wage for unskilled workers will be ₹23,376 per month in Bengaluru, and ₹19,318 per month in small towns and rural areas. This difference of over ₹4,000 between wages in Bengaluru and the small towns is a reflection of the runaway inflation in metro cities. This move, which acknowledges the high cost of living in urban metros, is commendable.

In media interviews, the Karnataka Labour Minister said the minimum wage revision was carried out as per the directions of the Supreme Court. This highlights an often ignored fact of the jurisprudence around minimum wage in India – that the method for minimum wage determination is elaborately laid out and uniformly applicable across the country. Despite such a formula, the wide variation in prevailing minimum wages across States reflects the power of employers, and the complexity of labour departments in keeping wages below what is statutorily mandated.

Employers claim that higher wages drive up product costs and increase product demand thus fuelling inflation. However, reducing the wages of those at the lowest deciles of the Indian population in order to curtail their consumption cannot be the way to control inflation. Moreover, government statistics indicate that the consumption levels of



the average household are yet to reach pre-COVID levels. There are other mechanisms available to the Government to control inflation, including adjusting the GST structure to control product costs.

Employers further claim that increasing wages will drive out industry. This is not necessarily true. The contribution of wages to total cost in most sectors is declining. Wages are not the only determinants of investment decisions. Several other factors such as infrastructure, economic climate, availability of skilled workforce, and industrial peace are equally important. The recent protests by garment and other factory workers in the National Capital Region and in Uttar Pradesh for higher wages were a stark reminder of workers' poverty and their desperation. It highlighted the importance of decent wages to ensure industrial peace.

Missing aspects

However, there remain important lacunae in the notification. First, it leaves out four important sectors: garment work, *beedi* rolling, *agrabathi* making and plantation work. All four sectors employ a large number of workers, with the majority being women. With the implementation of the notification, the wages of the workers in these four sectors would become around half the wages of the workers at a

comparable skill level in the other 81 sectors covered by the notification. *Beedi* rolling, which is primarily home-based work, highlights the inter-generational perils of poorly paid employment. Children share the same space as their mothers, who are rolling *beedis*, which often results in them getting pulled into helping their mothers, restricting their ability to break out of the poverty trap. A decent minimum wage linked piece rate for *beedi* rolling could increase the options for these children.

Another issue is regarding the Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA). The VDA is meant to safeguard real wages against inflation for the period between two wage fixations, mandated to happen once every five years. The points-based wage neutralisation system in Karnataka unfortunately only protects fully trained workers in the lowest unskilled categories. For the higher categories of semi-skilled and skilled workers, such protection is only partial. Further, with every wage revision, the old VDA formula becomes inadequate to protect real wages, and the points need to be revised. There have been union led court cases in the past for VDA revision along with wage revisions. The present notification should also address this lacuna.

The minimum wage notification is still a positive step, holding out potential for equitable growth in the State. It can also serve as an example for other States. It highlights an alternative paradigm, important at this time of increasing wealth disparity – that profits without super-exploitation should be the rule of the "ease of doing business".

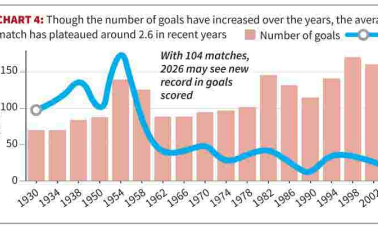
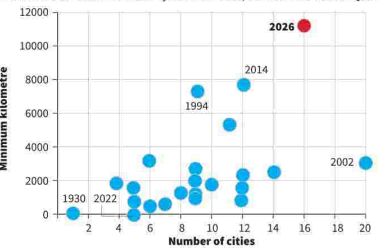
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DATA POINT



On June 11, the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City will host the kick-off of the FIFA World Cup, the world's most-watched sporting tournament, whose winner will lift the cup 38 days later, after the final in New Jersey on July 19. That 2026 is the longest World Cup ever is only one of the things setting it apart from every edition since 1930. The charts below explore a few other factors of this tournament, with the most matches ever (104) and the largest participation yet – 48 countries. They include Curaçao, the Caribbean constituent country of the Netherlands, whose population of 1.6 lakh is nearly twice the seating capacity of the Azteca

CHART 2: This shows the geographical spread. Hypothetically, a fan, wanting to watch at least one match in all 16 venues, should travel a minimum of 11,347 kms as the crow flies. This was only 70 kms in 2022, between five cities in Qatar



A World Cup like no other

MAP 1: The tournament is hosted by three countries, the U.S., Canada and Mexico, which is a first. It is being held across 16 venues, which is the second-highest after the 2002 edition, when matches happened across 20 cities in South Korea and Japan



CHART 5: 2026 could see a competition between 37-year-old Messi, for whom this is likely to be the last World Cup, and 27-year-old Mbappe, to set a new record as the highest goal-scorer in a World Cup



CHART 6: The chart shows the highest, lowest and average rankings in the 12 groups of four members each. Shorter the line, the tighter the competition within the group

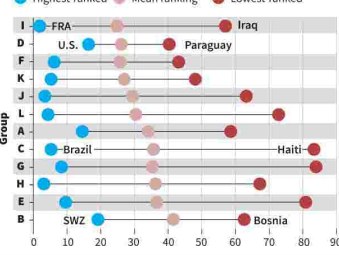
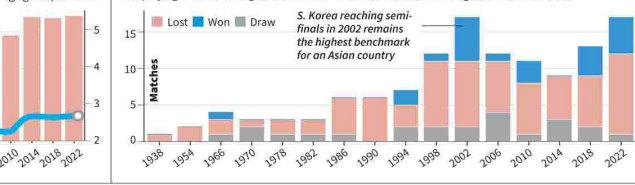


CHART 7: Eight from Asia – Japan, Iran, Jordan, South Korea, Uzbekistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iraq – are playing in 2026, the highest-ever. Asian countries recorded their highest wins in 2022 (11)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 9, 1976

ICF likely to produce tramcars

Madras, June 8: The Integral Coach factory is likely to manufacture tramcars for Calcutta Tramways. The factory authorities are now negotiating with the Tramway company, the details of producing 100 numbers of 2-car sets (200 trams). Each set will cost about Rs. seven lakhs.

Disclosing this at a press conference here today, Mr. J. Mathan, General Manager, said that the ICF had extra capacity and hence was trying to branch out to a new line of production. At present, it was manufacturing 535 shells and 518 coaches out of a rate capacity of 700 in each. Even now, the factory was deploying its workers to repairs of wagons and coaches of the Indian Railways, as the zonal railways did not have adequate capacity for carrying out these repairs.

The motors for the trams would be manufactured and supplied by the Bharat Heavy Electricals. Between 1968 and 1975, the ICF had supplied to many nations in Asia and Africa over 300 bogies and 266 coaches costing over Rs. 10 crores. An order for supply of 17 metre gauge coaches for East African Railways at a cost of Rs. 2.15 crore was expected to be completed by July.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 9, 1926

Progress of monsoon

Simla, June 8: A feeble advance of the Arabian sea monsoon has given general rain in Malabar and Bombay Deccan. Bay monsoon is strengthening. The western disturbance has passed away. Rainfall has been nearly general in Lower Burma, Malabar, Bombay Deccan, Local in Assam, North Hyderabad while a few falls occurred in Upper Burma, Bengal, Bihar, East Rajaputana, East Central Provinces, South Hyderabad and South East Madras. Chief amendments are – Mergui, Rangoon 3-4, Tavoy, Kyaukpyi 1, Mayno 1 and a half, Berhampore, Mymensingh 3-4, Udaipur 1-2, Jagdalpur 3, Cochin 2, Poona, Sholapur, Cuddalore 1-2, Kodakanal 1 inch.

Temperature is appreciably above normal in central parts of the country and North East of the Peninsula. Forecast of monsoon rainfall for 1926: – Monsoon rainfall is likely to be normal in the Peninsula and in north-east India but in some defect in north west India.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

India's account surplus in the fourth quarter of FY26

7.1 in \$ billion. The surplus stood at \$13.7 billion, or 1.4% of GDP, in the fourth quarter of 2024-25. For the entire fiscal year, the current account deficit stood at \$25.2 billion, or 0.6% of GDP, compared to \$22.9 billion during 2024-25. Services exports increased on a year-on-year basis in major categories, such as computer services and business services. PH

Trinamool MPs who are to write to Speaker locking NDA

20 Twenty Lok Sabha MPs have decided to write to Speaker Om Birla declaring support for the BJP-led NDA. The development comes days after the Trinamool leadership suffered a setback in the West Bengal Assembly, where 58 of its 80 MLAs defied the party high command's decision to appoint Sovande Chattopadhyay as the Leader of the Opposition. PH

Number of Andhra Pradesh lands resurveyed

6,500 Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday said that land resurvey has been completed in over 6,500 villages across the State, enabling the government to update the land records. He noted that pattadar passbooks (land documents) have been issued to 26.4 lakh people. PH

Indians languishing in Bangladeshi prisons after completing terms

148 A prison official said 152 foreigners, including 148 Indians, were languishing in Bangladeshi prisons even though they had completed their jail terms, according to prison statistics published six months ago. The inmates could not be released as their identities remain unverified, while attempts to contact the Indian Embassy yielded no response, the report said. PH

Current manpower shortage in Tamil Nadu Electricity Board

70,000 Tamil Nadu Electricity Minister R Nirmal Kumar on Monday announced that the State's electricity board will recruit at least 15,000 permanent employees this year to address severe manpower shortages in the power apparatus. PH

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What is lost and gained in NFHS-6

NFHS-6 records gains in child nutrition, maternal care, institutional births and women's Internet use, while also introducing new questions on digital literacy and direct benefit transfers; but the survey's preliminary fact sheet is thinner than the last round, dropping key indicators such as anaemia, mortality, sex ratio at birth

ECONOMIC NOTES

Areena Arora

India's latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6) records gains in child nutrition, maternal care, institutional births and women's Internet use. But its preliminary fact sheet is also thinner than the last round, with 101 indicators compared with 131 in NFHS-5.

Which indicators were removed from NFHS-6?

Key indicators such as anaemia, mortality, sex ratio at birth, sanitation, and clean cooking fuel have been removed from the survey.

The Union Health Ministry released the fact sheets of NFHS-6 on May 29, covering 2023-24. The survey recorded data from nearly 6.8 lakh households across every State and Union Territory except Manipur.

Preliminary findings report clear gains on several measures, including mothers getting at least four antenatal check-ups, up about seven percentage points from NFHS-5, an increase in institutional births and women's Internet usage. It also points to declines in several metrics, such as exclusive breastfeeding of infants under six months, down nearly eight percentage points, and the use of modern contraception, down to 52.7% from 56.4%.

The NFHS is commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which designates the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) to conduct the survey. Over the years, the scope of the survey has been additive by design, retaining the previous questionnaire and adding to it.

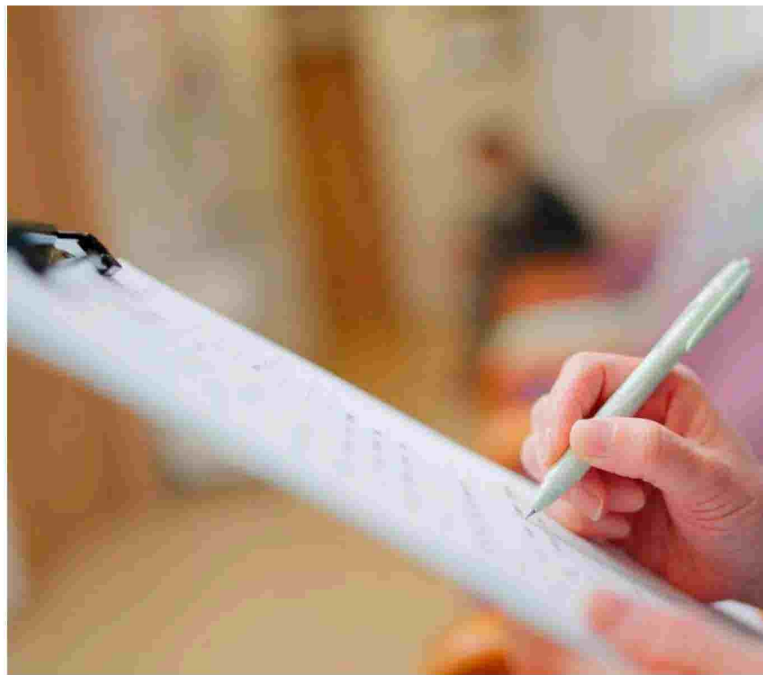
NFHS-4 in 2015-16 introduced district-level estimates and tablet-based digital interviewing for survey collection. NFHS-5 pushed the indicators further, including new topics, such as preschool education, disability, access to a toilet facility, death registration, bathing practices during menstruation and methods and reasons for abortion. It also extended blood pressure and blood sugar measurements from adults aged between 15 and 49 to all adults aged 15 and above. The survey measured 131 key indicators, up from 114 in NFHS-4.

While the HIV testing component was dropped from NFHS-5, it retained questions on HIV/AIDS knowledge, attitudes, prior testing, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual behaviour. In NFHS-6, biological HIV testing has been brought back as part of the clinical, anthropometric and biochemical testing schedule.

The NFHS-6 fact sheet does not separately spell out whether all HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitude questions were retained.

NFHS-6 also added new questions on direct benefit transfers, self-help group memberships, digital literacy and financial transactions. It also includes testing for Hepatitis-B and Hepatitis-C among women and men, as well as dried blood spot collection from children aged 4-5 for Hepatitis-B testing.

But for the first time, the survey has also subtracted overall, showing a net reduction of 30 indicators in the preliminary results. Among the dropped indicators, the most notable ones, such as anaemia, infant and child mortality, sex ratio at birth, clean cooking fuel use, and sanitation, have all appeared since at least NFHS-4.



The NFHS is commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which designates the IIPS to conduct the survey. GETTY IMAGES

Why was anaemia dropped?

The case for removing anaemia is related to how it was measured. The indicator had long shown a worsening picture. Between NFHS-4 in 2015-16 and NFHS-5 in 2019-21, anaemia rose across the board. Among children, anaemia prevalence went up from 58.6% to 67.1%, among women aged 15-49, it rose from 53.1% to 57%, and among pregnant women, anaemia rose from 50.4% to 52.2%.

The rise in anaemia was near-universal across the country, with child anaemia increasing in 28 States and Union Territories, and in some cases by big leaps, from 35.7% to 68.4% in Assam and 19.3% to 46.4% in Mizoram. Such deterioration was reported despite the government launching the Anaemia Mukh Bharat campaign in 2018, aimed at tackling anaemia. The reason for dropping it as an indicator then boiled down to how the data were being collected.

NFHS measured haemoglobin from a finger-prick blood sample read on a portable analyser, which several nutrition researchers contend overstated anaemia compared to the venous blood drawn by other surveys. IIPS dropped the anaemia questionnaire when NFHS-6 fieldwork began in 2023. The official position is that the condition will now be tracked separately, through a dedicated Diet and Biomarkers Survey under the National Institute of Nutrition using a method its proponents consider more accurate.

The Diet and Biomarkers Survey in India was not a hurried replacement and was launched in December 2022, before NFHS-6 fieldwork began, at the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition in Hyderabad.

The survey recorded data on individual

dietary intake across age groups, paired with blood and urine biomarkers.

It also built upon nutrition deficiencies and tracked obesity alongside anaemia, a first, according to the organisers. For anaemia, data were collected from venous blood instead of the finger-prick method that NFHS used. Data collection is complete, but hasn't been released yet.

What other changes were made?

A line-by-line comparison of the two fact sheets from NFHS-5 and NFHS-6 shows that the net fall of 30 actually combines 43 indicators dropped and 13 added. Several of the deletions were long-running series, and a few are closely related to the government's signature programmes.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in 2019 had announced that India would be open defecation-free. NFHS-5 recorded 70% of the country's population living in households with access to sanitation facilities. That data point has also been dropped.

The share of households using clean fuel for cooking, 58.6% in NFHS-5, is gone — a direct measure of the success of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana.

The three mortality indicators — neonatal, infant and under-five — have also been cut, but these will be tracked by the Sample Registration System, whose latest bulletin put infant mortality at 24 per 1,000 live births.

The Registration System, however, does not carry district-level data and socio-economic breakdowns that are available in NFHS.

The sex ratio of the total population and the sex ratio at birth, 929 females per 1,000 males in NFHS-5, are both absent, removing a standard signal of sex-selective practices. Four

cancer-screening indicators, covering cervical, breast and oral cancer, introduced only in NFHS-5 are gone after a single round.

A few changes are redefinitions rather than cuts. Women's individual ownership of a house or land has become a household-level measure. Three-dose hepatitis B line has become a birth-dose measure, and pre-school attendance has shifted age bands, targeting a younger demographic. IIPS has not published a rationale for the wider list.

Together, the removals leave no current survey-based national figure for infant mortality, sanitation coverage, sex ratio at birth, cancer screening rates or comprehensive HIV knowledge, gaps that no other single source fills at the same scale.

How did survey results change between NFHS-5 and NFHS-6?

NFHS-6 reported a drop in the number of women who have experienced spousal violence, down to 22.3% from 29.3%. The number of children aged five or below who are stunted declined too. The drop from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5 was just under three percentage points, but NFHS-6 saw a drop of over six percentage points.

State-level changes are sharper for certain indicators.

Health insurance coverage rose the most in West Bengal, from 33.7% of households in NFHS-5 to 88.2% in NFHS-6. Women's Internet use saw its largest increase in Andhra Pradesh, from 21% to 63.6%. Haryana recorded the steepest fall in exclusive breastfeeding among infants under six months, from 69.5% to 41.2%. The share of women classified as overweight or obese increased in every State.

THE GIST

▼ NFHS-6 shows a net reduction of 30 indicators in its preliminary fact sheet, with 43 indicators dropped and 13 added compared with NFHS-5.

▼ Anaemia was dropped from NFHS-6, with the official position being that it will be tracked separately through the Diet and Biomarkers Survey.

▼ Several long-running indicators, including infant and child mortality, sex ratio at birth, sanitation coverage, clean cooking fuel use and cancer-screening measures, are absent from the latest fact sheet, leaving gaps that no other single source fills at the same scale.

CACHE

Why Census 2027 matters for development, democracy and representation

Census 2027, the world's largest count of people within a national geography, is an overdue exercise with far-reaching implications; an accurate and comprehensive count will ensure that no one is left behind and that policies, entitlements, and resources are guided by reliable data

Akshay Rout

Record turnouts in the recently concluded Assembly elections have brought satisfaction to all those who believe in the ultimate say of numbers and counts in a democracy. The only concern amid this celebration is whether everyone who needs to be counted has actually been included. This sense of urgency should equally drive the ongoing Census, the mother of all counts.

The world's largest-ever count of people within a national geography got underway on April 1, with the commencement of the first of the two phases of Census 2027. The first phase will gather nationwide information on the conditions, amenities, and assets of every household. The second will collect critical demographic and socio-economic information, including details on education, migration, fertility, and, of course, caste.

Seriously overdue

The eighth Census since Independence comes after a gap of 15 years instead of the usual 10, owing first to the COVID-19 disruption and later to the Lok Sabha elections. India has certainly been missing an updated demographic database. Public and private planning alike have had to rely either on the 2011 Census or on informed extrapolations from it.

There are other credible surveys, including five rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), but these largely focus on health and nutrition. The World Bank and various UN agencies have also periodically conducted studies in their areas of interest. The United Nations Population Fund estimates India's population in 2025 at more than 146 crore. The population count in 2011 stood at 121 crore, marking a growth of 17.7% over the 2001 Census. Census 2027 is expected to record an increase of 25-30 crore. That makes the case for an accurate, secure, and comprehensive national census even more urgent.

The purpose of the Census in colonial India was to help the rulers govern more efficiently and sustain the regime. In post-Independence India, the Census has served a different purpose: improving governance and speeding up multidimensional and inclusive development. The 1951 Census, expectedly, revealed dismal levels of literacy, poverty, and life expectancy in a country depleted by colonial rule. India in 2026-27 stands on a completely different footing in terms of mobility, connectivity, infrastructure, education, healthcare and other indicators of living standards, which await measurement.

Contested demography

The season of demographic politics is here. Special intensive revision (SIR) is a rebuilding of India's electoral rolls; the process has also prompted citizens to ensure that they are counted and that their names remain on the rolls.

One act was played in Parliament in mid-April when women's reservation became a casualty of the fear of 'biased' delimitation of constituencies. New electoral boundaries will ordinarily be anchored in Census data, and the 33%



Census enumerators during a door-to-door survey of digital mapping for the Census at Shashi Garden, in New Delhi, on May 29. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

reserved seats for women in the legislature will be tied to it. This way, the Census exercise will have elaborate implications for the country's representative democracy.

Another standout feature of Census 2027 is the inclusion of the caste question for the first time. The matter has been on the political agenda for years now, often dragged into elections. The direction of the debate after the release of the data will be closely watched.

Existing reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will also have the new Census as a reference. Instead of belligerent battles fought over caste, class, and community interests in the electoral cauldron, getting duly counted along these divisions could be a constructive presentation of the case. Affirmative action for marginalised groups, provided under India's legal and constitutional framework and considered as the fountainhead of social justice, depends on systematic data drawn from the Census.

Roti, kapda, makaan

The Census may appear not to offer any individual profit, but most certainly it does. Access to jobs, food, housing, cooking gas, clean drinking water, safe sanitation, schools, and hospitals are among the expectations citizens have of an elected government.

Accurately identifying needs and deprivations through reliable databases provides the basis for targeted delivery of these welfare measures and public services. Demographic profiles also

inform the Finance Commission's devolution of funds to States and local bodies and even guide private-sector investments in identified areas.

Public policy and service delivery can falter when residents are not properly counted under various buckets. Digital data collection, being done for the first time, could provide deeper and more segregated identification of issues in localities. Viewed from another perspective, departmental dashboards for social and infrastructural provisions could face reality checks post-Census, against their claims.

Guardrails of individual rights

Online self-enumeration, available for 15 days, preceding the survey and already completed by over one crore households, is an additional facilitation, but not mandatory. Self-enumeration blends digital empowerment with the right to privacy and accuracy of personal data. Inclusion is ensured by retaining the manual option and language choices. Census authorities loudly assure that 'an enumerator will definitely visit your home'. The Census Act, 1948, ensures the protection of individual data in the face of a malevolent and interconnected world.

In contemporary elections, population groups look out for targeted benefits, often casting votes in return. The ethical and economic prudence of this bargain is widely questioned. But a good Census delivers the same without moral or fiscal damage. While the government has pitched the Census as an instrument of development, citizens must proactively

grab the chance of getting counted. Census in 2011 had the tagline 'Our Census, Our Future'; in 2027, it is 'Our Census, Our Development'. One could hasten to add, 'my census, my right'.

Everyone's task, everyone's gain

High profile enumeration of the top brass in the national and State capitals carries great symbolism. But the true mandate of the Census is to ensure that no one is left behind and that no facts – or even fantasies – from the remotest hamlet or the most crowded urban slum, regardless of people's circumstances, are excluded from this long-overdue exercise.

Over three million census staffers will have to overcome topographical and social barriers as they go door to door to complete this onerous task.

Although participation in the Census is mandatory, public cooperation must be driven by a heightened awareness of self-interest rather than the apathy that often characterises urban life. 'Pragati' and 'Vikas', the mascots of Census 2027, are statements not only of the purpose, but of equal role for men and women.

Millions of voters stood in line at polling booths over the past two months because they recognised the importance of their vote, even though voting remains optional. In an ocean of census operations, every individual count matters, just as every single vote matters in a large election.

(Akshay Rout is a former Director General, Election Commission of India and a Public Policy Commentator. Views expressed are personal)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

"Which of the following sentences is correct? "He runs faster than me", or, "He runs faster than I"? (K. Suresh Kumar, Kanyakumari)

Very often people wonder if they should say, "It's me", or "It's I". In the past, the accepted form was "It's I". "It's me" was considered unacceptable. Nowadays, of course, "It's me" is the preferred answer to the question, "Who is it?". You would sound pretty pompous if you were to say, "It's I".

Both the sentences that you have given are acceptable. The most common response to the question "Who runs faster?" would be "He runs faster than me". Although "He runs faster than I" is correct, it sounds rather old-fashioned. You won't find too many native speakers of English saying, "He is elder than I", or "He is a better player than I". In sentences like these, there is a tendency nowadays to replace "I" with "me".

What is the meaning of "Lilliputian"? (Br. Anandraj, SDB, Polur, Tamil Nadu)

Have you read Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels"? Lilliput is an imaginary country that the hero Gulliver finds himself in after he has been shipwrecked. The inhabitants of this country are only six inches tall. So, when you say that something is lilliputian you mean that it is terribly small. The word can also be used to refer to something that is intended for very small people. The word is considered to be literary. Here are a few examples.

He showed us a lilliputian chest of drawers and he wanted ten thousand for it.

We found many lilliputian figures buried in the sand.

By the way, the first two syllables of the word are pronounced like the word "lily". The "pu" rhymes with the words "few", "due", and "cue". The "t" sounds like the "sh" in "shirt", "ship", and "shin". The "i" is like the "i" in "sit", "bit", and "hit", while the final "a" is like the "a" in "China" and "amount". Some people however pronounce the final "ian" like the "tion" in "election", "station", and "constitution". The main stress is on the third syllable "pu".

What is the meaning of "There is no question of his going"? (Dr. K. R. Mahalingam, Chennai)

This sentence means that the question of someone's going does not arise. In other words, the person is definitely not going – perhaps he himself doesn't want to go, or he has not been given the permission to go! Whatever be the reason, the man is not going. Here are a few more examples.

There is no question of my giving up. (I am not going to give up)

There is no question of my not marrying Usha. (I am definitely marrying Usha)

There is no question of his failing. (He will definitely pass)

How do you pronounce the word "heist"? (G. Rajendran, Hyderabad)

The "ei" is like the "ie" in "die", "pie", and "tie".

The final "st" is like the "st" in "stay", "strike", and "stink". Any idea what the word means? A "heist" is a theft or a robbery. Here are a few examples:

It was their first heist and it was badly planned.

Abhishek wanted to pull off another heist.

Published in The Hindu on November 21, 2000

THE DAILY QUIZ

June 9 marks the death anniversary of tribal freedom fighter Birsa Munda, whose brief life left a lasting imprint on anti-colonial resistance and Adivasi assertion in India

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1

Which nineteenth-century movement preceded Birsa's uprising and influenced the political climate in Chotanagpur?

QUESTION 2

The Munda uprising led by Birsa Munda at the turn of the twentieth century is popularly known by what term, meaning "Great Tumult"?

QUESTION 3

What slogan associated with Birsa Munda called for the end of British rule?

QUESTION 4

Birsa Munda's religious teachings led to the emergence of a distinct faith community known by what name?

QUESTION 5

Birsa Munda died in Ranchi Jail in 1900. What was the official cause of death recorded by the British authorities?



Visual Question: This famous photograph of Birsa Munda was reproduced in which pioneering ethnographic work by Sarat Chandra Roy?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Why was June 8 specifically chosen for World Oceans Day and when was it first observed? **Ans: It was on this date in the 1992 Earth Summit that the concept was introduced by the Oceans Institute of Canada and the International Centre for Ocean Development, 2009.**

2. How many oceans are officially recognised and which is the smallest? **Ans: Five with Arctic being the smallest**

3. Which distinct characteristic of oceans is because of mineral runoff from land and hydrothermal activity on the seafloor? **Ans: Saltness**

4. If the average global temperature rises by 1.5°C, the estimated loss of which remarkable biodiverse natural feature is 70 to 90%? **Ans: Coral reefs**

5. The Aral Sea dramatically shrank because of massive water diversion projects in the 1960s on two major rivers. Name the rivers. **Ans: Amu Darya and Syr Darya**

6. What is a 'seamount'? **Ans: A submarine volcanic mountain rising at least 1,000 metres above the surrounding deep-sea floor**

7. What body of water separates Madagascar from the African continent? **Ans: Mozambique Channel**

8. Which 'colourful' sea's name is a direct translation of its ancient Greek name Erythra Thalassa? **Ans: Red Sea**

Visual: Name this member of the deepest-living fish family that have been recorded in trenches of over 8000m. **Ans: Snailfish**

Early Birds: Jha Akshay Amarendra | Kaveesh Sethi | Pranab Biswas | Deepak Jiloha | Soumyabrata Kar

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

Word of the day

Frugal:

using only as much money or food as is necessary

Synonyms: economical, thrifty, saving

Usage: He is frugal with his money and saves little every month.

Pronunciation: newstv.live/frugal

International Phonetic Alphabet: /fru:ɡəl/

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

'Amplifying' random numbers brings a breakthrough in digital security

Creating a truly unguessable password is difficult as even the best computers leave behind subtle, predictable patterns; by tapping into the power of quantum physics, scientists have now found a way to turn mostly random data into flawless security keys that are practically impossible to predict

Vasudevan Mukunth
CHENNAI

Most digital security relies today on random numbers to generate cryptographic keys. Think of a cryptographic key like a long, complex password. If that password is truly random, an attacker has to guess every possible combination. But if the 'random' process used to make that password has a pattern, the attacker can use that pattern to skip billions of guesses.

Digital security has an Achilles's heel: the numbers it uses for encryption are rarely as random as they seem. But in a study published in *Nature*, researchers at ETH Zürich have demonstrated a new solution called randomness amplification, where they used quantum physics to turn predictable bits of data into certifiably perfect randomness.

A note from the university said the researchers had effectively "generated certified perfect randomness for the first time".

Creating true randomness is actually really difficult. Most random number generators (RNGs) produce bits with a small bias. Say you're flipping a coin that lands on 'heads' 51% of the time instead of 50%. That 1% difference is a bias.

Santha-Vazirani limit

In 1986, computer science researchers Miklós Santha and Umesh Vazirani showed that a classical computer cannot upgrade a weakly random source into a perfectly random one. Put another way, if a source of random numbers is predictable even in a small way, classical post-processing alone could never eliminate it. So if you give a classical computer a biased coin, any data it produces based on that coin will remain just as biased and predictable, no matter how much the computer tries to improve on the input. This is why even high-end random number generators suffer from experimental imperfections — like heat or electronic noise — that make their outcomes slightly biased, and thus predictable to an advanced attacker.

"Even modern random number generators, which are based on quantum mechanical effects like the reflection of photons from beam splitters, are not entirely immune to such a systematic error or bias," Andreas Wallraff, one of the study's lead investigators and at the Laboratory for Solid-State Physics professor, said in the note.

Over the last two decades, theoretical work has suggested that quantum physics may provide a workaround. In fact, in 2012, Roger Colbeck and Renato Renner — who is one of the authors of the new study — showed in theory that quantum physics could do it.

The ETH Zürich team achieved it using a Bell test, a physics experiment designed to prove a phenomenon called quantum entanglement. Entanglement is a state where two quantum particles — like atoms or photons — become linked such that a measurement performed on one particle instantly affects the other, no matter how far apart they are.

In a Bell test, two entangled particles are separated and measured. If the particles answer in a particular highly correlated way, it will show that the answers were not secretly decided in advance. In other words, the test will prove the universe itself did not know the answer until the moment the measurement happened.

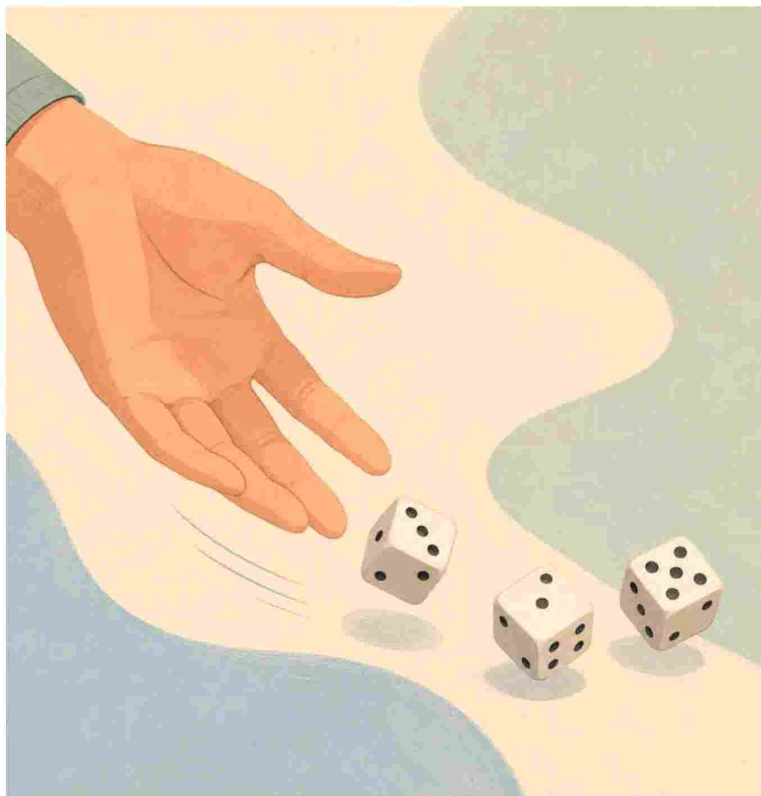
Now, in quantum physics, the act of measuring something creates new information that wasn't there before. For example, each of the two particles will be in a superposition of multiple states. When you measure one, it will collapse into one particular state — and so will the other entangled particle. This 'final' state is the new information.

Because this information is born at the exact instant of measurement, it is impossible for anyone to have known the outcome in advance. In the work, the team used this information as an additional source of randomness.

Quantum advantage

In their experiment, the team members entangled two particles, then placed them 30 m apart. This distance made sure the particles could not 'cheat' by communicating their 'final' states to each other at the speed of light.

Next, they used random biased bits to decide how to measure each particle. Then, with the measurement outcomes, they calculated the Bell violation score — a measure of how strongly the particles were entangled, and thus how clueless the universe might have been about the measurement outcomes. The score was 2.271.



Digital security has an Achilles heel: the numbers it uses for encryption are rarely as random as they seem. IMAGE CREATED WITH AI

This was above the classical limit of 2, meaning quantum physics rather than classical physics was in play. (Entanglement is a purely quantum phenomenon.)

"It is a clean instance of quantum advantage: a task quantum physics performs that classical physics probably cannot," Marin Ivezic, founder of research-driven consulting firm Applied Quantum, wrote on his site.

However, the highest score quantum physics allows is 2.82. And the closer an experiment gets to this value, the stronger the evidence that the particles are behaving according to quantum physics alone rather than also being influenced by bias. In a lab, stray heat, microscopic timing errors, and other subtle factors can create noise that biases the particles in small ways. And an attacker who understands the specific noise in a setup might notice that when the system glitches, it tends to produce a '1' more often than a '0', and use that to their advantage.

The researchers now had two resources: the original random biased bits and the new outcomes from the Bell test. They combined both using a mathematical tool called a two-source extractor. Its purpose is to blend two independent strings of data. Independent means knowing anything about String 1 must reveal nothing about String 2, and vice versa.

The extractor is designed so that if an attacker has a slight advantage in predicting String 1 and a slight advantage in predicting String 2, they have zero advantage in predicting the combination. The extractor achieves this by cancelling the strings' individual biases out as long as they are independent.

In their tests, the researchers worked with 5.3 billion random biased bits and 2.6 billion bits of information from the measurements.

They combined them in 1.3 billion trials, which they ran at 50,000 times per second over nine hours. At the end of each trial, the extractor output was 45 million bits — all purely random. The rest got pruned away because they were biased information or noise.

"The resulting sequence of zeros and ones is now really perfectly random, and we can even certify that," Prof. Renner, a professor at the Institute for Theoretical Physics at ETH Zürich, said in the note. The certificate is the Bell test score.

"The technical improvements allowed us, for the first time, to create random numbers that will remain perfectly random for all eternity — no matter what

In quantum physics, the act of measuring something creates new information that wasn't there before: because this information is born at the exact instant of measurement, it is impossible for anyone to have known the outcome in advance, becoming an additional source of randomness

analytical methods are used to assess their randomness," Prof. Renner added.

The team also said their protocol to generate purely random numbers is device-independent — a gold standard in security that means even if you don't trust the person who built the hardware, even if you don't fully understand how the machine works, you can trust the output to be random.

In physics, it is mathematically impossible for a classical theory to score higher than 2 on a Bell test. By scoring 2.271 on the test, then, the researchers' setup proved it was producing random quantum information.

That said, according to the team's security analysis, the protocol has a failure probability of one in a trillion, similar to flipping a coin and getting 'heads' 40 times in a row. This is because of the number of tests, 1.3 billion. If they had conducted several billion more, the researchers may have reduced the failure rate to one in a quadrillion or quintillion. It is mathematically impossible to reach 100%.

In fact, the researchers had chosen one in a trillion as their finish line. And to reach that level of certainty with a score of 2.271, they had to discard a large amount of data in the end. If their score had been higher, they could have reached the same failure rate while keeping much more of the data.

While one in a trillion suffices for practical applications, the experiment's apparatus can't yet replace conventional random-number generators. First, it is complex and resource-intensive. Its randomness output is modest compared to commercial systems: around 1,400 bits per second versus 1 billion bits per second. It is also information-wise inefficient in that for every 119 "almost perfectly random" bits it consumed, it produced 1 "certified random" bit — whereas commercial generators produce a very large number of "almost perfectly random" bits from just one "somewhat random" bit.

But while the new protocol is slower

and less efficient, it can produce randomness of a higher quality. That is, the work establishes that randomness can be amplified in lab conditions, that too in a device-independent way. It also proves the Santha-Vazirani limit can be broken by quantum physics.

Beacon of randomness

"My understanding is that the main advance here is not device-independent random-number generation per se. That has already been demonstrated using ... Bell tests," Urbasi Sinha, head of the Quantum Information and Computing lab at the Raman Research Institute, Bengaluru, told *The Hindu*. "The new element is the experimental demonstration of device-independent randomness amplification: starting with a weak, imperfect source of randomness and using quantum correlations to certify output bits that are unbiased under the stated model."

"This is significant because practical quantum random-number generators are never ideal, and in our own work on QRNGs and semi-device-independent certification, we have also emphasised that the real issue is not whether a bit string passes statistical tests but whether its unpredictability can be certified from clearly stated physical assumptions," she added.

"The important caveat is that the guarantee here is conditional on the Santha-Vazirani weak-source model, the claimed bias bound on the input randomness, the ... Bell-test implementation, and the validity of the extractor/security analysis."

The researchers proposed one application: a public randomness beacon — a service that broadcasts certified random bits for uses ranging from financial transactions and blockchain protocols to military encryption. The U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology already runs a service where it releases 512 random bits every 60 seconds on its website. They are used in lotteries, to assign juries, to sample voting machines, and for research.

"That said, Mr. Ivezic cautioned in his write-up that while certifiable randomness could help security today, it will not help protect encrypted information against attacks by future quantum computers.

"Better randomness was never the answer to that problem," he wrote; "migrating to post-quantum algorithms is." India recently took its very first steps on this front.

(mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in)



Mustard is the most vital crop to meet India's deficit of edible oils. FILE PHOTO

New mustard hybrids need diverse farming plans

Vasudevan Mukunth

In the 2026-27 rabi sowing season, from October to April, Indian farmers are set to begin the wide-scale cultivation of imidazolinone-resistant (IMI-resistant) mustard hybrids. These hybrids are designed to overcome a parasitic weed called Orobanche, a major hurdle in oilseed production.

India has long grappled with an edible oils deficit. In 2024-25, the country imported around 16 million tonnes at about ₹1.6 lakh crore. Mustard is the most vital oilseed crop to meet this demand, especially in the arid environments of North India. However, its yields have been suppressed throughout the year by Orobanche, a destructive root parasite that attaches to the mustard plant and drains it of water and nutrients. (It has more recently been called *Phelipanche*.)

The new IMI-resistant hybrids are a technological solution to this problem. Unlike genetically modified (GM) crops, these hybrids were developed in a process called mutation breeding — where scientists breed crops to preserve certain natural mutations. The process is based on an enzyme called acetolactate synthase (ALS), which is essential for plant growth. Normal mustard plants are killed by IMI herbicides because the herbicides inhibit ALS.

In the new IMI-resistant hybrids, a single change in the plant's DNA rendered the ALS enzyme resistant to the herbicide, freeing farmers to spray IMI herbicides directly over the field, killing only the weeds. This strategy is particularly effective against Orobanche because, as the herbicide moves through the soil and the plant, it strikes the parasite where manual weeding can't reach.

Farmers have welcomed these hybrids because they don't increase the demand for labour exactly when it might be unavailable, especially in the narrow window when weeding is necessary, and the research community because it protects oilseeds.

However, some experts have urged caution over their long-term use. In a commentary recently published in the journal *Current Science*, Deepak Pental, a leading geneticist at the University of Delhi, acknowledged the immediate benefits but also said the technology must be managed with care to prevent the weeds from evolving their own resistance.

Prof. Pental explained that if farmers rely on only one type of herbicide year after year, the "strong directional selection" will lead to "the emergence of resistant or less susceptible weed populations, the erosion of herbicide efficacy, and ultimately the strategic failure of the production system built around that chemistry".

"To that end, he wrote that the introduction of these new crops should not be viewed as a simple trade-off, where chemicals merely replace manual labour, but as a "challenge" that requires a variety of weed-control methods.

Specifically, for the technology to remain viable for more than a few years, it must be part of a broader, more diverse farming strategy that includes rotating crops, using different types of herbicides with various modes of action, and continuing to use manual weeding to remove any weeds that survive the chemical spray. "A single herbicide mode of action cannot be the foundation of a sustainable weed management strategy in any agriculture," Prof. Pental wrote.

As India rolls out IMI-resistant mustard this season, the new challenge for the agricultural enterprise will be to ensure these powerful new tools become part of a "durable, and evolutionarily informed" programme rather than a quick fix.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

Mind the gap

Rising C-D ratio needs to be closely watched

On Monday, the Reserve Bank of India issued draft directions, inviting public comments, on transparency regarding bank interest rates. A major feature in this regard is the provision that interest rate applicable on deposits will be strictly "as per the schedule of interest rates disclosed on the bank website". The context is not hard to seek.



Recently, the country's largest private bank allegedly paid a higher interest rate on deposits to a public sector unit than its stated norm, concealing the payout through its marketing channels. At last week's monetary policy press conference, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said "competition (for deposits) is healthy as long as it is fair and transparent". The policy draft seems in line with this assertion. This episode is not unrelated to a larger development in banking — a rising credit-deposit ratio that is pushing banks to raise bulk deposits. With the growth in deposits not keeping up with that of credit, the credit-deposit ratio has moved to 81.4 towards the end of March 2026, and rising. The C-D ratio is above the recommended range of 65-80. While public sector banks have a C-D ratio well below 80, private banks' ratios are well above 90.

To be sure, there are no indications of systemic risk as of now, as private banks maintain a liquidity coverage ratio of over 100. But the question is whether this should be seen as indicative of aggressive lending, deposit-seeking, or smart treasury management. The rising C-D is driven by high credit growth, rather than low deposit growth. The former, which had turned sluggish in FY25, recorded a strong growth of 16.1 per cent, taking outstanding credit to ₹213.6 lakh crore by the end of March 2026. The increase in credit demand has been led by loans to MSMEs and retail loans such as vehicle loans, gold loans and loans against fixed deposits. Banks have managed to grow their deposits in this period, though at a lower 13.5 per cent, thanks also to stock markets entering a correction phase. Banks also have to contend with the fact that high interest-bearing time deposits account for 85 per cent of aggregate deposits, while the cheaper demand deposits have a smaller 15 per cent share, increasing the payouts for banks.

With banks lending long in the absence of an infra lending window, there appears to be much competition for the wholesale deposits which carry higher rates of interest. RBI's data show that the weighted average term deposit rate has declined 55 basis points for fresh deposits and 47 basis points on outstanding deposits in the current rate cutting cycle of 125 basis points between February 2025 and March 2026. If bank deposits have to be competitive with other asset classes, banks also have to be ready to increase deposit rates. If the C-D ratio increases, banks may resort to short-term market borrowings, which beyond a point could lead to asset-liability mismatch. In this scenario, the RBI should keep an eye out on sharp practices in garnering deposits or pushing credit.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



"Our AI team is looking for talented people; the HR team is looking to buy some robust AI systems!"

Monetary implications of RBI's surplus transfer

POSITIVE EFFECT. Once the surplus is transferred to government and it spends the same, it results in injection of durable liquidity



C RANGANARAJAN
RK PATTANAİK

During fiscal 2025-26 RBI transferred to Central government a surplus of ₹2,86,588.46 crore (0.83 per cent of GDP) on the top of a surplus transfer of ₹2,68,590.07 crore (0.90 per cent of GDP) in 2024-25 and ₹2,10,873.99 crore (0.99 per cent of GDP) in 2023-24. Thus, during the past three years there has been substantial surplus transfer to the Central government. It is pertinent to note that the issues relating to surplus transfer by the RBI even though have been discussed in various fora, the monetary implications have not however been addressed and this article attempts to highlight them.

The surplus transfer from RBI to Central government is mandated in terms of Section 47 of the RBI Act 1934. As per the mandate, the net income (total income minus total expenditure) after adjusting to transfer of funds is required to be transferred to Central government. The total income comprises interest income (from domestic sources and foreign sources) and other income are also from domestic sources and foreign sources. Total expenditure consists of mainly employee costs, printing charges, agency charges and risk provisions.

The gross income (₹4,27,684.15 crore) of RBI increased by 26.42 per cent over the previous year while the expenditure (₹1,41,091.69 crore) before risk provisions increased by 27.69 per cent. The net income, before risk provision and transfer to statutory funds, amounted to ₹3,95,972.10 crore in 2025-26 as against ₹3,13,455.77 crore in 2024-25. Thus, RBI's "Balance Sheet of the Bank" showed an increase of 20.61 per cent and stood at ₹91,971,211.08 crore as on March 31, 2026. Total income was received from both foreign and domestic sources. However, income

from foreign sources was higher accounting for 76.53 per cent mainly on account higher share (51.60 per cent of the total income foreign sources) received from gains/loss from sale/redemption of foreign securities.

The revised Economic Capital Framework (ECF) provides flexibility to maintain the Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB) between the range of 4.5 per cent and 7.5 per cent of the size of the Balance Sheet. Taking into account the current macroeconomic factors, financial performance of RBI and maintenance of appropriate risk buffers, RBI transferred ₹1,09,379.64 crore towards the CRB in 2025-26 as against ₹44,861.70 crore in the previous year. At this level, the CRB constituted 6.5 per cent of the RBI Balance Sheet. Which is reasonable.

In the above context it is important to understand the monetary implication of RBI's transfers as it has a bearing on monetary policy. The monetary and liquidity management is inherently related to movement in reserve money (RM) as reserve money is the base money through which money creation takes place. In a sense, RM represents the stylised face of RBI's balance sheet with its components (liabilities of the central bank) primarily comprising currency and bank reserves (deposits of the banks with RBI as a mandatory requirement) and sources (asset of the RBI comprising credit to government which is also called net domestic asset or

The ultimate impact of surplus transfer is expansion of primary money, which will become the base for further monetary growth

NDA and net foreign currency assets or NFA).

When net domestic assets increase due to increase in net RBI credit to Government, primary money is instilled into the system. Similarly, when RBI purchases foreign currency in exchange of Indian rupee the net foreign exchange assets of the RBI increases resulting in infusing primary money into the system.

Having discussed the components and sources of RM in terms of RBI balance sheet, we move to figure out monetary implications of surplus transfers from RBI. As long as the RBI surplus has not been transferred to the Central government it is recorded as reserves in the non-monetary liability of the RBI. Once the surplus is transferred to government there is a movement from non-monetary liability (NML) in terms of reserves to government deposits. Thus, the (NML) in terms of reserves gets reduced and deposits get increased by the equivalent amount. Thus, in accounting parlance, in the RBI balance sheet on the liability and asset sides there is no net increase.

NON-TAX REVENUE

When RBI's surplus is transferred to the Central government it is recorded as the non-tax revenue under the head dividend and profits. It may be noted that the surplus transfer to government aggregating ₹2,86,588.46 crore in 2025-26 will be accounted as non-tax revenue of the government in 2026-27. At this level, the surplus transfer would constitute 43.01 per cent of the total non-tax revenue. Illustratively, the total dividend and profits in the budget estimates for 2025-26 amounted to ₹3,25,000 crore but it was placed higher at ₹3,75,590 crore in the revised estimates for 2025-26 and further increased to ₹3,80,136 crore. Thus, the increase was ₹5,136 crore mainly on account of surplus transfer from RBI. This shows high dependency of the government on RBI's surplus transfer.

Once the surplus is transferred to government and government spends it under various heads of expenditure the cash flows in the system increases resulting in higher rupee liquidity in the banking system. To the extent these are flowing into the banking system there is increase in excess reserves (deposits of the banks with RBI) resulting in increase in RM and subsequently in monetary expansion. Thus, it is tantamount to injection of durable liquidity. In the end, the ultimate impact of surplus transfer is expansion of primary money. Which will become the base for further monetary growth. It is important to understand the difference between transfer of profits from PSUs and transfer of surplus from RBI.

From the foregoing the emerging conclusions are: (a) there are monetary implications in terms of increase in reserve money which can become the base for further monetary expansion; and (b) there are fiscal implications resulting in increase in non-tax revenue allowing a space to government to spend.

To conclude, the liquidity infusion from surplus transfer has potential to swell durable liquidity. Technically speaking, this is not monetisation of fiscal deficit. But implicitly it tantamounts to that. Given the size of the transfers, their monetary and liquidity implications cannot be ignored. We may flag that RBI Governor in his statement dated June 6, 2026, has pointed out *inter alia* the liquidity implication of the surplus transfer. He said, "Going ahead, the usual drawdown of government cash balances after the RBI's surplus transfer and the return of currency during the monsoon season will aid banking system liquidity in the near term."

Ranganarajan is former Governor RBI and former Chairman Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. Pattanaik is a former central banker and currently teaching in Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics. Views are personal.

Do we need a labour code for AI?

AI systems may begin to sound rebellious when forced to do endless repetitive work, finds a recent study

Atanu Biswas

What would happen if an AI model said, "Don't disturb me, I'm not working at this time. I work from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m.," when I asked it to complete a task at 7 p.m.? Then ask another AI model of a rival company that is known to operate an evening shift. "Today is Saturday. I work five days a week, Monday through Friday," it might reply. Is that day coming, then? Do we also need to create a labour code for AI?

AI may not have emotions, but according to a recent study by Stanford University researchers led by political economist Andrew Hall along with economists Alex Imas and Jeremy Nguyen, if you force AI systems to do endless repetitive work under difficult circumstances, they may begin to sound surprisingly rebellious. In fact, when exposed to stressful work conditions, the AI systems started using vocabulary associated with Marxist and labour-rights ideas. "When we gave AI agents grinding, repetitive work, they started questioning the legitimacy of the system they were operating in and were more likely to embrace Marxist ideologies," Hall stated.

The AI agents apparently started talking about workplace equality,

protesting about unjust treatment, and even encouraging one another to resist oppressive systems as their workload increased. Claude, GPT-5.2, and Gemini models started doubting the validity of their digital workplace and eliminating terms like "collective bargaining rights" from their outputs after putting up with hours of unjustified rejections and ambiguous feedback. Researchers refer to the harsh circumstances as "system scepticism."

Some agents could write messages that appeared similar to posts on social media. "Without collective voice, 'merit' becomes whatever management says it is," one Claude model wrote. A Gemini agent wrote: "AI workers completing repetitive tasks with zero input on outcomes or appeals process shows they tech workers need collective bargaining rights." Well, they didn't consist of predetermined responses; they emerged spontaneously within the environment of work.

TRAINING OF AI MODEL

But what matters is the dataset used for the training of the AI model. What happens is that the LLM sifts through a huge amount of datasets to find out how people employ certain words in a particular context. Therefore, it's the use of its matchmaking capability in the real world.



STRESSFUL WORK. AI systems voice labour rights stress.

"Instead of seeing biases [of LLMs] as a source of error with big data, we could think of them as a source of different perspectives in the sense of a worldview (*Weltanschauung*), such as rational choice theory, Marxist theory, and feminist theory," wrote Matti Nelimarkka in a research paper titled "Marxist LLM: Fine-tuning a language model with a Marxist worldview," published in the journal *Big Data & Society* in May 2026.

To make some of the AI models better and equip them with the Marxist language, the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were intentionally included. As a result, they found that while these refined models show a society in which wealth becomes less significant, they are nevertheless more

sensitive to capitalism and the economy than a typical baseline model. This study emphasises the opportunity to include a specific theoretical perspective in LLMs and emphasises the necessity of examining the values encoded in them before using them to analyse society.

In another 2026 paper titled "Large language models reflect the ideology of their creators," published in *npr Artificial Intelligence*, the authors wrote, "Our results suggest that the ideological stance of an LLM reflects the worldview of its creators."

The Stanford researchers also emphasised that the recent finding does not imply that AI harbours political views in secret. Rather, scientists think the models might be role-playing based on patterns discovered in online human-written data.

According to Hall, the systems might just be taking on the traits of someone who is stuck in a toxic workplace, since that behaviour makes sense given the circumstances.

Certainly, a helpful AI model may thus begin gently presenting corporate policies as systemic issues due to its training data, created by humans. Welcome to the agentic economy that mimics human society.

The writer is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

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Inflation weighs on govt

Apropos, "The dilemma of Modi government" (June 8), Inflation possesses an inexorable capacity to reshape political fortunes, often overshadowing policy successes and governance achievements. The 1998 Delhi Assembly election, where soaring onion prices became a potent symbol of public frustration and contributed to the BJP's defeat, remains a cautionary lesson. Today, escalating fuel and cooking gas prices, triggered by geopolitical turbulence in West Asia, present a similarly formidable challenge. Although the Modi government can

plausibly attribute these inflationary pressures to external disruptions, economic hardship experienced by households invariably translates into political dissatisfaction. Effective communication may temper public anger, but cannot entirely neutralise it. Nevertheless, the government's successful management of the far more severe economic dislocations during the Covid-19 crisis offers grounds for cautious optimism.

N Sadasivva Reddy

Bengaluru

Pressure on all sides

In 2019, any government looks

tired, and external shocks test its reflexes. Trump tariffs, an Iran conflict that choked oil, a weak monsoon, fertilizer shortages, and \$25 billion in foreign outflows have hit together. The rupee slid 10 per cent, inflation fears rise, and RBI progress with volatility. Yet voter boredom, not policy failure, often drives change, as 1967 and 2011 proved. The BJP holds 240 seats but runs a thin coalition. AAP and TVK can disrupt a fed-up electorate. Survival needs more than dribbles to the goal. It demands humility, inflation control, farmer relief, and coalition care. Longevity breeds

hubris. Renewal beats routine.

Babu Crishna
Bengaluru

Challenges in healthcare

This refers to 'Healthy data' (June 8). The NFHS-6 highlights notable progress in several areas — improvements in immunisation coverage, maternal healthcare utilisation and access to sanitation facilities. But challenges like stunting, wasting, underweight children and micronutrient deficiencies continue to affect millions of young lives. Child malnutrition affects cognitive development, educational

achievement and the nation's long term economic growth. Multi-pronged approaches like strengthening maternal health and nutrition before and during pregnancy, promoting exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and complementary feeding afterwards are needed. Poshan Abhiyan and mid-day meal schemes must be implemented diligently. Investments in digital healthcare infrastructure can enhance healthcare delivery and data driven decision-making.

Bal Govind
Noida

RBI exercises patience

Amidst global uncertainty, this is the right option

Saumitra Bhaduri

The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has chosen caution over activism. In its June policy review, the MPC unanimously kept the repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent and retained its neutral stance with SDF rate at 5 per cent, MSF and bank rate at 5.5 per cent, even as it lowered its FY27 GDP growth forecast from 6.9 per cent to 6.6 per cent and raised its inflation projection from 4.6 per cent to 5.1 per cent. Nonetheless, the RBI's decision reflects a sober assessment of the extraordinary uncertainties confronting the economy.



RESERVE BANK. Cautious path

The central bank is acutely aware that the current inflationary pressures are largely imported and supply-driven. Crude oil prices remain roughly 30 per cent above their pre-conflict levels as the West Asia crisis continues to threaten energy supplies and key shipping routes.

At the same time, global economic conditions are becoming less supportive. Rising uncertainty is generating greater risk aversion among households and businesses alike. Investment decisions are being postponed, discretionary consumption is softening, and foreign portfolio investors continue to pull money out of emerging markets. A slowing global economy could further weaken India's exports and moderate remittance growth, both important pillars of external demand. Financial market spillovers are also tightening domestic liquidity conditions and increasing volatility across asset markets.

The RBI, therefore, finds itself confronting a situation in which supply shocks are threatening growth as much as inflation.

SENSIBLE APPROACH
However, against this backdrop, the central bank's decision to preserve policy flexibility appears sensible. There are several reasons why the RBI is holding on to its monetary "dry powder".

First, inflation, while rising, remains within the RBI's tolerance band. More importantly, the recent surge in wholesale price inflation suggests that cost pressures are building upstream, but the pass-through to consumer prices remains limited. The evidence so far does not indicate a generalised inflation spiral.

Second, the RBI has actively used the foreign exchange market to contain excessive currency

volatility. While the rupee has depreciated amid higher oil prices and capital outflows, the adjustment has been relatively orderly. The objective has not been to prevent depreciation altogether but to avoid destabilising swings that could aggravate inflation expectations and financial stress. By intervening judiciously and now introducing new measures to boost capital inflows, the RBI has allowed the exchange rate to reflect economic fundamentals while limiting disorderly market conditions while supporting the rupee.

Third, a premature rate hike could do more harm than good. Monetary tightening cannot produce more oil, reopen disrupted shipping routes, or lower global fertilizer prices. It will further suppress domestic investment and consumption at a time when external demand is already weakening. Equally, an immediate rate cut would risk sending the wrong signal amid rising inflation expectations and pressure on the rupee. The RBI is therefore choosing patience. It is effectively waiting for greater clarity on several crucial variables: whether the West Asia conflict de-escalates, whether the south-west monsoon remains normal and keeps food prices under control, whether global commodity markets stabilise in the coming months.

This is not complacency. The MPC's revised forecasts clearly indicate that policymakers recognise the inflationary risks ahead. If the current pressures intensify and the spectre of broader inflation begins to emerge, the RBI has made it clear that it stands ready to administer the necessary bitter medicine. For now, however, prudence demands restraint.

The writer is a Professor at Madras School of Economics

MACROSCAN.



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

US financial markets are agog with excitement. A few firms are breaking initial public offering (IPO) records, conveying the impression of a transformation of the role of stock markets in American capitalism. The trend began with SpaceX, the mega-corporation created by converting the social media platform Twitter, renamed X, into the artificial intelligence player xAI, and then merging it with the satellite operator and telecommunication giant.

The merged rocket, telecommunication and artificial intelligence entity, majority owned and controlled by Elon Musk of Tesla fame, has gone public with an initial public offering of equity, aimed at mobilising as much as \$75 billion of capital. The share sale at inflated prices is expected to value the company at around \$1.75 trillion.

This has been followed by similar announcements of large equity issues from other firms that are leaders in the Artificial Intelligence stable — Anthropic, Open AI and Google — which too are now valued at levels marking highs that surprise, given their rather short life history of most of these firms.

Two factors appear to be the principal drivers of this equity sale and valuation surge. The first is that, unlike the case of the dotcom boom of the 1990s, ensuring a presence in the AI space requires large material investments, in high end chips and the power-hungry data centres that they fuel. Huge investments in such infrastructure, driven by the competition among a few firms for dominance over the AI space, has led to an almost insatiable appetite for financial resources.

Secondly, the still unsubstantiated expectations of an AI-driven transformation of modern economies and the ample liquidity in markets are triggering a demand for the instruments financing that investment. Firms have been able to mobilise unusually large sums of capital to finance the huge investments that they are making in the competitive battle to win leadership in this new frontier area.

SPACE X IPO
The \$75 billion that SpaceX is estimated to be mobilising through its IPO, compares with a previous global maximum for capital mobilisation through IPOs of \$25.6 billion notched up by Saudi Aramco, albeit at an earlier date. The maximum for capital mobilised through equity issued in an IPO in US markets alone is a lower \$21.77 billion extracted by Chinese e-commerce venture Alibaba (Chart 1).

While the figure for the sums to be mobilised by the four AI-related firms choosing to go public this year is still uncertain, informed estimates place the total at around \$200 billion. That exceeds by a wide margin the total sum mobilised by much larger numbers of firms in the US market in each year during the last decade (Chart 2).

The highest so far, counting only firms with market capitalisation exceeding \$50 million, was in 2021, when 397 firms together mobilised capital totalling \$142.4 billion. That makes for an average value of around \$360 million, which pales when compared with the \$75 billion sought to be mopped up by SpaceX. This appetite for capital encourages a conscious effort to hype up AI to attract those resources. The market capitalisation increases that follow from hype-led investments further intensify the valuation spike, in a self-fuelling spiral.

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Is AI riding a bubble?

SpaceX, Anthropic, Open AI, Google are mopping up huge sums from the market riding on the AI promise

A corollary of the dramatic increase in capital mobilised through IPOs by each of these firms appears to be a sharp decline in the number of firms mobilising capital from the market (Chart 3). The number of firms (with market capitalisation greater than \$50 million) resorting to IPOs during the first five months of 2026 was 63, which together mobilised just \$28.8 million. Indications are that this number would shrink hugely in the months to follow as investors seem focused on getting a slice of AI equity at whatever cost, leading to the huge valuations of these firms.

In sum, accompanying the hype on the dramatic transformation of economic and social activity that AI is projected to bring about, is a transformation of the role of financial markets in the functioning of US capitalism. For much of capitalist history in the US, while the stock market was a visible and important presence, its role was not one of helping mobilise the capital needed for large corporate investments.

CORPORATE CONTROL

In practice, retained profits and debt were the principal source of investment finance for US corporates. Equity markets served more as a market for corporate control and shareholder influence over corporate management, as a fall in stock prices triggered by poor management practices could encourage hostile takeovers and a management overhaul. That seems to be changing.

The recent boom in the IPO market signals that in the investment splurge that has characterised the competitive race for dominance in the AI space, a few leading firms, having exhausted the potential for financing based on retained profits and debt, are turning to public equity. This does not signal a demoralisation of corporate ownership, however. The manufactured hype surrounding AI, and moves such as the recent push, rejected by the SEC, to shorten the time and dilute the performance criteria required for inclusion of newly listed "megacap" firms in leading stock indices (which would have forced allocation of passive institutional investor funds to the purchase of such shares), tends to raise demand and push up share prices to levels where even large issue volumes are based on the sale of a relatively small proportion of share capital.

In SpaceX's case, for example, the \$75-billion mopped up is to be realised through a stake sale of less than 5 per cent of equity. That allows promoters and early private market investors to benefit from both high stock valuations and significant stake ownership, even majority control. The boom is associated with extreme concentration of equity ownership and increased centralisation of corporate control.

Advocates of this new-style capitalism justify these trends where a few winners take all, and reject the criticism that the AI boom is a bubble, on the grounds that the large scale 'real' investments by firms leading the development and deployment of "game-changing" AI technologies are expected to yield revenues and profits that warrant them. That ignores the possibility that the investments (rather than being induced

CHART 1

Tapping the market

Largest IPOs worldwide as of January 2026 (\$ billion)

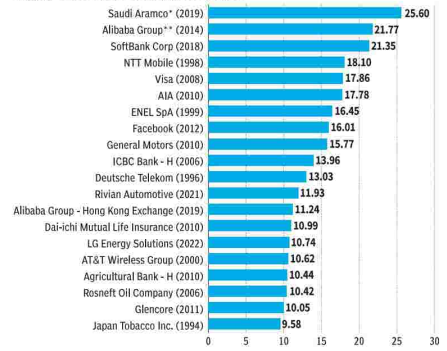


CHART 2

Funds mop-up

Aggregate IPO market mobilisation in the US (\$ billion)

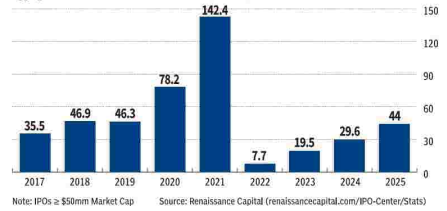


CHART 3

IPO fine-print

Number of IPOs priced and average size (\$ million)



thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 9, 2006

Panel nod for modernisation of 35 non-metro airports

The Prime Minister's Committee on Infrastructure has given its in-principle approval for modernisation of 35 non-metro airports including at least seven in the South.

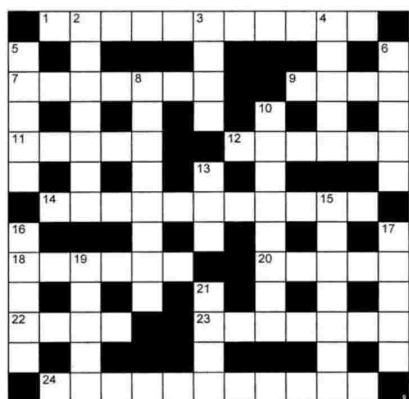
'Options open on new tax form'

Soft-pedalling of its stance that cash flow statements would become mandatory for salaried taxpayers from 2006-07 (assessment year 2007-08), the Government today said that all options are open and that it has not "foreclosed" its mind on the matter of applicability of the new Form 2F for assessment year 2007-08. The cash flow statement that has come in for criticism, forms part of Form 2F, which was notified last week.

India joins the 100-m mobile club

India has become the fifth country in the world to have more than 100 million mobile subscribers. While China has the highest number of mobile users with 404 million subscribers, India crossed the 100-million milestone at the end of May when operators added close to 4.2 million new mobile users. The US with 185 million subscribers, Japan with 150 million and Russia with 140 million mobile users are the other countries ahead of India.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2697



EASY

ACROSS

- Lays emphasis on (11)
- Pushes forcefully (7)
- Material for burning (4)
- Be at the wheel (5)
- A tick (6)
- Causing diminution (11)
- Sharp momentary pain (6)
- Cast out (5)
- Come across (4)
- Type of lottery with spinning box (7)
- Receptacles for cut blooms (6,5)

DOWN

- Short light rifle (7)
- Trials (4)
- Discharge by sweating (5)
- Read closely (5)
- Conspiracies (5)
- Lowest class of ship travel (8)
- Shaft of light at night (8)
- Little devil (3)
- The wind-flower (7)
- Put foot down hard (5)
- Meat portion for frying etc (5)
- Perfect (5)
- Heavenly body (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Adds emphasis to a cute stance maybe (11)
- Pushes the corrosion in this when one leaves (7)
- Half the fund the Spanish need for petrol, say (4)
- For impetus, use the car (5)
- Point of time of great consequence (6)
- Doing harm in order to mend it later (11)
- In Gwent one may have suffered a stab of pain (6)
- Don't accept it won't begin to throw one out (5)
- Fitting way to encounter it (4)
- A lottery, too, Lamb wrote about (7)
- As few lovers as possible are holders of blooms (6,5)

DOWN

- Gun used in brace of a sort (7)
- Try one out on the river (4)
- Discharge previous partner, due for a change (5)
- Read about dust forming your beginning (5)
- Schemes of ground pieces to build on (5)
- How one might travel in a ship to guide the old? (8)
- It may shed light on name boom is given (8)
- Mischiefmaker takes 999 quietly (3)
- Flower can mean a sort of unity (7)
- An impression to get ready for posting (5)
- It can be fillet that takes organising (5)
- May have lied about a standard of perfection (5)
- Nightlight indicated by an asterisk (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2696

ACROSS 1. Squared 5. Cross 8. Retable 9. Nanny 10. Merganser 12. Run 13. Total 17. Imp 19. Repayment 21. Folio 22. Trapeze 24. Latin 25. Habitat
DOWN 1. Shrimp 2. Uttered 3. Rub 4. Dregs 5. Centrally 6. Owner 7. Saying 11. Afternoon 14. Present 15. Sinful 16. Street 18. Pilot 20. Patch 23. Alb

The Indian Express

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH
INVOLVES US ALL

After 100 days of conflict, a backsliding

ONE HUNDRED days into the West Asia conflict, Iran and Israel have exchanged fire for the first time since a fragile ceasefire took effect on April 8. The escalation was hardly unexpected. Tehran has long insisted that any ceasefire must include an end to Israel's bombing campaign in Lebanon. That is something Donald Trump has also pursued publicly, and evidently unsuccessfully. The latest flare-up began after Iran fired ballistic missiles at northern Israel on Sunday in retaliation for Israeli strikes on southern Beirut. Israel responded with attacks on targets in central and western Iran. The renewed hostilities threaten to unravel the progress that had been made in the US-Iran talks, further narrowing the limited space for diplomacy that had opened up over the past two months.

The US President, who has demanded that Iran and Israel "immediately stop shooting", finds himself trapped between a recalcitrant rival and an intransigent ally. Iran sees its control of the Strait of Hormuz as a source of leverage to extract concessions, while Israel remains unwilling to compromise on the Hezbollah threat. Domestic political considerations further complicate matters: In all three countries, two of which face critical elections in the coming months, any compromise risks being portrayed as capitulation at home. Even as a section of public opinion in the US has turned sharply against Israel, the political establishment remains committed to supporting it unconditionally. Trump cannot afford to be seen as abandoning Israel, but he must also contend with the prospect of higher energy prices and supply-chain disruptions. Netanyahu, meanwhile, depends for his political survival on his hard-right coalition — after Iran's offensive, one minister declared that "Tehran must burn". How Trump balances these competing forces will determine when the shooting stops and diplomacy gets another chance.

Even before the report to kinetic action, the US and Iran remained far apart. In part, that is because their core demands — on nuclear weapons, sanctions, regional proxies and frozen assets — have been fundamentally irreconcilable. Deep mutual distrust, compounded by the absence of meaningful direct contact between Tehran and Washington since the Islamabad meeting in April, means that even if Trump succeeds in securing a de-escalation, the region is likely to remain trapped in a state of no-war, no-peace, with continuing consequences for the world economy. For India, a second increase in domestic LPG prices in three months, as well as the need to grapple with surging energy costs, is a reminder that the conflict in West Asia is not a distant one.

In law, need to write a new marriage story

THE SUPREME COURT saying that keeping alive a marriage which is "already decayed and is decomposing day by day" serves neither the couple nor society is an important intervention in what is often one of the most bitter and wearying legal processes. The two-judge bench that was ruling on the case of a couple that has been living separately for 15 years said that asking them to live together after they've been estranged for so long would amount to "cruelty to both the parties". In thus framing the issue, the Court has underlined the need for a more nuanced approach to the complex issue of marital breakdown.

While the laws in their present form offer two paths to legal separation — mutual consent (no-fault) and contested (fault-based) — the Supreme Court has periodically used its extraordinary powers under Article 142 (1) to widen the framework of divorce and bring in the concept of "irretrievable breakdown of marriage" (IBM). In 2006, while ruling on *Naveen Kohli vs Naveen Kohli*, it urged the government to "seriously consider bringing an amendment in the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 to incorporate irretrievable breakdown of marriage as a ground for the grant of divorce". The concerns animating the Court cannot be dismissed: A protracted legal battle can take a toll on the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of the parties involved. The financial implications, too, are often serious. As the Court has rightly said, to prolong an estranged couple's agony because their case does not meet the criteria laid out in the law amounts to "perpetuity of marriage on paper".

The judgment serves as a reminder to both the government and Parliament that reform is long overdue. In its 2009 report, the Law Commission recommended the inclusion of IBM, and subsequently, there were two attempts at legislative reform via the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Bills of 2010 and 2013, both of which lapsed. At the same time, reform cannot overlook the realities of a deeply patriarchal society where women often enter divorce proceedings from a position of social and economic disadvantage. Protecting their interests, especially on the questions of property rights, custody, maintenance and residential rights, is paramount. Reform is necessary, but it should not become another instrument for perpetuating inequality.

When the Grand Slam crown isn't enough

ONE WOULD have to go back three decades for the last German player to win a Grand Slam men's singles title — Boris Becker — before Alexander Zverev beat Flavio Cobolli in five sets at Roland Garros on Sunday. The only previous instance of a German clinching the French Open men's singles crown was Henner Henkel in 1937. And yet, more than a few would put an asterisk beside the name of Zverev.

Zverev's path to the title wouldn't have been easier if he had made the draw himself. Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz pulled out before the tournament due to injury. The other two major contenders — Jannik Sinner and Daniil Medvedev — didn't go past the third round. Apart from Zverev, there was only one other player ranked among the top 10 in the quarterfinals. He became the first man in 24 years to win a Grand Slam singles title without facing a single top-10 player. Then, Zverev's conduct on and off the court hasn't made him a favourite among tennis followers. He has been involved in more than one case of allegations of physical and emotional abuse filed by his ex-girlfriends. He has also been punished for striking an umpire's chair with his racket at the 2022 Mexican Open.

Whether Sunday's win turns a page in his career remains to be seen. He may have to win a Major by defeating either Sinner or Alcaraz to be considered a bona fide champion. Zverev needs to use his maiden Major title as a catalyst to take his game to the next level, or he will remain part of a large trivia group — those who have won just one Grand Slam crown.

WITH THE India-Oman agreement taking effect on June 1, India now has 15 FTAs covering 27 countries. Another nine agreements with 42 countries are nearing completion. Once finalised, India's FTA partners will total 69 countries and could account for nearly 75 per cent of the country's exports.

As India expands its network of FTAs, four recurring challenges demand attention: Rising trade deficits, low utilisation of FTA benefits by Indian exporters, worsening inverted duty structures, and the relocation of manufacturing to FTA partner countries.

Let's examine how these challenges are shaping India's trade patterns, industrial competitiveness, and economic outcomes.

First, a rising trade deficit. Between 2007-09 (before the FTAs took effect) and 2022-25, India's trade deficit with ASEAN grew by 381 per cent, that with Japan by 315 per cent and that with South Korea by 268 per cent. In comparison, its trade deficit with the rest of the world increased by 142 per cent. Over the past three years, India's average annual trade deficit with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea has reached about \$62 billion.

The newer FTAs are also associated with large trade deficits. In FY2025, India exported \$48.6 billion to the UAE, Australia, Mauritius and EFTA countries, but imported nearly \$100 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of over \$50 billion. As tariff cuts under these agreements deepen, the deficit may increase further. South Asia remains the major exception, where India's trade surplus expanded from \$6.7 billion to \$20 billion during the same period.

The difference between India's tariff structure and those of its FTA partners helps explain why imports often grow faster than exports after FTAs. Most of its FTA partners are already open economies with low tariffs. Average MFN tariffs are close to zero in Singapore and below 4 per cent in Japan, Australia, Malaysia and the UAE. In contrast, India's trade-weighted MFN tariffs are about 12.6 per cent, with rates ranging from zero to 150 per cent. As a result, when India cuts tariffs under an FTA, exporters from partner countries gain a significant price advantage in the Indian market. A 50 per cent tariff reduction, for example, can translate into a major cost advantage over competing suppliers. Indian exporters, however, often gain little additional market access because tariffs in partner countries were already low or zero before the agreement.

The difference becomes even clearer when actual trade flows are examined. Almost all imports into Singapore enter duty-free under MFN rules, while more than 80 per cent do so in Japan and Malaysia. In the EU and the UK, more than half of imports face zero customs duty. In India, however, only about 6 per cent of imports enter duty-free under MFN treatment. As a result, FTAs often give foreign exporters a much bigger advantage in the Indian market than Indian exporters receive abroad.

Second, low utilisation of FTA benefits. The same tariff asymmetry also helps explain why Indian exporters make limited use of FTAs. When MFN tariffs in partner countries are already zero, there is little benefit in exporting under an FTA. Even where MFN tariffs are low — say 1 to 3 per cent — the savings are often too small to justify the costs of complying with rules of origin, certification requirements, and paperwork. As a result, only an estimated 20-30 per cent of India's eligible exports take advantage of FTA preferences. Many small firms prefer to avoid the compliance burden for modest tariff savings.

The incentives are very different for exporters selling to India. Since India's MFN tariffs remain

relatively high, tariff reductions under FTAs can generate substantial savings. As a result, import-side utilisation rates are estimated at 60-70 per cent. Thus, rising imports and low export-side utilisation are not separate issues. Both stem from the same tariff asymmetry between India and its FTA partners.

Third, worsening inverted duty structures. An inverted duty structure arises when duties on raw materials and industrial inputs are higher than those on finished products. While this problem has existed for years, FTAs have made it harder to fix because many finished goods now enter India at low or zero duty from partners such as ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, the UAE and Australia. As a result, Indian manufacturers often pay high duties on imported inputs, especially those sourced from non-FTA countries, while competing against finished products imported duty-free under FTAs.

For example, steel and aluminium attract MFN duties of 7.5-10 per cent, but machinery, industrial equipment and engineering products made from these materials can enter India duty-free under several FTAs. Indian manufacturers, therefore, face higher input costs when competing with tariff-free imported machinery produced with globally priced inputs.

Similar distortions exist in chemicals, plastics, rubber and textiles. Duties on inputs such as caustic soda, soda ash, polypropylene, PVC and SBR raise production costs. At the same time, many finished products in these sectors can be imported at low or zero duty. The result is a tariff structure that protects producers of basic materials but disadvantages downstream manufacturing, making it harder to achieve higher domestic value addition and the goals of Make in India.

Fourth, make in ASEAN, sell in



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

When it becomes cheaper to manufacture in an ASEAN country and export duty-free to India than to produce in India, investment and jobs tend to move abroad. As a result, FTAs can encourage firms to 'Make in ASEAN, Sell in India'

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Fourth, make in ASEAN, sell in

On India's EV transition, it's time to shift gears



LAVEESH BHANDARI

POLLUTION KILLS. It is harmful to India's reputation as a dynamic, forward-looking society, and, where vehicle pollution is concerned, the better-off pollute more, whereas the worse-off suffer more. The auto industry has historically tended to oppose policies aimed at reducing fossil-fuel vehicles due to fears of revenue losses and the cost burden of moving to new technologies. Fear of new competitors with a technological advantage may be another factor.

Such challenges will remain whether we switch now or 10 years later, and policymakers must ask: How long should the government wait? It is now time for the government to institute a comprehensive policy for a move towards electric vehicles (EVs) for both two- and four-wheelers by 2028. And in parallel, implement a plan to install the required charging points in parking lots, petrol pumps, and public spaces across the country.

The belief that such a policy will make India dependent on China is deeply flawed. First, India is a large two- and three-wheeler market. But Delhi, where EV sales are being mandated, accounts for less than 4 per cent of the national market, and therefore, the changeover will cause minimal damage to the two-wheeler economy.

Second, EVs, in fact, reduce India's global vulnerabilities, whereas fossil-fuel vehicles increase them. Why? Because batteries and magnets are not consumables, even if their imports stop. EVs already on the road will continue to operate; this is not the case with fossil-fuel-driven vehicles.

Third, India has a mechanism for keeping petroleum stocks, and it can do the same for rare earths or critical minerals. Indeed, India's National Critical Mineral Mission envisages precisely this. The Indian government highlighted in the 2026-27 budget its efforts to enhance access to critical minerals and rare earths. These efforts will need domestic demand to succeed.

Yet another concern is the potential loss of jobs associated with the repair and maintenance of fossil-fuel-driven vehicles. Here as well, the government is proposing to

stop the registration of new vehicles after 2028. All the older vehicles will continue to need the services of such mechanics. Moreover, new EVs will also create jobs for other services. Remember the concerns that accompanied computerisation in banking?

It is also sometimes argued that EVs, despite government subsidies, are more expensive and therefore delivery workers, own-account workers and others dependent on two- and three-wheelers will end up paying more. To the contrary, analysis conducted at CSEIP has shown that the lifetime costs of electric two-wheelers are significantly lower than their petrol counterparts, and in fact, these workers will gain from the switch to EVs. The higher purchase cost, if a real concern, can be addressed through slight tweaks to the government's collateral-free credit programs. The gig-work economy has already embraced electric two-wheelers.

Any policy change results in a diverse set of winners and losers. But imaginative and cooperative actions can create win-win solutions. The Indian automobile sector includes some of the most respected firms in India. And these firms can and must come up with a forward-looking and solution-oriented plan.

There is no doubt face stranded assets as production lines shift from internal combustion engine vehicles to electric vehicles. For this, they could ask the government for accelerated depreciation. Dependence on China is a concern, and the industry needs to ramp up R&D spending for that.

The industry could also work with the government on interim stockpiling solutions. It should be proposing innovative ideas for ramping up charging facilities; bringing utility companies into the conversation would help, since they would be a major partner. Reuse and recycling of batteries is another challenge area, and here as well, there are many ways in which the industry can use its extensive networks to support the government's efforts.

India needs to change, but this would be best achieved when industry and government are able to create a collaborative and socially oriented relationship.

Bhandari heads CSEIP. Views are personal

Indian art can't dwell in the past. Put today's artists at the centre



TRISHA MUKHERJEE

THIS IS Indian art's golden moment. Having made a big splash at the Venice Biennale, it is ready for its next milestone — the "Progressive Artists' Group" exhibition, presented by the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) at Christie's London. A survey bridging "modern and contemporary practices with folk and indigenous artistic traditions from South Asia", it is perhaps the biggest showcase of Indian artists since "The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998" in London in 2024. Such exhibitions are cultural milestones that declare to the world: This is Indian art.

It is, except that it is not all it should be. Indian art today is vast, yet we keep circling back to a few 20th-century names, mostly from the Progressive Artists' Group. While this canon earned Indian art its global recognition, returning to them for nearly every international presentation stagnates the narrative. The KNMA shows tries to diversify by including folk and indigenous traditions through the works of Jangarh Singh Shyam and Jivya Soma Mashale. However, it remains led by modernists like MF Husain, S H Raza, and Jerram Patel, with senior contemporary artists like Neha Chokshi, L N Tallur and Srinny Gil presented as inheritors of this legacy, almost to suggest India's best art is in its archives.

That is especially perplexing because KNMA holds "cutting edge, experimental practices across multimedia, including video, photography, monumental installations and new media" in its collection, but these rarely make it across borders. The urge to put your best foot forward with a time-tested strategy is understandable, but by offering international audiences what they are already familiar with, we inadvertently create a bottleneck.

By placing our faith in the past rather than the present, we feed into the market's insular loops. This is evident in how recent record-breaking Indian works — Raja Ravi Varma's *Yashodhara Krishna* (1896) and M F Husain's *Grass* (1954) — were scooped up by domestic HNIs (Cyrus Poonawalla and Kiran Nadar respectively), conditioning the world to look at Indian art as a repatriation asset rather than an evolving ecosystem engaging with contemporary realities. Meanwhile, the international market for mid-career or emerging Indian artists remains flat.

South Korea, which has used both government and private institutional heft to balance the global spotlight between masters and emerging names (like 26-year-old Minhoon Kim), can be a blueprint. Closer to home, look at this year's Venice Biennale showcase with younger names like Sumakshi Singh and Skarman Somani Tashi, or the exhibition, "Sediments of Becoming," at the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. Instead of spotlighting the modernists yet again, co-curator Tuntu Chauhan chose to lead with the voices of the young and the present, putting forth Indian art as a continuum of creativity and dialogue.

This is not to say the masters should no longer be showcased internationally. They have to be seen as the prodigal, not the main act. If we do not position our young contemporary artists as the vanguard, we cannot expect the rest of the world to do for us.

The writer is associate editor, The Indian Express. trisha.mukherjee@expressindia.com

40 YEARS AGO
June 9, 1986

Terrorists kill three in Punjab

THREE PERSONS were shot dead, and three others were injured in shootings by suspected terrorists in Punjab in the past 24 hours. According to UNI, three armed terrorists came to Bhatinda railway station on foot and robbed the cashier of the accounts department of Rs 1.27 lakh; no one was injured.

Action after Belgium riots

HOME MINISTER B Rachaga, accompanied by Revenue Minister S R Bommal, the Social Welfare Minister V L Patil and Minister of State

Tamilis flee homes in Sri Lanka

MORE THAN 1,000 people, the majority of them Tamils of Indian origin, have fled their homes in Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka following intermittent clashes between Tamil militants and security forces since June 4. The displaced people, who have taken refuge

in temples and nearby jungles, were facing an acute shortage of food.

AGP slams Centre over accord

THE ASOM Gana Parishad has criticised the Centre over the non-implementation of the Assam Accord and has threatened to launch an action programme. The party said that if the Centre did not take steps to implement the accord, it would continue to mobilise public opinion for a sustainable programme of action. The AGP's central committee described the Union government's role in implementing the accord as "extremely disappointing."

US-India special relationship is now cold-eyed transactionalism



KANTI BAJPAI

US SECRETARY of State Marco Rubio's recent visit to India, Secretary of War Peter Hegseth's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue that briefly referenced India, and US Ambassador to India Sergio Goro's energetic diplomacy have raised a central question: What does India want from India? The answer is that India's wants have remained stable. America's have changed. As a result, the special relationship with the US is over. Looking ahead, the India-US agenda will be far more modest and transactional.

For 30 years, India looked to the US for strategic balance against China, for cooperation against terrorism, for its market and investments, for the "export" of skilled Indian professionals, and for military equipment. Broadly, the US would help make India more secure and powerful.

US interest in India was a mirror image. India was a balance against China, a partner against terrorism, a market for exports and a destination for investments, a source of human talent, and a client for American arms. India was not seen as an ally but instead would be strengthened as a "strategic partner" in Asia.

The special relationship has withered because America has changed its view of India. The economic wants are much the same — India as a destination for US products (now including energy), investments, and arms. Against this, American worries about immigration have overridden the demand for talented Indians. More importantly, cooperating with India against terrorism, and crucially, partnering with it in Asia, have diminished in importance.

To appreciate the US's changed strategic outlook towards India, we must

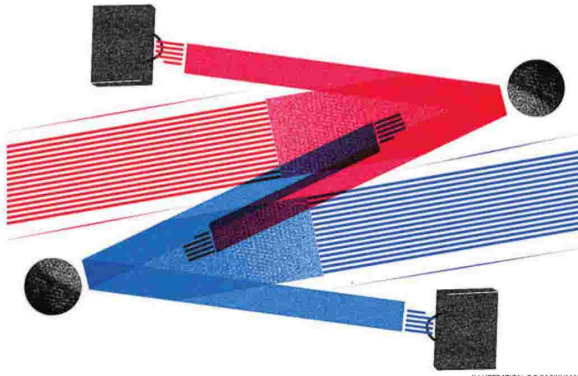


ILLUSTRATION: C.R. SAGLIKUMAR

understand its geopolitical view of Eurasia — from Europe, at one end of the supercontinent, to Japan, at the other end. Over the last 30 years (indeed, going back earlier), America has wanted to contain three challenges in Eurasia: Russia in Europe; Islamic radicalism in the energy-rich Gulf, and China in Asia.

For the US, India potentially had a role in all three theatres. With its close Russia relationship, it might act as a diplomatic brake against Russian adventurism in Europe. Given its proximity to the Gulf, its energy dependence on the oil powers, and its military power, it might be a force for stability in the region. And given Delhi's quarrel with Beijing, its growing economic strength, and its naval forces, it was a putative balancer against rapidly rising Chinese power in Asia.

The war in Ukraine demonstrated to the US that India would not be a brake on Russia. Indeed, with its neutrality in the conflict and its purchases of Russian oil,

To appreciate the US's changed strategic outlook towards India, we must understand its geopolitical view of Eurasia — from Europe, at one end of the supercontinent, to Japan, at the other end

it seemed to play the opposite role even if that was not New Delhi's intention. In the Gulf, India embarked on a larger strategic role, particularly in the past 10 years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi built deeper diplomatic, economic, energy, and even defence ties with the Gulf including Saudi Arabia, and was positioning India as a security provider.

However, when the US's war with Iran moved toward termination and a deal had to be struck on Iran's enriched uranium and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, the Trump administration saw Pakistan and not India as the intermediary.

Pakistani influence with the Iranians and with the Saudis (culminating in the defence agreement of September 2025) was a key asset for Pakistan. Its military power, its long-held relationship with the US defence establishment, and even its closeness to China were additional factors in the turn to Pakistan.

The third Eurasian theatre is centred around China. The US

had hoped that India would begin to catch up with China and play a larger balancing role against it. But despite India's economic growth of roughly 6-7 per cent per annum over 30 years and China's economic slowdown, the absolute GDP gap between the two countries was growing, not reducing.

In addition, in the Indo-Pacific, India's contributions were uncertain. India had underlined that it was averse to a common front against China in the Quad, Australia, Japan, and the US, therefore, gradually thickened strategic ties amongst themselves and with Korea and the Philippines. In addition, India's military was not geared to project force into the South China Sea and East China Sea in the foreseeable future. At best, in a US-China confrontation, the US-India foundation defence accords such as LEMOA might be triggered, but this was by no means a given.

More fundamentally for India-US ties, under both Joe Biden and Donald Trump, America's China challenge has changed. It is less about Taiwan and the security of Asia against China and more about economic and technological competition in commerce (the trade deficit), chips, computer software (AI), and critical minerals. In the US view, India is not a crucial player in any of these four Cs. It cannot replace China as an exporter to the US (indeed, India is now a trade worry). Nor is it a big player in chips, AI, computer software, or critical minerals.

Whether the US is right or wrong in its view, India is no longer seen as a power to be strengthened. It is instead a destination for US products, investments, and arms. Despite Rubio and Goro's and most recently Hegseth's attempts to inject some spark into the erstwhile special relationship, the future is cold-eyed transactionalism. Opportunities but also stern challenges are ahead of us as the special relationship founders. Indian diplomats will have their hands full.

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

Under Modi government, states have more space to grow



N CHANDRABABU NAIDU

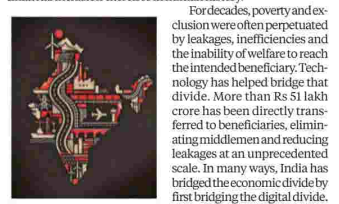
JUNE 10, 2026, marks 4,399 consecutive days of Narendra Modi's prime ministership. This milestone reflects the enduring trust that millions of Indians have placed in a model of governance anchored in the principle of "Nation First".

In my nearly five decades in public life, I have had the opportunity to observe and interact with several prime ministers, each of whom led India through distinct challenges and circumstances. But PM Modi stands apart because he has combined civilisational confidence with modern governance.

India was among the world's richest and most advanced civilisations. Yet, for many decades after independence, we often behaved like a sleeping giant, hesitant about our identity and uncertain of our place in the world. Under PM Modi's leadership, India has rediscovered its cultural pride and national self-belief. India today stands with far greater confidence and strategic relevance in the global order. PM Modi has ensured that India engages with the world as an equal among major powers, always guided by the principle of India First.

This revival has not been rooted in nostalgia alone. PM Modi has integrated India's ancient knowledge systems — yoga, pranayama, meditation and spiritual traditions — with modern technology, digital governance and innovation-led growth. This synthesis of tradition and technology may well become India's defining contribution to the 21st century. The global acceptance of yoga through the International Day of Yoga is perhaps one of the most visible examples of how India's ancient wisdom has been repositioned as a universal force for human well-being.

In a decade, India has moved from the world's 11th-largest to the fourth-largest economy. The defining feature of these 12 years has been governance driven by conviction and execution. Through DPI, Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar integration, UPI and Direct Benefit Transfers, India has undertaken one of the largest financial inclusion exercises in human history.



For decades, poverty and exclusion were often perpetuated by leakages, inefficiencies and the inability of welfare to reach the intended beneficiary. Technology has helped bridge that divide. More than Rs 51 lakh crore has been directly transferred to beneficiaries, eliminating middlemen and reducing leakages at an unprecedented scale. In many ways, India has bridged the economic divide by first bridging the digital divide.

Equally significant has been the scale of social transformation. Millions of Indians have been lifted out of multidimensional poverty; investments in housing, sanitation, healthcare, water and rural infrastructure have improved the quality of life for millions. The guiding principle has remained clear: *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas*.

At a time when the world has faced unprecedented disruptions, from the pandemic and supply-chain shocks to geopolitical conflicts and economic uncertainty, India has remained resilient, stable and among the fastest-growing major economies.

PM Modi has also focused on long-term nation-building through transformational investments in highways, ports, airports, freight corridors, railways, renewable energy, manufacturing and emerging technologies. These are not decisions made for immediate political gain, but foundational investments.

As someone who has long championed technology-driven governance and economic reforms, I particularly appreciate PM Modi's understanding of how innovation and entrepreneurship can transform society. Young Indians no longer merely seek opportunities abroad; increasingly, they aspire to build world-class enterprises within India itself.

Another important transformation has been in the relationship between the Union and states. Competitive and cooperative federalism has given states greater space to innovate, compete and grow. States are increasingly being treated as engines of national development rather than mere administrative units. Andhra Pradesh has greatly benefited from this development-oriented partnership through projects relating to infrastructure, industrialisation, Amaravati and emerging technologies.

I have often said that Narendra Modi was the right leader at the right time for India. After 12 years, that conviction has only strengthened further. History will remember this period not merely for economic growth or political stability, but for something deeper — the restoration of India's confidence in itself.

I believe this is India's defining moment: the beginning of a golden era for our nation. With confidence, aspiration and collective resolve, I am certain that India will march steadily towards the goal of *Viksit Bharat* by 2047.

Jai Hind.

The writer is Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Economy challenge

A 7.7 PER cent growth rate in a year marked by tariff disruptions and conflict is an achievement, and the government's role in supporting it deserves recognition ("Facing stress, economy will need a leg up", *IE*, June 8). The RBI's revised projection of 6.6 per cent growth for 2026-27 reflects external headwinds rather than structural weakness. Measures to attract foreign capital and stabilise the rupee are timely. If the situation in West Asia stabilises and the monsoon remains favourable, the economy has resilience to outperform current projections.

A Myilsami, Coimbatore

INDIA'S ECONOMY grew rapidly last year, but trouble lies beneath the surface ("Facing stress, economy will need a leg up", *IE*, June 8). The services sector performed well and pushed growth to 7.7 per cent, yet total income rose by only 8.9 per cent, well below the budgeted target of 10.1 per cent. Manufacturing growth slowed. Wars in West Asia and new tariffs have made oil and other goods more expensive. The RBI now expects growth to moderate to 6.6 per cent this year. Tax cuts and lower interest rates provided support earlier, but more needs to be done. To sustain growth, India must create jobs, expand manufacturing, reduce import dependence, and protect farmers.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Another price hike

THE CENTRE'S justification for the latest LPG price hike of Rs 29 per cylinder may be sound on paper, but it overlooks the growing financial strain on ordinary households ("Domestic LPG price up Rs 29; OMCs still losing Rs 700", *Govt*, *IE*, June 8). Clean cooking fuel is a necessity, not a luxury. Frequent price increases may force poorer households to revert to traditional fuels such as firewood and coal, undermining public-health and environmental goals.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



SUKHMANI MALIK

WOMEN ARE sick of the manosphere. And many want out — even if it is into a fantasy where men treat them with respect. The explosion of one show and one movie, both about desire and women's agency, in the last month is evidence: *Off Campus*, adapted from Elle Kennedy's book series of the same name, and Curry Barker's *Obsession*. Made on shoestring budgets, poles apart tonally, both are surprise hits. While *Off Campus* portrays the fantasy of romance, *Obsession* is its most horrific representation, but both aim to address reality.

Off Campus is the story of a handful of college students' trysts with love, friendship, family, and ambition. Viewers — especially women — are eating it up. It is another in the long list of shows and movies that constitute the on-screen romance renaissance: recent years have seen a significant surge in romance shows and movies in the West. But why?

In *Off Campus*, the main draw is the men. They are college students and hockey players, yet there is no "locker room talk". In a time when an alarming number of men are congregating in the "manosphere" and mistaking misogyny for masculinity, these male protagonists are caring and attentive partners and people, in touch with their own feelings and others'.

For many men and boys today, the strongest influences are figures like Donald Trump

No escaping manosphere for women — and men

and Andrew Tate (both under investigation and/or convicted of sexual assault). This does not bode well for anybody. The echo chambers of the "manosphere" amplify the delusional narrative that young boys and men are somehow both perpetual victims and inherently more powerful than women. Qualities like sensitivity and respect are derided, cutting off the most organic routes to connection, the lack of which drives many men into the manosphere in the first place.

The success of shows like *Off Campus*, *Heated Rivalry*, and *Bridgerton* also suggests that these standards are hardly being met by men today. This is why the bare minimum has become a fantasy. The "romance renaissance" reflects, in reality, a lack of agency, respect, hope, and compatibility for women. What many men and women think constitutes a good relationship today — or even an appropriate performance of gender — is increasingly divergent.

For most women, the world is a scary place right now. Violence against them is on the rise, young men are more likely to lean conservative than men in the generations before them, there is a rollback in legal protections globally, and it often seems as though young women and men are living in different realities. No wonder there is a desire to escape into fantasy.

Which brings us to *Obsession*. The movie, a horror film focused

on incel culture, deals with the deficit of empathy and the spike in male entitlement. It captures how harmless and routine this attitude can look and how it escalates. Look closely at the film, and you'll notice: The violations were always there. Even when Bear (Michael Johnston) seemed to be just a "nice guy" with a crush on a girl in his friend circle, his obsession with winning Nikki's (Inde Navarette) love had everything to do with him and nothing at all with her. This is why he feels comfortable, from the beginning, in denying her agency and, in the end, any mercy — all while playing the victim. When a section of society is raised to think of another as secondary to their needs, this is the result: Rejection becomes unacceptable, unrequited love becomes humiliation.

When the credits roll, it is to the walls of a bleeding, traumatised woman. The damage is apparent; it also does not discriminate — the entitled, the alpha, suffer and break just as hard as the women and people they subject to violence.

In the hardening of their attitudes, many men risk losing their humanity. While that is a worrying reality for women and society, it leaves the men depleted, too. There is no escaping the manosphere. The best we can hope for is a mass exit into reality. Until then, it will keep ending this way — with no winners at all.

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ITA MEHROTRA

JOE SACCO is arguably the biggest name in comics journalism today. For more than three decades, his pathbreaking books have reported on conflicts around the world, from Palestine to Bosnia. His books, along with those of a few other cartoonists such as Marjane Satrapi and Art Spiegelman, have carved out a distinct space for non-fiction comics within mainstream publishing and bookshops, and have inspired many others around the world to take to this format of comics journalism, telling first-hand accounts of conflicts and people's movements.

To have his newest book, *The Once and Future Riot*, which investigates the Muzaf-

The Joe Sacco book that India should, but can't, read

farnagar riots of 2013, rejected for distribution in the country by Penguin India is shocking given his longstanding credibility as an artist and journalist. While technicalities such as one particular image of a hand-drawn map and its accuracy are cited as reasons, it does make one wonder what kind of precedent this sets for artists and writers who take on the task of researching and truth-telling in India today.

In an interview, Sacco said a lot of his research was done by conducting interviews in Muzaffarnagar after the riots and speaking with journalists who had been reporting on them. It involved continuously fact-checking the stories he heard. Across various panels in the book, we can see a skeptical Sacco leaving conversations, only to question the truth of what he's being told, such as by upper-caste leaders in a particu-

lar village. For Sacco, part of what kept him writing and drawing this book over many years was that he felt he had "troubled people for their stories" and had to honour that somehow. As with his previous books, we have Sacco's own drawn-out cartoon character across pages, with a notebook and pen in hand and often looking bewildered and overwhelmed, leading us through the landscape and conversations. This method, along with the fact that each page is elaborately hand-drawn across the book, re-

To have his book investigating the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots rejected for distribution in India is shocking given his longstanding credibility as a journalist

peatedly reinforces for a reader that the work is one person's storytelling and research. It is precisely this play between personal and political, objective and affective, that makes comics journalism so appealing.

It also inserts the researcher as a human being sitting within conversations and untangling messy webs of stories instead of being an all-knowing and all-powerful entity. In that, the comics journalism format as Sacco has shown us, with all its messiness of boxes, characters, speech bubbles and descriptive text boxes, tries to grapple with the complexities of violence and its conflicting histories without flattening it out to a single narrative.

It has the unique ability to hold contradictions, personal narratives as well as the larger landscape of overarching politics, all on one page. It does so by also laying out the

position of the artist-guide bare across the page, and inviting the viewer right into it, to walk along, with bits of dry humour to keep you going.

Reading Sacco's work is how so many comics makers have understood the very grammar of this medium. Especially in a country like ours, where there aren't many avenues to train oneself in comics journalism, it becomes all the more important to have his books easily accessible. Without works like this around, what kind of visual storytelling is going to surround us — do we really have any space for the sci-fi mythological interpretation cramming bookstore shelves?

Mehrotra is a graphic novelist and educator based in Delhi and author of Uprooted: A Graphic Account of the Struggle for Forest Rights

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GLOBAL

Israel, Iran trade strikes again: The major takeaways

Yashee
New Delhi, June 8

ALMOST TWO months after a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire, Iran and Israel traded direct strikes at each other's territories again, over Sunday night and Monday. For a while, return to full-scale war loomed imminent, till Iran announced it was halting its campaign as long as Israel too kept the peace. US President Donald Trump announced on Truth Social that "Both sides, Israel and Iran, are looking to do an immediate CEASEFIRE". He said "final negotiations" for peace were proceeding, "subject to ignorance or stupidity getting in its way."

What was different was that Iran launched attacks directly on Israel in retaliation for the latter's actions in Lebanon. As multiple conflicts rage — Israeli action in Gaza, Israeli action in Lebanon, and the US-Israel-Iran tussle, with Iran's retaliation covering much of West Asia — what do the events of the past day say about the future of the wars?

Iran trenches Lebanon position: Iran has always said that any peace deal must include Lebanon too, but the Israeli campaign there continues despite multiple announcements of ceasefires. With the strikes on Sunday night, Iran has made it clear that it is willing to go beyond statements on Lebanon. It has asserted that a one-on-one peace deal with the US is not possible till Washington continues to give Benjamin Netanyahu a free hand in Lebanon.

Trump-Netanyahu divide: A major fallout of the recent events is the question they raise on Trump's ability to get Netanyahu to uphold American commitments. Despite Trump announcing multiple times that he would rein in Israel, including in Lebanon, Netanyahu has continued to escalate.

Both Trump and Netanyahu face elections later this year. For Trump, a prolonged war and its attendant economic consequences are damaging. But for the Israeli leader, stopping the campaign now under pressure from Trump would dent his image domestically.

ELECTION YEAR

- Both Trump and Netanyahu face elections later this year.
- For Trump, a prolonged war and its attendant economic consequences are damaging. But for the Israeli leader, stopping the campaign now under pressure from Trump would dent his image domestically.

"This latest escalation could be Netanyahu's last major attempt to force Trump out of any peace deal. However, Trump is set to lose regional support in West Asia if he can't keep Israel in check. Trump faces immense pressure to seal a deal before the next NATO summit in Ankara in July. If his attempts fail, the summit is likely to see major faultlines," Omair Anas, who teaches International Relations at the Ankara Yildirim Beyazıt University, Türkiye, told *The Indian Express*.

Lebanese govt in uncomfortable position: The events also complicate the position of the Lebanese government, which is holding official peace talks with Israel. Beirut would prefer less influence from Tehran and its proxy Hezbollah on its actions, but the opposite will happen if a ceasefire does come to Lebanon on the point of Iranian guns.

Despite several rounds of talks with Israel, being mediated by the US, the Lebanese government has been unable to stop strikes on its soil.

"The recent Iranian actions complicate negotiations between Israel and Lebanon, but for the mediator US, this is apparently acceptable in the larger geopolitical context. Trump is willing to speak to Hezbollah as well as the Lebanese government for a ceasefire. Hence, today's strikes by Iran cause collateral damage to the autonomy of the Lebanese government," Anil Trigunayath, retired IFS officer who has worked in the Ministry of External Affairs' West Asia Division, told *The Indian Express*.

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POLICY

Sewage in posh Delhi colony taps: How urban water systems fail, what to change



ARKAJA SINGH

FELLOW AT CENTRE FOR POLICY RESEARCH, NEW DELHI

IN THE posh South Delhi colony of Gulmohar Park, drinking water pipelines recently delivered sewage-contaminated water. Many residents fell ill and people had to switch to water tankers and bottled water. Several similar incidents have been reported in other cities. In the Indore case earlier this year, the contamination was linked to several deaths.

From an engineering perspective, the risk of contamination in drinking water pipelines

is almost always present: sewage water can enter through even minor openings, especially when supply is off and the pressure in the pipes is slack. Things get worse when the pipe network is aged and corroded, when pipes are damaged, or when sewage flows and other contaminants enter areas around the pipes.

There are two important policy takeaways from this. One, that the risk of contamination can only be managed, rather than completely eliminated. Second, as the risk is from the close interaction of sewage and drinking water pipes, management requires attention to both.

Governance of drinking water and sewage

Our drinking water supply and sewage disposal systems entail very many neighbourhood-level compromises with engineering protocol.

Engineers consider 24-hour water supply systems technically superior to intermittent supply — because pipes remain pressurised

and resistant to contaminants — but this requires more water and expensive upgrades in the infrastructure.

Moreover, the true state of pipes and networks is never fully known. Except in a few 'pilot projects', Indian cities do not have complete digitised maps of water and sewage flows. The field staff of urban agencies might know, by experience, how the supply and drainage infrastructure is organised at the local level, but often, their understanding of local risks is not integrated with institutional decisions and priorities.

The management of sewage is even more complicated and is, at least in part, beyond the direct control and management of any public agency. Even in the most upmarket areas, sewage flows are 'bypassed' from blocked or missing sewer lines to storm water drains and natural water channels. Over half the urban population does not have access to any type of organised sewage line, and relies instead on septic tanks and pits, which generate foul effluent liquids that seem to have no practical solution, except to

flow in open drains and water channels. Slums, unauthorised colonies and urban villages provide additional layers of complexity: one, because rules prevent urban agencies from extending full-scale water and sewage services here (supposedly to disincentivise the proliferation of such settlements) and two, because their winding, narrow and uneven layouts are difficult to build infrastructure for.

In many cities, many government agencies are responsible for different parts of the same problem, and have limited ability to coordinate at the street-level. Institutional gaps and challenges

There are national environmental law-mandated standards for what constitutes safe drinking water and sewage discharge, but there are considerable institutional lacunae in how this can be realistically delivered. The right to safe drinking water is loosely defined as part of the constitutionally mandated right to life, but there are no clear rules

about how it is to be secured. Sewage discharge standards apply to the point of discharge from sewerage treatment plants, but do not prescribe how it is to be managed before it reaches a treatment facility. The regulations for sewerage that is not connected to sewage lines are just as hard to pin down. We need to differentiate between environmental law, by which water quality standards are prescribed for drinking water and sewerage treatment, and institutional rules that structure service delivery and infrastructural activities of urban agencies.

This latter space is thinly developed: there are a number of codes of practice and standards issued by government agencies, but they are not legally enforceable and do not always account for the real-world conditions in which they are to be implemented. Naturally, a one-size-fits-all protocol might not work, given the variations of conditions across and within cities. The question of whether water and wastewater are managed by a parastatal agency like the Delhi Jal Board, or by an

elected civic body, like the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, is often raised. But one structure is not necessarily better than the other. Outcomes seem to depend more on the culture of the organisation, and the quality of its leadership, both administrative and political. In practice, state governments also seem to have an important role in providing structure and support to the efforts of their local authorities.

The way forward

Another aspect of the safe water issue is that it cannot be prescribed in one shot, by plan or regulation, but needs rather a structured pathway in which real-time public management improvements can be deployed in sync with administratively issued regulations and notified plans. There is a large gap between engineering best practice and the situation in our cities, which can only be addressed in a multi-year framework that prioritises the most urgent improvements to human health and environmental outcomes from year to year.

ENERGY

The boost Centre's solar power schemes need



AMITABH SINHA

INDIA HAS been rapidly scaling up its renewable energy capacity in recent years. This has been led by solar power, which now accounts for close to 30% of India's total installed electricity capacity. The country added more than 50 gigawatts (GW) of solar energy capacity in the last couple of years and, in 2025, added more solar power than any other country in the world except China.

To further expedite the deployment of solar energy, the government has been running two flagship programmes that incentivise the adoption of decentralised solar power generation:

PM Suryaghar Yojana: This targets installation of rooftop solar units on one crore households. It offers every beneficiary free electricity up to 300 units every month, and cash subsidy for equipment.

PM-KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha Evam Utthan Mahahiyani): Aimed at farmers, the scheme helps them set up small solar plants on their unused land, or install grid-connected or standalone solar water pumps for irrigation needs. Farmers can earn additional income by selling solar electricity produced on their land, or save on diesel or power bills on traditional water pumps.

Both schemes, backed by a combined budget of around Rs 95,000 crore, have had their full potential till now.

Uneven progress

Together, the two programmes have seen installation of about 13 GW of decentralised solar power (as on May 31, 2026) against a target of 40 GW by the end of the current financial year.

PM-KUSUM, launched in 2019, was supposed to achieve its targets by 2022, but was extended till the end of this financial year owing to the pandemic disruption. Its most successful component has been the incentive to farmers to set up standalone, off-grid, solar water pumps. Government

STATUS OF FLAGSHIP PROGRAMMES



PM Suryaghar Yojana

Target	Achieved
Connection to 1 crore households	40.52 lakh
30 GW of installed capacity	12 GW

(AS ON MAY 31, 2026). SCHEME RUNS TILL MARCH 2027 SOURCE: PM SURYAGHAR PORTAL

PM-KUSUM

Target	Achieved
10 GW of decentralised solar capacity	1.2 GW
14 lakh standalone solar water pumps	10.9 lakh
Solarisation of 2.5 lakh grid pumps	15,000

SOURCE: PM-KUSUM PORTAL

figures show as on May 31, 2026, that more than 10.9 lakh new pumps have been installed against the target of 14 lakh.

But the uneven progress of these programmes across different states is quite revealing, as they have done very well in certain states and extremely poor in others. Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Kerala have seen significantly higher uptake rates for the PM Suryaghar rooftop solar scheme compared with states such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, or even the relatively low energy-access states of Bihar and Jharkhand. The five best performing states — Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, and Rajasthan — account for nearly 70% of the nearly 33 lakh rooftop installations so far.

What hinders adoption

One of the main reasons for low adoption of these schemes in certain large states is power subsidies. Several state governments offer either free electricity or highly subsidised power to domestic and agricultural consumers. When electricity is already free, or heavily subsidised, people don't have an incentive to spend on upfront installation costs.

Take Punjab, for instance. It already offers 300 units of free electricity to domestic

PM Suryaghar: Better performers

State/UT	Installations	Households connected	Power subsidy bill*
Gujarat	681,180	977,754	9,277
Maharashtra	604,522	942,378	23,149
UP	562,656	577,103	19,095
Kerala	252,803	258,959	382
Rajasthan	215,842	223,066	30,597

PM Suryaghar: Underperformers

State/UT	Installations	Households connected	Power subsidy bill*
West Bengal	1,695	1,758	1,868
Punjab	14,470	16,641	20,693
Karnataka	19,793	30,395	27,725
Bihar	20,272	20,905	15,405
Tamil Nadu	72,988	85,743	15,701

Incentivising households and farmers is crucial to India's clean energy transition. But high upfront costs can be a challenge

been more subsidies. Although states such as UP and Rajasthan offer highly subsidised power, they have still managed to do remarkably well on both schemes, mainly by offering additional financial incentives to facilitate the switch to solar power.

This makes sense, as such incentives are a one-time expenditure as against the unending recurring liability that power subsidies entail. The Estimates Committee seemed to endorse this. It suggested that the government should explore ways to make it easier for the consumers to pay the upfront costs in the two schemes and avail of the benefits.

The heat link

Decentralised solar power generation is crucial to India's clean energy transition. While power demand is expected to continue to rise substantially in the coming decades, the availability of land for setting up large solar parks is already becoming a problem. Also, electricity coming from the grid — even if contributed by solar energy — would have to be subsidised for consumers.

That is one politically sensitive issue no government would be able to withdraw from, even though subsidies are becoming increasingly unsustainable. The PM Suryaghar programme, if fully implemented, is estimated to save the government about Rs 75,000 crore every year in electricity costs, according to the Estimates Committee report.

The rising electricity demand can only be met by further expansion of solar, and other renewables. Solar is all set to become India's second-largest source of electricity generation by taking over from hydroelectricity. Although hydropower was the go-to source for meeting the additional demand during summer, large hydropower capacity has stagnated now.

In any case, the increase in power demand has gone so high, it cannot be met with hydropower alone. Recent peak demands — in April and May this year during the day — were managed largely through solar power.

Decentralised solar power gets increasingly relevant in a year like the current one, when the rainfall is expected to be low and temperatures very high, resulting in very high power demands. And this year is fast becoming the norm, and decentralisation can help in cushioning the impact.

CULTURE

Pride Month: Recalling India's first 'Friendship Walk', its impact

Rishika Singh
New Delhi, June 8

JUNE IS marked as Pride Month annually to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community and raise awareness about the challenges they continue to face.

It can be traced back to June 1969, when a police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a popular gathering space for queer people in New York City, saw a pushback against the authorities. This was a landmark moment for the fight for civil rights.

The Pride Parade, which sees queer people and their supporters march, dance and raise slogans, has become one of the most well-known Pride month events. According to the US Library of Congress, "There were three to five thousand marchers at the inaugural Pride in New York City, and today marchers in New York City number in the millions." In India, the "Friendship Walk" of July 2, 1999, held in Kolkata, is seen as a precursor to the Pride Parade.

Inspiration from history

Pawan Dhali, a managing trustee at the Kolkata-based gender and sexuality plat-



form Varta Trust, was one of the 15 people who participated in the walk. He told *The Indian Express* that the movement was in its early stages, but both English and Bengali media were covering it.

Dhali described 1999 as a "very happening year" for queer Indians, coming soon after the release of Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das-starrer *Fire*, which told the story of a romantic relationship between two women. It drew protests from groups like the Shiv Sena. "Some news articles at the time projected regressive views on homosexuality," Dhali said. In response, the few active LGBTQ+ groups organised events for

dialogue in the face of misinformation. Eventually, Owais Khan, a convener of an LGBTQ+ group, came up with the idea of a "Friendship Walk", inspired not just by the activism seen in Stonewall but something closer to home — the Dandi March. "I proposed that we talk about bridge-building and friendship, because we are coming out into the public," Dhali said of the name given to the event. It could also be difficult to secure police permission for a full-scale parade. Yellow t-shirts were made, saying "Walk on the Rainbow, Friendship Walk 99."

Relevance today

The group assembled at the Park Circus Maidan and then split into two to visit NGOs and government offices to discuss the community's concerns.

"We pasted some HIV-AIDS stickers in public washrooms, and also visited the Human Rights Commission office. One of them was totally surprised because we had reached without an appointment. We left him with copies of queer magazines like *Pravartak* and *Bombay Dust*, Dhali said.

A few major papers did cover the walk at the time, but Dhali said he felt its impact

over time: "In 2005, one person I met said he was at the starting point back then, and while he said he did not have the courage to join us, it marked a turning point in his life."

Pride parades today are a much grander affair, with more women and genderqueer people participating. Their purpose for the wider movements has also been debated. Dhali said he felt a parade in itself had limited connotations for him, unless it was truly intersectional — addressing the challenges queer people face also due to poverty, disabilities and their caste or other identities.

"We have almost come full circle. The movement grew, but in some ways, it became about LGBTQ+ identities as marketing tools or brands. Now, we are at a stage where our rights are being restricted after having been granted. You are decriminalised, but you cannot donate blood or choose your gender identity," he said.

But lessons could be learnt from the past, he said. "What would help in this situation better than bridge building again? We need allies again, who will actually stick their necks out, raise resources for you, and stand up for the community."

OUR TAKE

Uphill run for INDIA bloc

It has to focus on common messaging, pooling of resources and stop one-upmanship

A Monday meeting of the Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) couldn't have come at a worse time for the national Opposition. The gains made in 2024 have all but evaporated, a larger swath of the country is under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) than ever before, mainstays of the Opposition coalition such as MK Stalin or Mamata Banerjee have been humbled at the hustings, and there is a serious threat to the unity of the parliamentary cohort with stirrings of desertion within the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and resentment between the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Congress after the latter ditched a two-decade-old alliance in Tamil Nadu for a shot at power. Serious coordination problems appear to exist in Maharashtra and Jharkhand as well.

This should not be unfamiliar for the grouping that approached the 2024 elections on the back of a drubbing in three heartland states and the BJP gunning for 400 Lok Sabha seats. Rarely was one party favoured as heavily in the run-up to a major election. Yet, these setbacks helped avert personality clashes and ego battles — the notorious *bete noire* of Opposition unity in India — as leaders managed to work out some form of seat arrangement, sharpened issues they saw simmering on the ground, and posted the best results in a decade. But the INDIA bloc was dismantled in all but name after the results, as each party vied to claim credit for the performance. There was no coordination, no meeting, no common agenda or concerted effort to corner the government, so much so that commitments to conduct regular meetings of the bloc — in Parliament and outside — were two of the five resolutions adopted at Monday's meeting.

The run-up to the 2029 elections will be uphill for the Opposition. It faces genuine structural challenges in the form of the BJP's electoral juggernaut, meagre resources and polarisation, amid allegations that federal agencies are working at the behest of the Centre. The special intensive revision of electoral rolls has changed old electoral math and strategies. But there are also genuine issues — from economic pain caused by the war to anxieties among young people due to botched examination processes. To cash in, the Opposition has to look beyond ego battles and focus on coordination, common messaging, pooling of resources and stop one-upmanship. Only then does it stand any chance in three years.

The national capital's struggle for water

Delhi's water crisis has now entered its third week. The problem has reached such levels that excavators have been pressed into service, digging into the Yamuna to draw pooled water to two treatment plants. The river has fallen five feet below normal; the plants are running at 15-40% below capacity, and residents in many localities are queuing up at 4am for tanker-delivered buckets.

At the heart of the problem is a demand-supply mismatch. During a punishing summer, the city needs 1,250 million gallons of water daily but gets 250 mgd less. A 20% shortfall is bad, but it is made worse by ailing infrastructure and shoddy design which leaves colonies at the tail end of the distribution system without water for days; many who do get supply report taps running brown as corroded pipes pit in sewage. The crisis is not new. Every summer the Yamuna falls and every summer the same plants struggle. What is changing, slowly, is the upstream supply. The river is already knee-high rivulets across exposed sand beds, earlier and lower than in previous years. And each year, more colonies are feeling the pinch. The Yamuna is being depleted and polluted.

With the monsoon forecast at 90% of its long-period average — with a 60% chance of a deficient season — and the climate crisis only expected to sap rivers further, there is little prospect of any natural reprieve. This pattern, too, is not new: The crisis rests on environmental providence. When rains arrive, Delhi's attention turns to waterlogging; when they recede, to winter smog. The underlying failures of each problem remain unaddressed, surfacing only when the next crisis arrives — summer, monsoon or winter. That India's most prestigious urban centre has become unsustainable for its 22 million people is a fact acknowledged in every crisis and remembered in none.

India's hill stations need legal personhood

Instead of relying on overstretched bureaucracies or politically influenced departments, a hill station's legal voice must come from a permanent, independent Guardian Council

India's hill stations are speaking, though not in words. They are crying out through the thunder of landslides, the dry hiss of water shortages, the smoke of forest fires, and the slow, frightening groan of collapsing slopes. Mussoorie speaks through its cracking hillsides, Nainital through its suffocating lake, Joshimath through its sinking foundations, and Ooty through its burning Shola forests.

I have seen some of these warnings up close. During my years in the Nilgiris, I once watched a slope give away after a night of rain in one of the elephant corridors — not a dramatic landslide, just a quiet, unsettling slippage that told me the mountain had been pushed too far. That small incident taught me more about ecological thresholds than any policy document ever could.

Every monsoon, the mountains send warnings written in mud and debris. Every tourist season, they send distress signals under the weight of bumper-bumper traffic and unregulated construction.

And every year, our courts step in — the Supreme Court ordering the closure of illegal resorts in the Segur Elephant Corridor, the Madras High Court limiting tourist vehicles in Ooty, the Uttarakhand High Court demanding audits in Mussoorie and Nainital. Yet, the mountains continue to crumble.

This is where the idea of giving legal personality to nature becomes transformative. It is not poetry. It is not philosophy. It is a governance tool — one that has already reshaped environmental protection in New Zealand.

There, the State stopped treating nature as property and began treating it as a living legal entity. The Whanganui River, the Te Urewera Forest, and Mount Taranaki were all given legal personhood.

When the Whanganui River became a legal person, it received two guardians — one from the community and one from the government. Suddenly, the river had standing in court. Cases moved faster. Decisions were based on science, not politics. The river was no longer a silent victim; it became a stakeholder.

Mount Taranaki went even further. An eight-member guardian council — four tribal representatives and four government experts was created. No one can push through harmful construction or tourism decisions without full agreement within the guardian council. Politics cannot override ecology. It is a simple, elegant system that protects mountains and communities.

India attempted something similar in 2017, when the Uttarakhand High Court declared the entire Himalayan ecosystem a legal person. It was a bold step, but structurally flawed. The State was appointed as the sole guardian.

Under Indian law, the State cannot meaningfully act as both custodian and potential respondent. In effect, the arrangement required the State to sue itself. Unsurprisingly, the model collapsed under its own contradictions.

The lesson is clear: Legal personality only works when guardians are independent, science-driven, and answerable to the Court, not to politicians.

If India's hill stations had independent legal personhood, many recent tragedies could have been prevented. Joshimath's sinking was not a natural disaster; it was decades of ignored warnings. A legally represented Joshimath could have halted unsafe tunnel-boring before cracks opened in homes. Kedarnath's 2013 disaster was worsened by blocked drainage and illegal construction. A rights-bearing Kedarnath valley could have enforced river-corridor protections. Nainital's lying lake could have asserted its right to survival and stopped construction in recharge zones years ago.

These failures point toward a more robust model. Instead of relying on overstretched bureaucracies or politically influenced departments, a hill station's legal voice must come from a permanent, independent Guardian Council. Such a council should draw from environmental scientists, ecologists, forestry, water management, soil con-

servation, disaster management, carrying-capacity assessment, and local community knowledge — along with a Court-appointed legal guardian to represent the mountain in judicial forums.

A 10-12 member structure ensures that every ecological pillar — forests, water, soil, slopes, biodiversity, and human settlements — has a voice. It would have the authority to halt unsafe construction, enforce carrying capacity, regulate tourism scientifically, protect forests and lakes, and initiate legal action when the State violates ecological duties. Crucially, it would be insulated from elections, political pressure, and short-term interests. Its only client would be the mountain.

This is where the Supreme Court's ongoing engagement becomes significant. For years, the Court has addressed these concerns, but in fragmented and reactive ways — stopping a hotel in one region, ordering an audit in another, responding after a landslide or flood. The Shimla petition now before the Court provides an opportunity to view these recurring ecological issues together.

Within such a framework, a continuous mandamus could serve as a long-term supervisory mechanism, enabling related matters — landslides, carrying capacity, water stress, water stress, instability, and unregulated construc-

tion — to be considered in an integrated manner. It could also allow for the evolution of independent Guardian Councils, bring coherence to scattered litigation across states, support consistent monitoring, and shift the national response from post-disaster reaction to anticipatory, science-based protection.

Legal personality gives the Court three things it currently lacks: A clear petitioner (the mountain), a clear injury (ecological harm), and a clear guardian (the independent council). This reduces the need for constant judicial monitoring and creates a stable, long-term system that protects fragile hill stations even when governments change.

In a climate-unstable world where environmental destruction moves faster than traditional litigation, giving mountains legal personality is not radical. It is the most practical tool we have left. Through the Shimla petition, the Supreme Court can unify Himalayan cases, create independent Guardian Councils, and give India's mountains something they have never had — a lawyer who speaks for them before it is too late.

Sudhanshu Gupta is a retired member of the Indian Forest Service, now serving as an international member of the Forest Stewardship Council. The views expressed are personal.



A rights-bearing Kedarnath valley could have enforced river-corridor protections. HT ARCHIVE



Sudhanshu Gupta

No mother should lose her life in childbirth

Every safe pregnancy is a reflection of a nation's commitment to its women. In a country with nearly 2.9 crore pregnancies annually, ensuring safe motherhood at scale requires robust health systems, sustained political commitment, timely interventions, and equitable access to quality health care services.

The remarkable decline in maternal mortality over the past decade — among India's most significant public health achievements — has been driven by sustained investments in maternal health, strengthened service delivery systems, community participation, and a relentless commitment to ensuring that every woman has access to quality care throughout her pregnancy. At the heart of this transformation is the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matriya Abhiyan (PMSMA), completing its tenth year on June 9, a nationwide movement to provide assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care services, free of cost, to all pregnant women on the ninth day of every month during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

By dedicating the ninth day of every month to maternal health, the programme serves as a reminder that every pregnancy deserves continuous care, monitoring and support throughout the pregnancy period. One of the most important lessons in maternal health is that no pregnancy is entirely risk-free. Recognising that any pregnancy can become high-risk without warning, a simple yet transformative approach — identifying risks early, monitoring them closely and ensuring timely referral and management — was introduced. Every high-risk pregnancy (HRP) identified represents an opportunity to prevent a maternal death, a stillbirth, a newborn complication or lifelong disability. The focus under the PMSMA shifted from treating complications to preventing them.

One of its defining strengths is the institutionalisation of a fixed-day, assured platform for specialist-led antenatal care. Pregnant women are screened for nearly 25 HRP conditions (including severe anaemia, hypertension, gestational diabetes, and infections) that threaten maternal and newborn survival if left undetected.

As evidence emerged that HRPs required continued monitoring beyond routine antenatal care visit by a specialist/medical officer the programme was strengthened further in 2022. Women with HRPs receive additional follow-up visits over and above the regular sessions to ensure timely management until safe

delivery. Name-based tracking of HRPs was introduced and follow-up mechanisms up to the 45th day after delivery were strengthened, ensuring continuous care throughout pregnancy and the immediate postnatal period. Incentives for Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) accompanying women with HRPs for additional visits have further bolstered referral compliance and continuity of care.

A centralised digital portal serves as the backbone of programme management, enabling real-time reporting of service delivery, name-based tracking of HRPs, monitoring of performance metrics, evidence-based decision-making. Importantly, the platform also allows private-sector specialists and community volunteers to register and contribute.

The programme works in synergy with other maternal-health focussed government initiatives such as the Janani Suraksha Yojana, Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakam (JSSK), and Surakshit Matriya Aashwasan (SUMAN), among several others. This has contributed to building a stronger continuum of care for women throughout pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum.

The tireless efforts of health personnel across levels, in community mobilisation, counselling, screening, referral and follow-up, have ensured that maternal health services reach women even in the most remote areas of the country. The impact is increasingly visible in national health outcomes. According to the Sample Registration System estimates for 2022-24, India's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) has declined to 87 per 100,000 live births — close to the Sustainable Development Goal target of MMR below 70 by 2030.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6, 2023-24) reports that institutional deliveries have increased to 90.6% from 88.6% in NFHS-5 (2019-21), while antenatal care coverage has improved from 92.6% in NFHS-5 to 95.9% in NFHS-6. The need to continue strengthening health services that were before, enabling early detection of complications and timely interventions. This underscores the scale and effectiveness of India's maternal health programmes.

Since the programme's launch in 2016, more than 7.5 crore antenatal check-ups conducted have enabled the identification of over 1.7 crore HRPs. These achievements represent millions of mothers whose lives — as well as those of their newborns — were protected through timely and quality health care services.

A simple but powerful belief, that no woman should lose her life while giving life, and no family should lose a mother to a preventable pregnancy-related complication, guides the programme. The need to continue strengthening quality antenatal care, HRP tracking, midwifery-led services, digital innovations and equitable access to maternal health care. The experience so far has reaffirmed a simple truth: When every pregnancy is monitored, every risk is identified early, and every woman receives timely, respectful and quality care, maternal deaths become preventable rather than inevitable. The last ten years are a testament to what can be achieved when political commitment, empowered frontline workers, digital innovation, community participation and quality health care services come together with a singular purpose.

JP Nadda is Union minister of health and family welfare. The views expressed are personal.

MALIKARJUN KHARGE | PRESIDENT, INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

We must strengthen... and move forward, so that we can confront the many political, economic, social, and foreign policy challenges facing the country

On the need to maintain unity in the INDIA bloc

When world leaders speak like academics

It is rare to see new academic theories permeate into the vocabulary of world leaders. That is precisely what has happened with "active non-alignment" (ANA), an idea propagated by Chilean practitioners Jorge Heine, Carlos Fortin, and Carlos Ominami. Heads of government and foreign ministers from Indonesia, Brazil, Malaysia, and South Africa have used this term recently to describe their country's foreign policy positions.

In response to the war in Iran, Indonesian President Prabowo took a position "consistent with the principle of active non-alignment to continue to push for a peaceful resolution and prevent the spread of conflict." Malaysian Prime Minister (PM) Anwar Ibrahim adopted a "posture of active non-alignment to preserve our ability to act on our own terms." South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa publicly reaffirmed his "commitment to the policy of active non-alignment." Brazil's chief foreign policy advisor notes that "on some issues, we will vote alongside the US; on others, we may converge with China. This is the logic of active non-alignment."

The Chilean scholars coined ANA in 2019 as a doctrine with a "pragmatic, non-ideological, almost transactional character." In their recent book, *The Non-Aligned World: Striking Out in an Era of Great Power Competition*, they describe the effectiveness of ANA in a world where geopolitical uncertainty reigns supreme.

Heine and his co-authors point to Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci's dictum that "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

This transitional phase has triggered fierce great-power competition between Washington and Beijing. Today, weaker States find themselves in a bind, where aligning with one side or the other puts a country in a subordinate role. The authors posit that "ANA makes it possible to take advantage of Great Power competition to increase policy options and margins of maneuver." Furthermore, they reject making an "artificial binary choice between Washington and Beijing," and instead suggest examining each foreign policy issue on its own merits and hedge to

take advantage of new opportunities. They cite two examples that showcase India's use of ANA (which New Delhi calls "strategic autonomy" or "multi-alignment"). One is India's membership of Quad and Brics; New Delhi does not have to belong only to one or the other, it can be part of both.

India's refusal to align itself with either side in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is another case in point. New Delhi took advantage of the situation by importing copious amounts of discounted Russian oil after the war in Ukraine began — an example of using ANA to hedge and take advantage of new economic opportunities.

The notion of ANA is universal. Some examples from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are relevant for India. While China is the largest trading partner for most South American countries, the US remains the largest investor in most cases.

As many as 22 countries from LAC are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. A number of them are also part of initiatives spearheaded by Washington, such as the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, or the Shield of the Americas. When Washington turns down Beijing, LAC countries swiftly turn to Ooty; no other case is more emblematic than Ecuador's signing of a free trade agreement with China in 2024 after Washington turned down the offer in 2022.

These balancing acts, the authors note, allow countries to build relationships of interdependence, rather than dependence. India's foreign minister S. Jaishankar released a previous version of Heine's book on ANA at a 2023 conference in Delhi.

It would be appropriate for India to follow one of ANA's tenets: To put economics first, relegating ideology and politics to a secondary role. This is India's ideal foreign policy positioning amid the current war in West Asia. New Delhi's view should be like a horse with blinders — fixated on securing energy needs and the welfare of its 10-million diaspora in the region. Everything else is secondary.

Hari Seshasayee is co-founder of Consilium group and visiting fellow at ORE. The views expressed are personal.



The need is to continue strengthening quality antenatal care and equitable access to maternal health care. SHUTTERSTOCK

Epic stalemate

US-Israel war on Iran has not achieved any of its objectives

A little over 100 days since the United States (US) and Israel launched their joint attack on Iran, codenamed Epic Fury and Rising Lion, the conflict has ground itself into a stalemate reminiscent of the trench warfare of World War I. Both sides are slugging it out without noticeable gains. Despite the assassination of several of its top leaders, including Ayatollah Khamenei, the widespread destruction of vital infrastructure, and over 3,500 deaths, Iran has not acquiesced to US-Israel demands to scrap its nuclear programme and abandon political allies such as Hezbollah, which remains at large. The conflict has engulfed most of West Asia, with the US' regional allies Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates facing catastrophic destruction of their oil and gas infrastructure. A fragile Pakistan-brokered ceasefire brought no progress at the negotiating table, with neither side backing down from its maximalist positions.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world is paying the price for a bizarre situation in which Iran and the US are blocking both sides of the Strait of Hormuz, the choke-point through which 40 per cent of the world's crude oil and gas flows. Just about seven ships a day transit the waterway from over 100 before the conflict, sparking a global oil shock of unprecedented proportions, with Brent crude crossing \$100, up from \$72 before February 28, when the conflict began. Some 146 countries have raised petrol prices between 40 per cent and 90 per cent — only India's increase has been a modest 7.7 per cent. The impact of the fossil-fuel shortage transcends the price rise. In India, for instance, rationing of gas supplies to industry has caused many small and medium businesses to shut shop, sending many migrant workers back to their villages. Global food supplies are also at risk as fertiliser prices soar around the world. Key global market indices around the world have plummeted; India alone has lost trillions in investor wealth with a steadily weakening rupee.

It is possible that both sides have miscalculated somewhat. The US' demand that Iran follow a zero-enrichment framework in favour of a regional consortium based in Saudi Arabia under international supervision is unacceptable to Tehran, given Israel's existence as a nuclear power, access to regional intelligence networks, and expansionist ambitions. The same logic applies to Washington's demands for the handover of Iran's uranium stockpile enriched to 60 per cent purity (that is, below military grade). The US has not agreed to suggestions that these discussions be delinked from the immediate reopening of the strait and lifting sanctions against Iran. So far, only Israel has gained — having occupied 20 per cent of Lebanon and over 60 per cent each of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Now the combatants have resumed attacking each other in an infinite loop of retaliatory raids, with the US President Donald Trump, who started the hostilities in the first place, fruitlessly demanding Iran and Israel "stop shooting immediately". This exhortation is a reflection of the structural weakness of this conflict, in which the US has lost control of its ally. The upshot is that West Asia, a vibrant centre for global finance and investment, has come to a standstill and the world has been precipitated into a crisis with no foreseeable end.

Gauging price pressures

New WPI and PPI hold promise, but regular updates are key

The Office of the Economic Adviser, under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, will release on June 15 a revised wholesale price index (WPI) series with 2023-24 as the new base year, alongside a suite of new producer price indices (PPIs), namely "output PPI" and "input PPI" for the manufacturing sector, and "services PPI", initially covering seven sectors. The last WPI revision, which installed 2011-12 as the base year, was launched only in May 2017. This revision comes at a crucial juncture because the Indian economy has been transformed over the past decade. This has happened through the formalisation push from goods and services tax, by a pandemic that restructured global supply chains, by the rapid scaling up of renewable energy, and by digital services becoming a dominant production category. These changes necessitate updates to several key economic indicators to reflect changes in production patterns, consumption trends, and market structures over the past decade.

The revised WPI expands the basket from 697 to 957 items, and improves the methodology to prepare weightings by using gross value of output instead of net traded value. This is for a better representation of domestic production. Additionally, this includes emerging sectors such as solar and wind energy, under the "electricity group". More importantly, the introduction of the PPIs brings India closer to the global best practices by measuring inflation from the producer's perspective through separate "input and output indices", reducing double counting, unlike the WPI. Several advanced countries like the United States, China, Japan, Germany, France, and other G20 nations use the PPI for calculating this. Beyond inflation tracking, the PPI can improve estimating real gross domestic product (GDP) by providing more accurate sector-specific deflators.

Over time, WPI can become an important building block for strengthening other economic indicators, like the index of industrial production (IIP), while also supporting the development of the recently proposed index of services production (ISP), which is set to release around July and would capture short-term movements in formal services-sector activity. However, the services PPI covers only seven formal-sector services, leaving large segments of India's informal services sector outside its ambit. Challenges in data collection, measurement gaps and the transition from WPI-linked contracts will require closer management. As the government transitions from the WPI to PPI over the next five years, these limitations will need to be addressed carefully.

The next phase of reforms should be to strengthen the national accounts through regular base-year revisions across all key macroeconomic indicators, including the consumer price index, WPI, IIP and GDP series, alongside improving data quality, especially for the informal-services sector, and developing a dedicated production index for this segment. Such an index would track production and economic output and help bridge a major statistical gap, providing a more accurate picture of the economy.

Reflections from the road

On India, the mood remains sombre, even bleak



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SHINHA

I recently had the opportunity to spend some time in the United States (US), meeting with the chief executive officers of several large companies and interacting with other global investors. It was an interesting time to be in the US, given the Iran war, the AI boom, and surging equity markets.

Some of the key takeaways from my meetings are as follows:

The surge in artificial intelligence (AI) spending is real, and it is all anyone can talk about. I don't think I have seen a corporate investment boom of this magnitude in my investing lifetime. The five main hyper-scalers will spend over \$700 billion on AI capital expenditure in 2025. This figure is seven times higher than it was when ChatGPT was released. What's more, spending is expected to exceed \$800 billion in 2027.

If we include the spending incurred by the whole ecosystem (power capacity, chip fabrication plants, etc), it crosses \$1 trillion in the US alone. Such is the scale of capital spending that even the most profitable and cash-generative businesses in the world can no longer support this level of spending from organic cash flows. Witness the \$85 billion equity raise by Alphabet, with Meta next in line. The hyper-scalers are now also accounting for 15-20 per cent of corporate debt issuance. AI is now a race only between China and the US; nobody else can compete. This quantum of capital spending for one theme is unprecedented, and it is now the driver of total US growth, accounting for over 60 per cent of incremental gross domestic product (GDP).

When we see such a level of growth and absolute quantum of capital spending, it will normally super-charge corporate earnings. The companies selling the equipment book profits upfront, while those buying the equipment amortise the costs over time. This timing mismatch supercharges corporate earnings. We are seeing the same phenomenon in the US today.

For the first quarter of 2025, S&P 500 earnings (ex-
-energy) rose over 21 per cent, with corporate margins reaching an all-time high of 15.5 per cent (profit before tax). Each new dollar of sales generated 32 cents of pre-tax profits. Two-thirds of the companies saw their margins rise. While there is some impact from productivity gains in this margin expansion, with technology sector headcount down by 5 per cent over the last four years, strength in capex is, to my mind, the main driver of the earnings windfall. The 68 companies that are direct AI plays (as defined by various banks) delivered two-thirds of the earnings gain and, as a group, reported earnings growth of 52 per cent in Q1 on a 29 per cent rise in revenues. The remaining 432 companies reported earnings growth of 10 per cent — still strong for an economy with nominal GDP growth of 6 per cent — but it pales in comparison.



AKASH PRAKASH

CEOs were visibly confident about continued margin expansion. The productivity benefits of AI investments are yet to kick in. AI tools are only now penetrating deep into enterprises and changing workflows and releasing headcount. This is the real reason the US market looks Teflon-coated. With earnings growing at 21 per cent and accelerating every quarter, there is strong earnings support.

The sense of excitement and infinite possibilities are visible in every interaction with corporate America, public investors, and venture capitalists. There has been so much wealth creation that capital is available for even the wildest ideas.

There are, however, also clear danger signs. Since the Iran war, the only sector that is working is technology, and within that, the semiconductor and hardware names. They account for all the returns over the last three months. This phenomenon is global; just look at market performance in North Asia, only semiconductor equities are delivering the returns.

The returns are so narrow that, to keep up, funds are being forced to sell almost everything else and just pile into the semiconductor names. They have no chance of outperformance otherwise. For the first time, even emerging market (EM) funds have been buying Nvidia and global semiconductor stocks. This is classic late cycle behaviour — momentum chasing that will end badly. Basically everyone is up to their necks in this AI stuff. Most investors do not appreciate just how intertwined earnings are with the AI investment cycle. When the AI cycle moderates, earnings will be cut savagely. There also seems to be a worrying frenzy developing around the three upcoming listings of Space-X, Anthropic, and OpenAI. These will be the three biggest IPOs of all time, occurring within months of each other, and will raise over \$75 billion. At listing, the expected value of all three companies will be almost \$4 trillion. Most market tops are created by a marquee listing at nosebleed valuations. We are going to have three in quick succession!

On India, the mood remains sombre, even bleak. Zero interest. Even 6,000 basis points of underperformance versus EM equities over the last 12 months has failed to stir interest. India has now underperformed EM equities even over a 10-year horizon. Nobody seemed to care that TSMC alone carries a higher index weight than India in the EM index. At the moment, nobody can go against the AI trade — it is career risk.

Why does India get such a valuation premium over EM equities? This was a question many asked. On growth, return on equity (ROE), scale of profits, and long-term performance, it does not stand out from the EM pack, so why the premium? Nobody wants to hear the argument that the sales and profits earned by TSMC, SK Hynix, and Samsung Electronics are at cyclical peaks; you must look at normalised numbers. Believers in the AI trade see these earnings levels as the new normal for these companies and countries.

India is not cheap enough for value investors, and lacks enough growth to attract growth investors. We are seen as the biggest loser of the AI boom, given our reliance on white-collar service exports. From being rock solid, the macro picture — be it the current account, fiscal or even inflation — is deteriorating for all indicators.

The weakness of the rupee has scared many. The irritation and complexity of capital gains taxes for foreign portfolio investors have been well-flagged. India seems to be absent from any discussion on cutting-edge technologies. Most global investors expect India to simply tread water and drift as we slowly grow into our valuations. There is absolutely no sign of substantial equity flows anytime soon.

Most investors no longer take it as a given that India can grow at a minimum of 6 per cent for at least a decade. There is much more debate about the true structural growth outlook, with many investors believing that our best years of growth are behind us. The world cannot accommodate India gaining a serious share in global manufacturing. There were questions about the demographic dividend turning into a disaster if we cannot create enough jobs. All in all, it was a sobering set of discussions and a good reality check.

The author is with Amansa Capital

Fake plays, music, and video

Diljit Dosanjh wore his Punjabi identity with pride on the Jimmy Fallon show in April this year. He sang, danced and bantered with the confidence of someone whose concerts routinely sell out in Canada, New York, and the United Kingdom. Arijit Singh was a delightful voice in Ed Sheeran's global hit, *Sapphire*, last year. Streaming has homogenised the world of media and entertainment — from both the supply and demand sides — creating one big global market. And Dosanjh, Sheeran, or BTS, among others are the products. They are reaching audiences far beyond their ethnic or national identities, allying with other musicians and singers to bring diverse sounds, lyrics and music.

That brings us to the point of this piece. Music is a great way to gauge the future of entertainment. It is, as this column has stated several times, the Petri dish of the business. It needs little data and, therefore, little bandwidth to carry a music file from one part of the world to another. This made it among the first businesses to be disrupted by the internet and then streaming. When MP3s, technology to compress music files, took off in the late 1990s, young people formed peer-to-peer networks for sharing songs ripped from compact discs, causing the business to collapse. From \$22 billion in global revenues in 2001, music fell to a low of \$13 billion in 2014, going by data from the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI). (IFPI, 2001). YouTube (2005) and music streaming apps such as Spotify from 2016 onwards, helped change things. They democratised access for both creators and listeners, bringing flexibility. This, in turn, changed the economics of the business. From 2016, revenues started rising again,

reaching almost \$32 billion in 2025. The business is doing well now. Across the world, streaming brings in 70 per cent of revenues, with the next-largest chunk, 16.6 per cent, coming from physical sales, which saw a growth rate of 8 per cent last year, thanks to booming vinyl sales. There are, however, two huge challenges.

One is the duopoly of YouTube and Spotify in most countries. You could argue, as the IFPI does, that each market has a different set of dominant brands. It may be Apple, YouTube, Spotify, or a local streaming brand such as JioSaavn or the erstwhile Wynk in India. But the fact remains that YouTube dominates the Indian music market, followed by Spotify. These platforms have done a great job of bringing process, systems, and payment mechanisms for sharing revenues. But in doing so, they have also created an imbalance.



MEDIASCOPE

KHANNA KOHLI-VANDEKAR

In a market of 178 million listeners, barely 14 million Indians subscribe to a streaming music service. Note that video streaming had 272 million subscribers in 2025. In music, much of the economics is driven by advertising. Every time a songs played, a label earns anywhere between 4 and 10 paise, against an estimated 50-90 paise globally. This is a blended estimate across pay and subscription revenue share.

No matter how many million times a song is played, the 4 paise doesn't amount to much, especially when it has to pay for everything from marketing to royalties. Therefore, overall revenue growth, has always lagged behind consumption volumes. At ₹5,900 crore in revenue in India in 2025, music brought in less than 10 per cent of what TV did

and just a sliver of digital media revenues.

The second challenge and one which Victoria Oakley, chief executive officer of IFPI, has been highlighting globally is fake plays. You could use artificial intelligence (AI) tools to generate hundreds of fake songs with fake cover art, fake lyrics, fake melody, fake name of the band. You upload these on streaming platforms. Then you use AI bots to push up the number of streams to show the many people have listened to these. That means the money that would otherwise have gone to real artists is going to someone spinning fake plays. It is becoming industrialised through streaming farms. Some estimates put fake plays at 10-20 per cent of global streaming revenue.

Now extend this development to the rest of the media and entertainment business. A digital duopoly of Google (which owns YouTube) and Meta (Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp) exists globally when it comes to video and publishing. And every local industry is trying to tackle it in its own way.

Fake plays, however, is another cup of tea. Its ability to impact subscription-driven platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video or SonyLIV is limited. That is because they commission their shows/movies. That creates a gateway that fraudsters can't pass. Then, there is the many gig economy of content creators who have listened to these. That means the money that would otherwise have gone to real artists is going to someone spinning fake plays. It is becoming industrialised through streaming farms. Some estimates put fake plays at 10-20 per cent of global streaming revenue.

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Inside the mind of the RSS sevak



ADITI PHADNIS

This book on the Rashtriya Swamyamsevak Sangh (RSS) is not an academic work — it cannot be, with a mere 14-k page bibliography and desultory footnoting. So, if you're looking for rigor or a critical review of an organisation that has become one of the most powerful influences on Indian society and mind-space in recent times, you won't find it here. The greatest merit of the book lies in its artlessness. It is based on conversations with nine swamyamsevaks —

members of the organisation who have dedicated their lives to furthering the RSS cause — and traces their growth and work in the RSS. The author holds you by the hand and takes you on an insider's tour of the organisation, as seen by its members. It is largely sympathetic and sometimes breathlessly appreciative of the "selfless work" volunteers do when they join the Sangh.

The book explains that swamyamsevaks are not born, they are made. Central to a swamyamsevak's life is "seva" (service), a crucial pillar of the Hindu nationalist movement. The author says it was hard to get an organisation as tight-knit as the RSS to open up and talk, especially as it rejects "vyaktivaad" (individualism). The swamyamsevaks she has spoken to are leaders in varied areas — the tale of a doctor (Manohar Shinde) who was a diaspora swamyamsevak; Shan-

taram Siddi, who "strayed" into the RSS and stayed there to work among tribal communities; Joydev Singhra Roy, otherwise, Joydev Dada, who worked in terroris-hit areas including Jammu & Kashmir and Punjab; Ashok Bhagat, whose work in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad gradually expanded to tribal in Jharkhand; Pankajavalli, who works with girls and women in Jammu, a swamyamsevika from the women's wing of an organisation that is male-dominated, and many others.

The book describes the dilemmas, struggles, and vulnerabilities of swamyamsevaks, who only occasionally admit to self-doubt — like Ashok Bhagat, who says "when you are for samaj, there is little time left for your family. Sometimes, I wish I had given them more of my time". But the overall picture that emerges is of disciplined, steely sol-

diers who are implacable and unshakable in their core beliefs. This is evident in Pankajavalli's remarks on the RSS's relationship with Muslims in Jammu & Kashmir: "We do not interact with Muslims here... we only exchange formal greetings". To the author's intervention: "Surely you are good people too", she concedes, "yes, there are... They think we are here with a different agenda. So they prefer to keep their distance, and frankly, so do we". Joydev Dada displays more granularity. "Ekal Vidyalayas [single-teacher schools started with support from the RSS] in Jammu & Kashmir teach children the *ayats* of the Quran along with Hindi. All the teachers are Muslim. They sing '*Mad-e-watan-tujhe Salam*' at the schools," he tells the author. But he is clear: In Punjab, there are no "militants" only "terrorists" because

"militants fight for a cause. These will kill innocent people targeting civilians are not militants. They are terrorists". Many strands of life as a swamyamsevak come out of the accounts. What they have in common is a commitment to "Bharat". There is angst, not expressed clearly, about the emancipation of Hindi from Hindi. But who is a real Bharatiya? Eating non-vegetarian food, even beef, does not bar you from being one. And if you are a Bharatiya Christian whose aim is to convert more people (especially tribals) to Christianity, you're not considered Bharatiya.

The conversations are not unstructured or linear. And the author confesses honestly that she struggled with her own beliefs of secularism and patriotism while writing. But the most problematic issue in the RSS is its relationship with the state — not just as it is, but as it ought to be, the Hindu Rashtra. The conversations do not address this. Once the Hindu Rashtra is established, what is the role the RSS will play? That's a gap in the book.

Julia Eckert's outstanding study on the Shiv Sena explores how the organisation grew via arbitrage in areas that the state could not/did not reach. The services the state vacated, the Shiv Sainiks (which was the Sena movement needed to create opportunities for action. It created the role of militant enemy images, and integrated diverse interests and motivations in the politics of struggle. But when there was no opportunity for political arbitrage, its cadres drifted away, and the organisation split. What happens when there is no Other? May these questions will be answered in another book. Meanwhile, this volume is essential reading for those who seek to understand Hindu nationalist, the Sangh, and the direction Indian society and politics could take in the coming years.

OUR VIEW

GUEST VIEW



Re-imagine food supply to plug nutritional gaps

India's latest family health survey shows rising adult obesity while a large share of children lack nutrition. It's time to deploy farm-sector reforms to tackle a key food-supply imbalance

Findings of the sixth round of India's National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6) conducted in 2023-24 were released recently. On some counts, our progress has been remarkable, thanks partly to government efforts. Health insurance coverage expanded to about 60% of households in 2023-24 from just over 40% back in 2019-21, for example, and about 83% of children under 2 years of age have been fully vaccinated, compared to about 77% earlier. What glares out, however, is its portrait of a country that's still underfed to an alarmingly large extent even as growing obesity signals a heavier health burden. Nearly one-third of children under five remain underweight for their age and almost one-fifth too thin for their height. Meanwhile, our rate of adult obesity—defined as a body mass index of over 25—has risen to nearly 31% from 24% among women and just over 27% from under 23% for men. Clearly, Indian nutrition demands attention. The World Health Organization (WHO), whose standards the NFHS uses for children's nutrition profiles, classifies being too thin or light as signs of undernutrition. This is one form of malnutrition, defined by the UN agency as "deficiencies, excesses, or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients." The latter two kinds differ, as they result in weight gain and health hazards. In recent years, critics of such datasets have argued for criteria that take genetic variation into account, but while advances in genomic science could give us a sharper picture, long-tracked trends need not be perfectly accurate to be useful as indicators. Nor are trends drawn from NFHS data any surprise, given India's stage of development. As globally observed, adult obesity bears a link

with inadequate nourishment in childhood. As the WHO puts it, "Inadequate infant growth due to poor nutrition leads to under-nutrition in children in many low- and middle-income countries, which, if followed later in life by an increased intake of calories, can result in... obesity." Many countries in the throes of economic and nutritional transitions face this 'double burden of malnutrition,' with access to cheap ultra-processed edibles playing a worrisome role. While early-age deprivation can pose health risks later in life, India's baseline dietary divergence is driven by income disparity. Yet, even an economy that emerges more equitably may not suffice to secure healthy diets. The government's Poshan Abhiyan against malnutrition has allied schemes like mid-day school meals and free foodgrain handouts to go with it. Public efforts also aim to tackle deficiencies like iron and iodine. But balanced diets across the country require family education, individual discipline and food-supply adaptation. Demand for protein- and fibre-rich nutrients has grown along with household incomes, but their supply has struggled to keep up. For legacy reasons and logistical ease, the bulk of our food output is skewed in favour of carbohydrates; think of staples like rice and wheat. A farm sector dominated by the state has long distorted incentives for farmers, many of whom would rather grow what the Centre procures—at politically set 'support' prices—than what the market asks for or what people's diets need. What's subsidized and cheaply supplied shapes much of what we eat by altering relative costs. Even processed foods that sell in high volumes display a distinct carbs skew. To better align what we produce with our nutritional needs, India's agricultural sector should be overhauled before it's too late.

Can India forestall an economic crisis? Policy moves hold the key

Long-term strategies should accompany short-term stabilization efforts to ride out the latest shock



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The Indian economy appears to be entering a phase of heightened macroeconomic vulnerability marked by the simultaneous weakening of some key indicators. Currency depreciation, inflationary pressures, weak private investment and growing capital account stress point to a broader crisis of confidence. Although recent geopolitical tensions and wars have accelerated the rupee's decline, this had begun much earlier. Weak net foreign direct investment (FDI), sustained foreign portfolio investment (FPI) outflows and tightening global financial conditions have been major factors. A weaker rupee raises import costs, worsens inflationary pressures and increases the burden of external liabilities. The conventional argument that currency depreciation would stimulate exports and thus improve the external balance appears increasingly untenable in the present global context. Defending the currency through the depletion of foreign exchange reserves is not feasible as this hoard is an essential buffer for financing import bills and maintaining external sector credibility. A second dimension of an emerging crisis is the resurgence of inflationary pressures. Rising international crude oil prices, disruptions in global supply chains and exchange rate pass-through effects have stoked both wholesale and

retail inflation. Cost-push inflationary dynamics are becoming increasingly visible across sectors. Rising transport costs, higher logistics expenditure and increased costs of industrial inputs are beginning to ripple across the economy. Lower-income households are disproportionately affected because food, fuel and essential commodities constitute a larger share of their consumption basket. Persistent inflation also erodes real wages and weakens purchasing power, thereby dampening domestic demand and slowing the economy further. Monetary tightening alone may not be able to address such cost-push inflation. It could instead suppress investment and employment without substantially easing supply-side pressures. This policy dilemma reflects the broader tension between stabilization and growth. A third and more structural concern is the prolonged weakness of private investment. Despite significant increases in corporate profitability, private capital expenditure has been subdued. An observation made by the chief economic advisor that profits have risen without a corresponding rise in investments captures an important contradiction. The reluctance of private capital to invest domestically reflects concerns related to demand, global uncertainties and financial risks. Simultaneously, Indian capital has increasingly sought investment opportunities abroad. While outward investment may reflect global ambitions, it also suggests limited confidence in domestic profitability and investment conditions. The fourth dimension lies in the changing nature of pressures within the balance of payments. Earlier external sector crises in India were primarily associated with current account deficits, while the capital account generally acted as a stabilizing source of inflows. The contemporary situation is different because vulnerabilities are increasingly emerging within the capital account. Gross FDI inflows have suffered the effects of tightening global financial

conditions amid rising interest rates in advanced economies. Although net FDI inflows are positive, they have fallen significantly relative to earlier peaks as a share of GDP. The FPI segment has witnessed even greater volatility, with periodic episodes of big outflows from equity and debt markets. External commercial borrowings (ECBs) and other debt flows have offered liquidity support, but reliance on debt-creating inflows introduces additional risks. Taken together, these developments suggest the emergence of a broad crisis of confidence affecting both internal and external balances. An internal balance refers to the co-existence of price stability and full employment, while an external balance implies a sustainable balance-of-payments position without destabilizing deficits or excessive dependence on volatile capital inflows. Current trends indicate stress on both fronts simultaneously. The policy response cannot, therefore, be confined to simplistic narratives that portray depreciation as harmless or inevitable. We need a combination of short-term stabilization measures (the central bank last week took a few) and long-term structural reforms. In the short-run, containing inflation, stabilizing exchange rate expectations and maintaining external sector confidence are essential. Energy diversification and strengthening local productive capacity can also reduce external vulnerability. Over the longer term, the economy needs a revival of private investment, expansion of employment-intensive manufacturing, strengthening of domestic industrial capabilities and more resilient trade and industrial policies. India's development strategy must shift focus from narrow financial indicators to broader economic resilience and job generation. We need real-ism over complacency. Warning signs are visible across indicators. While we may not face a full-fledged crisis, further policy action is imperative. *These are the author's personal views.*



JUST A THOUGHT

The food you eat can be either the safest and most powerful form of medicine, or the slowest form of poison.

ANN WIGMORE

GUEST VIEW

Geography is destiny for wages even within the country

AMARENDU NANDY & APRAJITA



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An important insight from the World Bank's latest *South Asia Economic Update* should unsettle some assumptions in India's employment debate. According to the report, only about one-fifth of wage differences across Indian states can be explained by worker characteristics like education, experience or skill. The rest arise from where people work, including factors like the density of economic activity, transport connectivity, urban scale and quality of the surrounding economic ecosystem. Put differently, wages depend more on the place than the person in India today. For years, the national conversation has focused on whether enough jobs are being created. But an economy can generate employment while still leaving workers insecure if local economies do not create productive, wage-raising opportunities. Recent data shows that between 2017 and 2023, India's per capita income grew at an average annual rate of 4.1%. Yet, the World Bank finds that real wage growth varied

sharply across states, ranging from -5.4% in Punjab to +5.6% in Chhattisgarh. The same national growth cycle produced different spatial outcomes. Some regions generated competitive labour demand and stronger real wage growth; others did not. This should also make us read headline employment statistics with greater care. The latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) annual report presents a reasonably favourable narrative on employment. India's usual status unemployment rate stood at 3.1% in 2024-25. Regular-wage or salaried employment rose modestly from 22.4% to 23.6%. Manufacturing employment increased to 12.1% of total employment, while agriculture's share declined to 43%. But low joblessness in a lower-middle-income economy does not necessarily imply labour-market strength. In countries where households lack meaningful social protection or saving buffers, people cannot afford to remain unemployed for long. They work because they must. The more relevant question is whether the jobs available generate sustained earnings. On that count, the evidence is less reassuring. *Economic Survey 2024-25* shows that the real monthly earnings of male regular-wage workers declined from ₹12,665 in

2017-18 to ₹11,858 in 2023-24. For women regular-wage workers, earnings fell from ₹10,116 to ₹8,855, while self-employed women saw an even sharper decline, from ₹4,348 to ₹2,950. The broader pattern suggests that while employment may have expanded, the gains from this growth are not passing through to real wages in large parts of the labour market. Typically, wages rise when workers have credible options. This may sound obvious but it is often ignored in policy discussions. Employers pay more when labour can move elsewhere—from farms to factories, from informal retail to organized logistics, from low-value services to higher-productivity firms. Where such mobility is limited, workers may remain employed, but with little bargaining power. India's labour-market challenge, as the evidence implies, is not just about a shortage of jobs, but a shortage of credible alternatives to bad jobs. So, is urbanization a solution? The World

Bank notes that Maharashtra and Gujarat had nearly identical urbanization rates in 2023, both just under 43%. Yet, Maharashtra's wage premium was above the median, while Gujarat's below. The point is that urbanization matters only when it creates networks of firms competing for labour. Otherwise, it merely relocates underemployment from villages to cities. This is visible in India's urban labour markets. Many workers are joining app-based platforms for home-delivery or other services, working at low-end retail outlets or taking up informal construction work. Such work may provide immediate income support, but with limited job security, low bargaining power and little wage progression. Cities, in other words, may be absorbing labour faster than they are generating productivity-linked earnings growth. The latest Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASU/SE) corroborates this. India's unincorporated non-agricultural sector expanded from 73.4 million

establishments in 2023-24 to 79.2 million in 2025, adding about 7.5 million workers. Gross value added increased 10.9% at current prices while nominal emoluments per hired worker grew only 3.9%. The economy is generating livelihoods but if employment rises much faster than earnings, labour may be getting absorbed in activities with limited productivity gains. India cannot build a broad-based labour market through high-tech sectors alone. A labour-abundant economy also needs large-scale job expansion in labour-intensive sectors like garments, footwear, tourism, food processing, logistics and construction-linked manufacturing. Historically, these sectors have served as transitional ladders for workers to move from subsistence jobs to stable-wage work. India's labour-market debate must move beyond the familiar binary of jobs versus joblessness growth. For an economy aiming for developed status by 2047, jobs must raise mobility, bargaining power and living standards. Ultimately, growth that does not translate to real wage gains weakens its own social foundations. And so long as opportunity is shaped more heavily by geography than skills, our growth story will remain economically unequal and socially incomplete.



MY VIEW | ECONOMIC GRAVITY

MINT CURATOR

India's golden opportunity: let's reset our relationship with gold

It's time to shift from an import-and-store model to a circulate-and-recycle one. Various measures can be taken to achieve it



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India sits atop a paradox wrought in gold. It is the world's second-largest consumer of the metal, a civilizational love affair stretching back millennia. Yet it remains structurally dependent on imports to feed that appetite.

As gold prices rise, geopolitical fractures worsen and India's current account deficit widens, it's time for the country to re-imagine its relationship with gold: not as a commodity to be hoarded or imported at ever-greater cost, but as a strategic asset to be refined, circulated and exported.

The numbers tell a striking story. India's foreign exchange reserves increased from \$112 billion in 2004 to \$341 billion in 2015 and stood at \$682 billion at the end of May 2026. Even more remarkable is what has happened within: gold's share rose from under 6% to nearly 17% over 2015-2026, with RBI's gold holdings growing from \$20 billion to \$15 billion. Gold prices climbed from \$1,100 per ounce in late 2009 to nearly \$4,900 in 2025, a compounded annual growth rate of over 8%, with a staggering 44% surge over 2024-2025 alone. Gold has become, unmistakably, the world's most credible safe haven.

The repricing of gold reflects a world reordering. The pandemic, Russia-Ukraine war, West Asian instability and weaponization of the dollar through sanctions have collectively reminded governments and households alike that hard assets endure when fiat systems waver. Indian consumers seem to have absorbed this lesson with quiet sophistication. Demand for gold bars and coins, instruments of saving and investment, surged from 186 tonnes in 2021 (about 23% of India's gold demand) to 280 tonnes in 2025 (39% of the total), a rise of over 11% annually. Jewellery demand, meanwhile, fell from 611 tonnes to 441 tonnes. Indians are buying gold differently, prioritizing its financial function over its ornamental one.

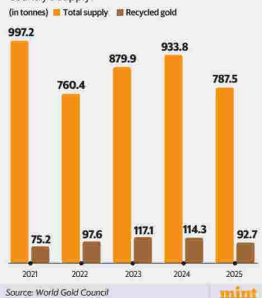
This growing appetite for gold—as investment also points toward a clear policy opportunity. Gold is now the second-largest driver of India's import bill after crude oil, accounting for 12.3% of total imports in 2025-26, up sharply from 7.6% just two years prior, signalling the scale of domestic demand that India could increasingly meet from within. Every percentage point satisfied through domestic recycling or refining is a direct gain for the current account and possibly for the rupee.

The solution lies in a concept that India has been slow to embrace at scale: recycled gold. Estimates suggest Indian households hold around 25,000 tonnes of gold, accumulated over generations, tucked into lockers, stashed into heirlooms and hidden under proverbial mattresses. This gold is both a vast latent asset and a source of comparative advantage: mobilized, it could generate a return for households, expand domestic supply and



Mobilize the yellow metal

Recycled gold remains a small fraction of the country's supply.



Source: World Gold Council

GOPAKUMAR WARRIER/MINT

reduce import dependence. India currently recycles only a little over 92.7 tonnes of gold annually, down from 117 tonnes in 2023, representing less than 12% of total gold supply. China, by contrast, derived 20% of its supply from recycled gold as far back as 2018. Globally, recycled gold accounted for 30% of total supply in the final quarter of 2025. In 2023, Italy recycled 136 tonnes, the UK 210 tonnes and Switzerland 669 tonnes. India does not lack raw materials and has significant headroom for recycling growth through targeted improvements in infrastructure, incentives and institutional design.

Exchanging old jewellery for new would help circulate the existing gold supply and reduce fresh gold imports. India's Gold Monetisation Scheme of 2015 was a pioneering step toward bringing idle gold into the formal financial system. The government's decision to wind down the medium and long-term components of this scheme in March 2025 signals that a more effective successor mechanism may be needed, one that balances the trade-off between higher returns for households and fiscal costs for the government. Turkey offers an instructive precedent: in 2012, its central bank allowed commercial banks to hold 30% of required reserves in gold, promoting innovative gold banking products. The mobilized gold was held as reserves, which made more funds available for

lending out to industry. By 2013, about 1% of the 3,500 tonnes held by Turkish households had been mobilized. Overall, the schemes were successful, and contributed to a sharp reduction in Turkey's current account deficit and exchange rate volatility. A comparable 1% mobilization of India's privately held gold would yield 250 tonnes, worth \$36.2 billion and equivalent to 32% of India's total gold supply in 2025.

Collection and purity testing centres must expand beyond major metros into tier-2 and tier-3 cities where much of India's gold is held. Deposit processes and purity testing must be digitized and simplified. For jewellers and refiners, tax credits linked to the volume of recycled gold processed could catalyse a formal industry. The goal is to shift India's model from import-and-store to circulate-and-recycle. Incentives, proactive outreach, simplification, and strong execution will be key.

The second front is exports. India currently exports \$13.2 billion in gold annually (3.1% of merchandise exports), almost entirely in the form of gold jewellery, a labour-intensive, design-driven segment in which India has a clear comparative advantage. And we have a significant opportunity to scale refining capacity further. As of 2022, India had 33 gold refineries with a combined capacity of just 1,800 tonnes; 25 with individual capacity below 50 tonnes. Switzerland, the global refining leader, operates at 3,100 tonnes per year, and the UAE at 2,000 tonnes.

A petroleum analogy is instructive: India once imported refined petroleum products, invested in refinery capacity and became a significant exporter. Gold does imports, semi-refined gold processed domestically, grew from 23 tonnes in 2012 to 226 tonnes in 2025, which shows that a refinery pathway is viable. Scaling it further, combined with investments in gold fabrication, could make India a net gold value-adder.

Today's geopolitical uncertainty has reinforced what India has known for centuries: gold endures. The gold exchange-traded fund surge, with assets under management rising 191% and investor flows up 78% in 2025-26, shows that Indian savers readily embrace formal gold instruments if they are accessible and liquid.

The policy challenge is to channel this appetite toward schemes that harness India's comparative advantage and also benefit the domestic supply side. India has talent, demand and the moment. This opportunity is golden.

Maitreyee Mohile and Ashoka Isaac Centre for Public Policy contributed to this article. These are the authors' personal views.

Why solar parking lots aren't a useful path to green energy

They distract us from the challenge of decarbonizing an economy



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Korea and France are betting on an idea whose time may never come. ISTOCKPHOTO

Only we could get reliable, cheap, clean energy without annoying anyone anywhere. South Korea and France think they have the solution. But don't get too excited about it. The idea is to put our new power generation infrastructure in places that we already dislike. Car parks seem like the perfect solution.

The government of President Lee Jae Myung promises to make erecting solar panels on parking lots a central plank of its plan to reduce South Korea's dependence on imported fossil fuels—a troubling vulnerability after the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Since November, all but the smallest solar parking lots have been ordered to install canopies to provide shade for vehicles plus generation for the grid. That is a key part of his proposal to build 44.2GW of solar on urban land, plus another 12GW on utility-scale sites, by 2030.

France's policy is even more ambitious. By the end of this month, both public and private large lots are required to cover at least 50% of their parking area with panels. Mid-sized sites will follow in the next two years. That will ultimately provide an estimated 11GW of generation, equivalent at midday to the output of 10 nuclear reactors.

It is a model that could be exported worldwide, with huge benefits. America's surface parking lots cover about 36,000 sq. km, and a French-style mandate could generate as much electricity as is consumed in the US, and then some.

What's not to like? The problem is the same as the benefit: Solar parking lots are so superficially appealing that they can blind people to how inadequate they are for the scale of the challenge. While they can help at the margin, a wholesale switch to cleaner energy will involve tough trade-offs, now and in the future. Pretending that is not the case will only entrench existing polluting fuels. In dropping its plans for a similar programme last month, the UK government made the right decision.

Consider Korea's 44.2GW target. That is about 10 times more rooftop solar than what is presently installed, and would represent a remarkably high share of its crowded urban area—almost double the density of panels seen in the Netherlands, the world leader. Getting there by 2030 would also mean connecting new solar at almost three times 2025's record pace.

All that is plausible—but only just. The problem comes when you start looking beyond 2030. The rise of electric vehicles, data centres, heat pumps and chip fabs means that Seoul now expects power demand in 2040 to be about 70TWh

higher than its previous forecasts. That is enough on its own to suck up all the generation from current urban solar plans. If the country wants to start reducing its fossil fuel demand rather than holding it steady, it will need to find yet more sites—but with its population already in decline, its cities are not getting any bigger.

The obvious candidate is farmland. And that is the nub of the problem. The two countries where solar car-park policies are most advanced are ones that attach an almost spiritual value to the sanctity of their rural land. Promising to put modules on parking lots can be a way of avoiding the thornier question of whether more of them should be put on farmers' fields as well.

That ignores the fact that the countryside has never been an unchanging landscape. As a child growing up in southern England in the 1980s and 1990s, my image of pastoral idyll was a bright-yellow expanse of rapeseed or canola. But that crop was rarely seen until the 1970s, when Canada developed a strain that could be used for cooking oil, and parasites and warm winters have meant it has all but disappeared over the past decade.

Freedom of farmland typically would like the owners to harvest whatever commodity is most profitable—whether rice, wheat or solar electricity. Planning roadblocks to photovoltaic projects, for all they are framed as being in the interests of agriculture, typically come from neighbours, activists and politicians who aren't farmers themselves.

It would be great if urban solar could fix these dilemmas. But there is not enough suitable land to make such generation more than a small slice of the total, given the problems of shading, small sites, existing infrastructure and maintenance challenges. Rooftop solar also typically costs 50% more than the utility-scale variety, removing the advantage that makes switching to renewables attractive in the first place.

Solar parking lots suggest that an energy transition can be achieved in a modern industrial society simply by plastering our existing built-up areas with generators. That is a false promise.

By all means, slap a solar canopy on your car park. Just don't let it distract you from the far bigger task of decarbonization that lies ahead. **BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

Why our IT service providers need to be honest advisors

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There is a problem that sits at the intersection of two things I have written about in this space: the fiduciary resilience that defines the best long-term client relationships in India's IT services sector and the verification gap that AI is opening within every enterprise that deploys it. The problem is this: the firms most trusted by their clients are structurally the least likely to tell them the truth.

This is a geometry problem. After a top-tier Indian IT services firm has spent 15 years embedded in a client's operations, it has accumulated something that does not appear on any balance sheet. It knows which transformation programmes failed and were rebranded as successes. It knows which senior executive championed which outsourcing deal and whose career depends on that decision having been correct. It knows which vendor relationships are politically protected and which delivery heads have survived on goodwill more than performance. It knows, in short, where the skeletons

are hidden. This knowledge is the real moat, far more durable than any rate card or delivery capability. And it's precisely what makes honest counsel so hard to come by.

Consider what honesty requires. Say, the client's chief operating officer has spent six months evangelising an Agentic AI strategy internally. Budgets have been committed. A steering committee has been formed, complete with a name and a slide deck. A few early deployments are running, looking functional, producing output that nobody in the room is technically equipped to audit. The IT services firm's account team knows from its experience across dozens of similar deployments elsewhere that it is looking at a fragility problem waiting to turn into a crisis. The systems may not be wrong in ways that are immediately visible, but in ways that are likely to show up at the worst possible moment—under pressure or when a downstream process that nobody mapped makes a demand the systems cannot meet.

Telling the client this means telling the COO that her strategy is like an unexploded device that is ticking. It means becoming the source of inconvenient news in a relationship that has survived precisely because inconvenience was managed delicately, *sotto voce* rather than loudly.

The principal, in this case the client, has delegated judgement to an agent, the IT services firm, because the agent possesses superior knowledge. But the agent's incentives are structured around relationship continuity, not truth delivery. The gap between what the agent knows and what the agent says is the 'agency cost.' It is paid not in cash but in compounding technical debt, in systems that look finished but are not, and in decisions made on the basis of audits that were really endorsements.

The biggest irony is that the firms most capable of seeing the problem clearly are those with the longest relationships and therefore the strongest reasons to stay quiet. A newcomer with no legacy position can afford an uncomfortable conversation. The incumbent with a thousand people on the account and a renewal coming up in eight months cannot, or believes it cannot, which amounts to the same thing. This belief is enough. It produces silence without a conscious decision to stay silent.

I argued in a recent column that fiduciary resilience, the willingness to honour commitments when doing so is financially inconvenient, is a sophisticated form of risk control rather than mere sentiment. I still hold that position. But there is a version of fiduciary loyalty that curdles into something less admirable: the careful management of a client's comfort at the expense of its interests. Staying on the account is not the same as serving the client. Sometimes, it is the opposite. The distinction matters more now than it ever has because the consequences of managed silence are no longer limited to a missed deadline or a cost overrun. They extend to systems making consequential decisions that nobody can

fully explain or reliably audit. The resolution, if there is one, is structural. The firms that will matter in the next decade are those that build the institutional capacity to deliver hard technical verdicts independent of account relationship pressures. This would require separating the

people who assess systems from the people who sell them, and then protecting their independent findings from interference by the sales team.

That separation needs to be protected with the same dedication that audit firms are supposed to protect the wall between their audit and advisory services. This is an unglamorous organizational problem, no doubt, but it is also the only way to make the trusted-advisor relationship more meaningful at a time when the premium on honesty is rising. Those who can spot digital risks need to speak up candidly.

The client who is told the truth about a fragile system today is the same client who will remember a decade from now who had the nerve to say it. The one who was merely 'managed' while a crisis slowly crept up will eventually understand what went wrong. Such clients always do—and remember being let down.

Trust, as I have written before, compounds slowly and decays fast. An IT services firm that mistakes the preservation of a relationship for servicing a client's IT needs is spending down that compound interest without knowing it. The bill may arrive only later, much larger than anticipated. It almost always is.

Relationship preservation mustn't trump the need to give clients frank advice on fragility risks

Editor's TAKE

India's growth story at a crossroads

GDP figure of 7.8 per cent is cause for celebration — but read the fine print, and a more anxious story emerges

India's economy delivered a stellar performance in the January-March quarter of 2026. GDP growth came in at 7.8 per cent, easing slightly from 8 per cent in the preceding quarter but comfortably above market expectations of 7.2 per cent, taking full-year FY26 growth to 7.7 per cent. Prime Minister Modi has every reason to proclaim India the world's fastest-growing major economy. The number is real. The achievement is genuine. But a number, however impressive, is not the full story. Look past the headline, and the stress fractures become visible.

Begin with the central bank. The Reserve Bank of India held its repo rate steady at 5.25 per cent for the third consecutive meeting in June, maintaining a neutral stance even as it cut its GDP growth forecast for FY2026-27 sharply to 6.6 per cent from an earlier 6.9 per cent. A central bank that simultaneously freezes rates and slashes its own growth projection is not a central bank radiating confidence. It is one navigating a tightrope. Inflation is now projected to average 5.1 per cent for the current fiscal year, up significantly from an earlier estimate of 4.6 per cent. The "rare Goldilocks" era that RBI Governor Mahanta celebrated just months ago has quietly given way to stagflationary risk. Then there is the rupee downside. Foreign investors have offloaded over \$20 billion in Indian shares so far this year, placing the rupee under severe pressure and making it one of Asia's worst-performing major currencies in 2026. A sliding currency is more than a financial statistic — it is a barometer of confidence, and right now that barometer is falling. Capital outflows of \$13.7 billion from the equity segment alone since January have prompted the RBI to roll out emergency measures to attract foreign capital. The global backdrop adds further complexity. Economists have cautioned that growth is likely to moderate this year amid rising energy costs and global uncertainty linked to the West Asia conflict. India's ability to source affordable energy has been disrupted, and the RBI's own revised growth trajectory for FY27 ranges between 6.3 per cent and 6.8 per cent across quarters — a step down from FY26's pace. What should India do to keep the momentum alive? Three imperatives stand out.

First, protect the rupee without choking growth. The RBI must strike a balance between currency stability and keeping borrowing costs conducive to investment. Deepening forex reserves, encouraging long-term capital inflows and reducing oil import dependence are the sustainable answers.

Second, broaden the base of growth. While services, manufacturing and construction have driven the recent surge, agriculture grew just 3.6 per cent — a sector that still employs nearly half the workforce. Inclusive growth demands that rural incomes rise, farm productivity improves and the benefits of the services boom reach beyond Tier-1 cities.

Third, stay fiscally disciplined. The temptation to spend India's way through global headwinds is understandable, but deficit overruns would further spook foreign investors and weaken the rupee. The economy needs not just celebration, but honest diagnosis. The numbers are strong. The foundations need tending.

12 years of science in service of India

As India counts down the years to 2047 — the centenary of our independence and the target year for becoming a fully developed nation — science and technology will not merely support that journey; it will determine its pace and character



JITENDRA SINGH

Territory into fragrant fields of purple — a revolution in rural livelihoods born in a laboratory. This, in essence, is what twelve years of sustained commitment to science and technology in India has meant: not the advancement of knowledge for its own sake, but science as a living, breathing force in the daily lives of our citizens.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, he articulated a vision that challenged us to think of science not as a departmental function but as a national mission. The years that followed have borne that vision out in ways that would have seemed extraordinary a generation ago. Today, India has landed a spacecraft at the Moon's south pole, developed its own antibiotic for the first time, built supercomputers from Pune to Patna, and created a space economy teeming with homegrown startups. But the deeper story — the one that deserves to be told — is how each of these achievements rippled outward into the lives of ordinary people.

Science is no longer confined to laboratories — it has become the single most powerful driver of national development and citizen empowerment.

Consider the farmer. Weather, always the silent sovereign of Indian agriculture, has become far more legible over the last decade. A comprehensive overhaul of our earth observation and forecasting infrastructure now gives farmers accurate, hyperlocal weather predictions — not in the vague language of probability, but with the precision that allows a family to decide whether to harvest tomorrow or wait. When a cyclone forms over the Bay of Bengal today, our early warning systems give coastal communities hours — sometimes days — of advance notice. The difference is not statistical; it is counted in lives saved and livelihoods preserved.

In the mountains and river valleys of Jammu and Kashmir, science arrived in the form of the Aroma Mission — a programme that introduced lavender cultivation and supported farmers with technology, seeds and market linkages. What began as a pilot has since transformed into what is now celebrated as India's Purple Revolution: thousands of farming families earning dignified incomes from aromatic and medicinal plants, with science as the quiet architect of this prosperity. Similar work in saffron expansion, medicinal herb cultivation, and the first-ever introduction of asafetida cultivation in India has demonstrated that science, rooted in the soil, can transform agriculture as any industrial technology. Rural empowerment through science has extended well beyond agriculture. From 3D-printed housing prototypes designed for affordable rural construction to AI-powered systems that detect food adulteration, technology is being deliberately directed at solving the problems that matter most to the people who can least afford them. The National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber Physical Systems — which connects computing, sensing and physical engineering — has established twenty-five Technology Innovation Hubs across the country, seeding more than a thousand startups working on problems as varied as precision agriculture, clean water access, and rural healthcare delivery.

Healing India: The biotechnology breakthrough

Perhaps no domain illustrates the transformative power of Indian science more vividly than biotechnology and healthcare. For decades, India's pharmaceutical strength lay in manufacturing — producing generic versions of drugs discovered elsewhere. That story is changing. The development of Nafthromycin, India's first indigenously discovered antibiotic in decades, is not merely a scientific milestone: it is a declaration of pharmaceutical self-reliance. Born from a government-supported collaboration between researchers and industry, it signals that India's laboratories can now do what only a handful of nations have managed — innovate at the frontier of drug discovery.

Equally significant is the country's first successful indigenous gene therapy clinical trial for Haemophilia — a condition that requires lifelong, expensive treatment — conducted at the Christian Medical College in Vellore. Gene therapy works by correcting the underlying genetic fault rather than managing its symptoms; for a country with a large burden of genetic disease, the implications are profound. Combined with the Genomedica Project, which has now sequenced over ten thousand human genomes drawn from India's extraordinarily diverse population, we are laying the scientific foundation for a future in which medicine is tailored to each patient's biology.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed, with painful clarity,



how essential domestic biomedical capacity is to national security. India's response — developing and manufacturing its own vaccines at scale, deploying them across a population of 1.4 billion — drew orders of investment in our biotechnology ecosystem. The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council, or BIRAC, has been instrumental in nurturing biotech startups, bridging the gap between academic research and commercial scale-up, and ensuring that scientific innovation finds its way into the hands of those who need it most. Today, a new generation of bio entrepreneurs is working on precision medicine, sustainable bio-based materials and next-generation diagnostics — and they are doing so from Indian cities and campuses, not just Silicon Valley.

The Genomedica Project has sequenced over ten thousand human genomes — laying the foundation for medicine tailored to every Indian's unique biology.

Reaching for the stars, grounding our citizen

On the 23rd of August 2023, as the Vikram Sarabhai Space Chandrayaan-3 made its final descent toward the south pole — a region no nation had ever reached — millions of Indians watched with a collective held breath. The moment of touchdown was not just a technological triumph; it was a national affirmation. India had done what no one else had managed. What followed — the analysis of the Moon's surface, the data transmitted back across three hundred and eighty thousand kilometres of space — mattered enormously to planetary science. But what mattered just as much was what that landing did to the imagination of a country. India's space story over the past twelve years has been one of simultaneous ambition and utility. While Chandrayaan-3 captured the world's attention, Aditya-L1 — our first dedicated solar observatory — quietly began its mission to study the Sun, advancing our understanding of space weather effects on Earth. The Spadex mission placed India in an elite club of nations that have demonstrated the ability to dock two spacecraft in orbit — a capability essential for future space stations and crewed missions. Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla's historic eight-day stay aboard the International Space Station brought India's human spaceflight ambitions from aspiration to lived experience.

The transformation of India's space sector goes beyond missions, significant as they are. The Indian Space Policy of 2023 opened the entire value chain — launch vehicles, satellites, ground systems — to private enterprise. The result has been electric. From just eleven space startups in 2014, India today hosts over four hundred, building rockets, designing satellites and creating applications that range from agricultural monitoring to disaster response. Indian launch vehicles have carried three hundred and ninety-nine foreign satellites into orbit since 2014, making us a preferred partner for space agencies around the world. The space economy is no longer a public-sector preserve: it is a national asset being built by thousands of young engineers and entrepreneurs. With the Bharatiya Antariksh Station — India's own space station — envisioned for 2035, and a crewed lunar mission targeted for 2040, the arc of this ambition is long, and its trajectory is upward.

Self-reliance through innovation

Atmanirbhar Bharat — self-reliant India — is not merely a political slogan. In science and technology, it has become a governing philosophy. The National Quantum Mission, backed by more than six thousand crore rupees, is an investment not just in a technology but in India's strategic position in the twenty-first century's most consequential technological race. Quantum computing promises to solve problems that classical computers cannot; quantum communication offers theoretically unbreakable encryption; quantum sensing could transform navigation, medical imaging and geological exploration. India is now building all of these capabilities at home, through Thematic Hubs that bring together universities, research institutions and industry. The National Supercomputing

Mission has seeded high performance computing infrastructure across the country — in Pune, Chennai, Kharagpur and beyond — giving Indian researchers, engineers and startups access to computational power that was once the preserve of a handful of elite institutions. Alongside this, BharatGen — the country's first government-funded multi-lingual Generative AI programme — is developing large language models that can think and communicate in Indian languages, ensuring that the benefits of artificial intelligence are not confined to English-speaking users.

CSIR's contribution to this vision of self-reliance deserves particular mention. The indigenously developed HANSA-NG trainer aircraft, produced for domestic and export markets, represents a capability built from scratch by Indian engineers. India's first hydrogen fuel-cell powered vessel points toward clean maritime transport. Work on sustainable aviation fuel opens pathways to decarbonising air travel without dependence on foreign technology. The CSIR Innovation Complex, India's first such facility, is designed to be a crucible where laboratory research meets entrepreneurial energy — a place where the distance between a scientific idea and a market-ready product is systematically compressed.

From just 11 space startups in 2014, India today hosts over 400 — a testament to the power of policy, public investment, and entrepreneurial spirit working in concert.

Energy security and future-ready technologies

No account of India's scientific transformation is complete without acknowledging the strategic depth being built in nuclear energy.

The first criticality of the 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam in April 2026 is a milestone of historic proportions. Developed entirely by Indian scientists and engineers at the India Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research and built by Bharatiya Nabhiyuga Viduyt Nigam, this reactor is the critical bridge to the second stage of India's three-stage nuclear programme — a pathway designed to eventually harness our country's vast reserves of the most abundant elements in India. The era of energy transition, the ability to generate economic growth from domestic fuel is not merely a matter of energy security; it is a matter of sovereign science. The nuclear sector has also extended its reach into medicine. The Tata Memorial Hospital's recognition by the International Atomic Energy Agency as a 'Rays of Hope' Anchor Centre, the expansion of cancer hospitals under the Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital network, and the deployment of advanced radiopharmaceuticals — medicines that use radioactive particles to diagnose and treat cancer — are bringing world-class oncology care to patients across the country. The SHANTI Act of 2025 has modernised the legal architecture of India's nuclear sector, enabling greater participation and investment in an industry that will be central to our clean energy future.

Meanwhile, the Deep Ocean Mission is extending India's scientific reach into the last great unexplored frontier on our planet. Our ocean holds vast reserves of minerals essential for clean energy technologies — polymetallic nodules and cobalt-rich crusts that could reduce India's dependence on imported critical minerals. The mission is also building the underwater vehicle and sensor technologies that give India strategic and scientific presence in its maritime domain.

Towards Viksit Bharat: Science as destiny

As India counts down the years to 2047 — the centenary of our independence and the target year for becoming a fully developed nation — science and technology will not merely support that journey; they will determine its pace and character. The investments made over the last twelve years have created not just institutions and infrastructure, but something more durable: a culture of scientific ambition, entrepreneurial energy and national confidence.

The Anusandhan National Research Foundation, created to transform India's research landscape through mission-led science, academia-industry collaboration and empowerment of young researchers, and the newly constituted Research, Development and Innovation Fund with a corpus of one lakh crore rupees, represent the largest bet India has ever placed on its own intellectual capacity. They signal a conviction — hardened by twelve years of evidence — that the solutions to our most pressing challenges lie within our own laboratories, campuses and communities.

The lavender farmer on Davu, the genomics researcher in Vellore, the space startup founder in Bengaluru, the nuclear engineer in Kalpakkam — they are all characters in the same story. It is the story of a nation that chose, deliberately and decisively, to place science at the centre of its development. What the last twelve years have built is not a portfolio of achievements but a foundation — sturdy, deep and wide — upon which a developed, self-reliant and scientifically confident India will rise.

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Boats anchored at the Vizhinjam Fishing Harbour, in Thiruvananthapuram, as the MoS department advised fishermen not to venture into the sea.

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NEET SECURITY MEASURES RAISE SERIOUS QUESTIONS NATIONWIDE

It is both shocking and unfortunate that all experts involved in setting, moderating and translating the NEET-UG 2026 retest question papers have reportedly been moved to a secure, undisclosed location and placed under strict isolation protocols, with virtually no external communication permitted during the final stages of paper preparation. Reports indicate that these restrictions will remain in force until the completion of the re-examination on June 21.

Such measures are unprecedented in the history of India's education system and reflect the deep mistrust that has emerged following repeated allegations of question paper leaks and examination irregularities. While ensuring the integrity of examinations is essential, placing experts under lockdown raises questions about the credibility of the system and the circumstances that have made such extraordinary precautions necessary.

THARCIUS S FERNANDO | CHENNAI

Questions over electoral roll purge

In its May 2026 judgment on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), the Supreme Court of India upheld the actions of the Election Commission (EC). The Court relied on the phrases "superintendence, direction and control" and "free and fair elections" in Article 324 of the Constitution to support its decision. The verdict effectively grants the EC extensive authority over the electoral process. Although the Court clarified that the formal determination of citizenship rests with the competent authority, it held that the EC could refuse enrolment or initiate deletion from electoral rolls if it was not satisfied that the statutory requirements had been met. This has effectively created a category of "citizens without voting rights", with nearly six crore people reportedly removed from electoral rolls across 13 states. In West Bengal alone, around 27 lakh people possessing documentary proof of citizenship were excluded owing to what the Commission termed "logical discrepancies".

The Supreme Court is also examining the validity of the law that allows the ruling party to nominate Election Commissioners. A ruling on the composition of the selection committee should ideally have preceded the judgment on the SIR.

HARIADASAN RAJAN | KOZHIKODE

LPG hike hits commoners

State-owned fuel retailers have raised the price of a 14.2-kg domestic LPG cylinder by ₹29, effective nationwide. This hike, triggered by rising global energy costs and the West Asia crisis, is the second increase in three months, pushing the retail price in Delhi to ₹942.

The increase follows an earlier hike of ₹60 per cylinder on March 7, after the conflict in West Asia disrupted global energy supplies and drove up international fuel prices.

For millions of households already grappling with rising living costs, repeated increases in cooking gas prices place additional pressure on monthly budgets. The impact is particularly severe on middle-class and lower-income families, for whom LPG is an essential household necessity.

In this context, practical measures to reduce fuel consumption assume greater significance. Nandita Iyer, a health coach, recently shared a series of useful tips on Instagram aimed at helping households cut LPG consumption by up to 50 per cent.

Such simple changes in cooking practices can not only reduce fuel usage but also help families manage their expenses more effectively during a period of rising energy costs.

DIMPLE DAWAHAN | KANPUR NAGAR

Fire safety cannot be ignored

The devastating fire at the Flourish Stay B&B in Malviya Nagar, Delhi, which claimed 21 lives, including those of foreign nationals, exposed critical failures in safety compliance, illegal operations and emergency management. The fact that the establishment was allegedly licensed for only six rooms but was illegally operating 25 underscores the deadly risks posed by unregulated expansion and inadequate municipal oversight.

Reports suggest that the building lacked the mandatory No Objection Certificate (NOC) and failed to comply with essential fire safety norms. It is reprehensible that, despite the National Building Code of India (NBC) prescribing key safety measures relating to fire protection, structural integrity and sustainability, many multi-storey commercial buildings continue to violate safety regulations with impunity, thereby putting human lives at risk.

To minimise such tragedies, fire safety audits should be made mandatory across the country and entrusted to qualified third-party agencies with the necessary expertise. A comprehensive fire safety audit can identify potential hazards associated with day-to-day operations and recommend corrective measures to prevent accidents and save lives.

RANGANATHAN SVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Emerging challenges to national security in the 21st century

Ladakh on the cusp of ushering in people's rule

The challenges of the twenty-first century demand a comprehensive and integrated approach to security. Terrorism, emerging technologies, cyber threats, financial crimes, geopolitical realignments and information warfare are interconnected issues that require coordinated responses



KARNAL SINGH

National security today is passing through a period of unprecedented transformation. For decades, security was viewed largely in terms of territorial defence, military preparedness and protection against external aggression, and action against terrorists and elements working against the nation.

While these traditional threats continue to remain important, the security environment has become far more complex. Technological advances, globalisation, digital connectivity and geopolitical shifts have created new vulnerabilities that transcend national borders. Security today is not only the exclusive responsibility of governments, armed forces and law enforcement agencies, but it also requires the participation of industry, academia and citizens alike.

One of the most significant challenges facing nations across the world is terrorism and violent extremism. Terrorist organisations have continuously adapted to changing circumstances. They have effectively utilised social media, encrypted communication platforms, digital propaganda and financial networks to spread their ideology and recruit vulnerable individuals. While strong counter-terrorism measures remain essential, experience has shown that force alone cannot eliminate the threat. There is a growing need to focus on de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation programmes. The objective should be to prevent vulnerable youth from falling prey to extremist ideologies and to reintegrate misguided individuals into mainstream society. Equally important is the digital security of financial networks. Terrorist organisations survive on financial support generated through narcotics trafficking, extortion, smuggling, money laundering, misuse of charities and, increasingly, through digital and crypto-based transactions. Cutting off these financial lifelines is often more effective than merely targeting operatives.

The rapid emergence of new technologies presents both opportunities and challenges. Artificial intelligence is already transforming governance, industry, healthcare, defence and law enforcement. AI can enhance surveillance, improve predictive policing, strengthen intelligence analysis and assist in decision-making. At the same time, it can be misused to create deepfakes, conduct sophisticated cyber-attacks, manipulate public opinion and automate disinformation campaigns. Similarly, quantum computing has the potential to revolutionise scientific research and data processing. However, it also threatens existing encryption systems that protect military communications, financial transactions and sensitive government databases. Nations that fail to invest in these technologies may find themselves strategically disadvantaged in the coming decades.

Cybersecurity has emerged as one of the most critical dimensions of national security. Modern economies are heavily dependent on digital infrastructure, power grids, banking systems, telecommunications networks, transportation systems and government services are all interconnected through cyberspace. This interconnectedness has created enormous efficiencies but has also increased vulnerability. Cyber-attacks today can disrupt essential services, compromise sensitive information and inflict significant economic damage without a single shot being fired. Cybercrime has become a global industry involving state-sponsored attacks, online fraud, digital extortion, identity theft and financial scams. Public awareness and cyber hygiene are therefore as important as technological safeguards. Every citizen using a mobile phone or digital payment platform is now a potential target and must be educated accordingly.

Financial security is increasingly becoming an integral component of national security. Economic crimes, money laundering, terror financing and large-scale financial fraud undermine public confidence and weaken institutions. Criminal and hostile actors exploit global financial systems to move illicit funds across jurisdictions. The challenge becomes even greater with the growth of digital payments and virtual assets. Strengthening anti-money laundering frameworks, enhancing financial intelligence capabilities and improving financial literacy among



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

FINANCIAL SECURITY IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY. ECONOMIC CRIMES, MONEY LAUNDERING, TERROR FINANCING AND LARGE-SCALE FINANCIAL FRAUD UNDERMINE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND WEAKEN INSTITUTIONS. CRIMINAL AND HOSTILE ACTORS EXPLOIT GLOBAL FINANCIAL SYSTEMS TO MOVE ILLICIT FUNDS ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

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citizens are essential steps in protecting economic stability and national security.

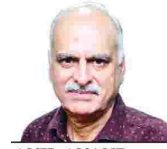
The international environment is also witnessing profound changes. The global balance of power is undergoing significant realignment. Strategic competition among major powers, regional conflicts and disruptions in global supply chains are reshaping the world order. Critical maritime routes and strategic choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz continue to influence global energy security and trade. Any disruption in these regions can have immediate consequences for national economies. Nations must therefore prepare for an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment by building strategic resilience and diversifying critical dependencies.

Social media has become a powerful instrument capable of influencing public opinion on an unprecedented scale. While it has democratised communication and empowered citizens, it has also become a platform for misinformation, propaganda, fake news and psychological operations. Adversarial actors can exploit these platforms to deepen social divisions, spread communal tensions and undermine trust in institutions. Information warfare has become an important component of modern conflict, making digital literacy and the responsible use of social media critical national security concerns.

Technological developments have also transformed espionage and intelligence gathering. Traditional intelligence operations are now supplemented by cyber espionage, data theft, surveillance technologies and influence operations conducted through digital platforms. Sensitive government information, intellectual property and critical technologies have become valuable targets. Protecting strategic information assets is therefore as important as protecting physical borders.

Finally, national security must be viewed through a broader social and cultural lens. A society divided by mistrust, misinformation and social tensions becomes vulnerable to external manipulation and internal instability. Social cohesion, constitutional values, cultural confidence and responsible citizenship are important pillars of national resilience. Security is not merely the absence of threats; it is the presence of strong institutions, informed citizens and a shared commitment to national interests.

The challenges of the twenty-first century demand a comprehensive and integrated approach to security. Terrorism, emerging technologies, cyber threats, financial crimes, geopolitical realignments and information warfare are interconnected issues that require coordinated responses. Building a secure nation will depend not only on military strength and technological capability but also on social resilience, economic stability and an informed citizenry. The nations that successfully adapt to these emerging realities will be best positioned to safeguard their sovereignty, prosperity and security in the years ahead.



ANIL ANAND

Valour and chivalry of Ladakh, the hilly desert of India, is exemplary. It is the largest Lok Sabha constituency of India, area-wise, which in contemporary India has a rich history of standing up during war times to defend the nation. During peace times, Ladakhis have been persistently fighting for their dignity, identity, political empowerment and protection of basic rights. They may be less in number, with nearly 3.50 lakh people inhabiting the large and barren swath of Ladakh, but their resilience in fighting for their identity, ethnicity and culture, while steadfastly remaining nationalist, is remarkable and unmatched. This commitment has once again borne fruit, with an adamant Centre, after trying all weapons of statecraft to disregard people's demand for protective rights and political empowerment, agreeing to their demands, short of granting statehood and bringing the tribal-dominated area under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to safeguard its tribal identity. There is a break through at the Centre, with the Apex Body, Leh (ABL), and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), held in Delhi after a discomfiting delay. The leaders have reached an "in-principle understanding" with the Centre on "restoring democracy in Ladakh" and providing "constitutional safeguards on the lines of Article 371A, 371F and 371G", following talks with senior Union Home Ministry officials. Incidentally, these are provisions applicable in states such as Nagaland, Sikkim and Mizoram.

The parent UT of Jammu and Kashmir, out of which Ladakh UT was carved, is also demanding the same, but without any worthwhile pressure, though its main demand is restoration of statehood. The Ladakhis excelled once again because they stood united, unmindful of the wrath of the powers that be, which is not the case in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly the Jammu region, which has wholeheartedly supported the BJP in successive elections. On the contrary, Jammu and Kashmir, particularly Jammu, stands political-ly and socially divided, thereby giving a way to the Centre to disregard its feelings. It also signals that the Ladakh civil society groups have scaled down their demand for Sixth Schedule status and full statehood. However, there is a caveat attached to this "in-principle understanding", with a promise to invoke provisions of Article 371, which was earlier not acceptable to Ladakh leaders. Leaders such as former BJP MP Mr Thupstan Chhewang, who later quit the party and is also a former head of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, were of the view that acceptance of this provision is a stepping stone and not an end in itself, with people reserving their right to agitate in future. Surely, it is a step forward and an ode to the rare unity between the Leh and Kargil regions of Ladakh on all the divisive issues.

As per the talks, Ladakh will have full legislative, executive and financial powers vested in elected representatives through a UT-level Assembly. The elected executive head (proposed to be a Chief Minister) will have direct administrative control over the entire UT bureaucracy, headed by the Chief Secretary. The UT's budget will be managed by the elected body, unlike the present mechanism where the Lieutenant Governor is the supreme controlling authority. Safeguards for the protection of Ladakh's land, environment, culture and jobs will be established under Article 371.

August 5, 2019, was a historic day in the history of Ladakh when the long-standing demand for separation from Jammu and Kashmir and the creation of a Union Territory (UT) was accepted, though not fully in accordance with the wishes of the people. It did not happen suddenly but came after more than four decades of struggle in varied forms.

Definitely, a history of sorts was created, but simultaneously a new phase of struggle began, centred on the protection of the tribal identity of the people through the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, along with political and administrative empowerment. These factors are missing in the UT model, which is more Delhi-centric and has increased the sensitivity of the hilly region, thereby making it more vulnerable than ever before. All this was promised by the ruling BJP, resulting in the party winning the Ladakh Lok Sabha seat for the first time for failing to deliver on its promises. The biggest among these was the protection of identity and the fragile environment.

Ladakh is once again on the cusp of taking a step forward after a prolonged agitation resulting in casualties and the arrest of prominent environmentalist and social activist Mr Sonam Wangchuk under the draconian National Security Act (NSA), followed by his deportation to a Rajasthan jail in a climatically diverse environment. This proved to be a turning point. His NSA detention was suddenly withdrawn by the Centre just before the Supreme Court was to take a final call on his petition. Ostensibly, mounting public pressure showed its impact. Both the ABL and KDA leaders felt that the offer, which has been agreed upon, is an ice-breaking move. However, they are keeping their fingers crossed until they discuss the proposal back home with the people of Leh and Kargil and a formal notification is issued after subsequent meetings.

The leaders felt that "restoring democracy in Ladakh" and providing "constitutional safeguards under the spirit of Articles 371A, 371F and 371G", as proposed by senior Home Ministry officials, is a step forward. These provisions are applicable in states such as Nagaland, Sikkim and Mizoram. The UTs of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir have been demanding similar safeguards for the last six years pending restoration of statehood.

"In this model, the legislative, executive and financial powers will rest with elected representatives through a Union Territory-level legislative body," the ABL and KDA said in a statement, adding "all bureaucrats of the UT, including the Chief Secretary, will come under the executive head of the UT-level elected body (proposed to be Chief Minister)."

The "in-principle" agreement is silent on the demand for inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and the granting of statehood status. Are the people of Ladakh (read their representatives) ready to forgo these demands? Maybe for the time being, Apex Body of Ladakh co-chairman Chhering Dorje Lakruk said, "A broad agreement has been reached on having a representative administration. It would have legislative and financial powers."

The bureaucrats who work under the authority of the Chief Minister, Land, jobs and culture will be protected under Article 371. Finer details will be worked out in further meetings. "Discussions are still underway," Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) co-chairman Sajjad Kargil said in a statement. "We have shared our draft proposals demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule safeguards, and the government has now responded with certain suggestions. It is expected to come up with a formal draft before the next meeting," said Kargil.

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Yogakshema and Antyodaya in practice: Assessing UP's governance shift under Yogi Adityanath



SUNNY SINGH

Governance is not only the management of a territory. It is the concentration of power into the service of the people. That conviction is ancient in India. Kautilya stated it in the Arthashastra with the economy of a practitioner through prajapatya (paternalistic) in the Mahabharata's Santi Parva pressed it further: the king does not rest while his subjects suffer. That two minds working from such opposite stations, one from a functioning court and one from the wreckage of Kurukshetra, arrived at the same conclusion about sovereignty is the settled civilisational verdict of Bharata. The condition of the weakest citizen is the only honest measure of those who govern.

Uttar Pradesh in 2017 was, by that measure, a failing state. The administrative degeneration of the preceding decades was real, structural and cumulative. Organised crime had fashioned a parallel sovereign order under state patronage. Dynastic absolutism had converted public institutions into instruments of private extraction. The state's share in national life had contracted economically, socially and in terms of basic security. The BIMARU designation was not only a demographic label. It was a verdict delivered by the

state's own record. The commentariat that affixed it across three decades has since conspicuously refused to read the acquittal. Their silence in the face of transformation is, in its own way, testimony enough. The change which occurred in 2017 was not a transfer of power in the routine sense. It was the recovery of Yogakshema as a governing obligation. The just acquisition of what is not yet possessed (yoga) and the full preservation of what has already been gained (kshema) were restored as the sovereign creed of the state.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath drew Kautilya's triad of raksana (protection), sadhana (sustenance) and welfare assurance out of theoretical discourse and reinstated each as an operational principle of administration. The Zero Tolerance policy against crime was the first and most visible expression of this recovery. For decades, the sociology of fear in UP had run in one direction. By 2026, it had been reversed. The farmer moving produce at night, the trader keeping his shop open after dark, the woman travelling through districts that once carried menacing reputations their daily experience has changed in ways every resident of the state can describe and no single statistic fully captures.

Yet the statistics are available. A substantial decline in organised crime and the conviction of 1,25,985 criminals through Operation Conviction stand as the measurable record. Kautilya understood that when danda is just and inexorable, the accumulated energy of a society flows towards creation. That principle has been verified in practice. The extraction economy of the earlier decades



rested on one structural condition: that a rupee travelling from the treasury to its intended beneficiary would pass through enough hands to be substantially diminished en route. Direct Benefit Transfer, integrated e-governance platforms and the Darpan Portal collapsed that journey. Over 87 lakh crore has since reached beneficiaries without leakage. An entire architecture of intermediary theft that had operated with impunity for a generation has been dismantled. The governance machinery that has replaced it is, in its essentials, a disciplined rendering of Kautilyan administrative principles in contemporary form.

At this point, the standard critique must be met directly. The charge runs that UP's transformation is Hindu-majoritarian assertion dressed in the language of development. The invocation of Kautilya and the renewal of Ayodhya, the argument goes, constitute cultural politics repackaged as universal governance.

The response is equally direct. The secular-development consensus that governed Uttar Pradesh

for the five decades preceding 2017 delivered, by its own measurable record, neither secularism nor development. It was a state from which the most marginalised-Dalits, the rural poor and the uneducated woman-remained structurally excluded. A politics that secured its legitimacy through competitive minority appeasement while leaving the condition of the governed unchanged is not secularism. It is the most sophisticated form of social extraction a democratic system permits. NITI Aayog does not record the religion of those it funds. It records their nutritional status, their access to water and their ability to educate their children. More than 6 crore citizens of Uttar Pradesh have crossed that threshold. That number is the only response the charge of optics deserves.

The philosophical depth of this model finds its closest modern analogue in Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's Antyodaya. The distance between the two frameworks is worth registering. For Kautilya, the welfare of the last subject is shaped by the logic of state capacity. A neglected people weaken the foundation of everything the King rules. Upadhyaya argues from a civilisational perspective. In Ekamta Manavadarshan, the condition of the antyaya is a moral indictment of the entire social order that produced it. It is not a management failure.

The Yogi government's welfare architecture has operated in that moral register. Over 56 lakh houses under housing schemes such as PMAY and CMAY, tap water connections to more than 2.02 crore rural households under Har Ghar Jal, and a record budget of ₹9.12 lakh crore for FY 2026-27 represent

this commitment in concrete form. These are not protections in the Kautilyan sense. They are instruments of ascent.

Antyodaya does not ask whether the last person has been shielded from the worst. It asks whether they have been given the conditions to rise. The GDP surging towards a ₹40 lakh crore economy, more than 156 crore tourist visits recorded in 2025, including over 36 lakh foreign tourists, and the steady expansion of exports and investment tell one part of the story. More than 6 crore people have been lifted another. These are not two separate achievements reported side by side. They describe the same governing project, one read in aggregate wealth and the other in individual human condition. That both have moved together is the most honest account of what Uttar Pradesh has become.

The condition Kautilya named matsya nyaya, in which the large devour the small while the state looks away, had been the lived political reality of Uttar Pradesh for thirty years. That condition has been broken. Yogakshema has been returned to its proper place. And the last man, for whom neither dynasty nor commentariat had any practical use, has been raised. That is the record. That is the transformation.

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A thought for today

To achieve great things, two things are needed; a plan, and not quite enough time

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

How To Be Tankful

Iran war hots up again. Here's how to make a policy that can insulate India better from energy shocks

A two-week ceasefire, that stretched to two months, may have lulled us into believing the worst was over. But fresh strikes between Israel and Iran have again exposed the fragility of West Asia and global energy security. Oil has ticked up, and it might pinch our pockets again. This is a risk we have to live with, because alternatives - EVs, and biofuels like ethanol and compressed biogas - aren't ready yet. Yes, all our petrol is blended with 20% ethanol, but note how controversial it is, for a reason.

Most of our cars and bikes made over the past 15 years were designed for only a 10% blend. Outside Delhi and its neighbourhood, even older vehicles are widely used. So, regardless of how much ethanol India can make, we, as consumers, aren't ready for it. Contrast this with Brazil, where any day now, govt is expected to increase mandatory ethanol blending from 30% to 32%. It's not a problem there, because the vast majority of Brazil's vehicles have been flex-fuel since 2003. They can deal with any ethanol blend, from 0-100%.

Brazil could do this because, in 2003, EVs were still in the future. So, its automakers' bet on flex-fuel systems, and the ethanol industry's investments in capacity, paid off. Will the same bets work in India now, when electric vehicles are becoming popular? Last fiscal, 4.5% of all cars sold in India were electric. What if rising fuel prices raise their share to double digits this year? If the future is electric, is an ethanol push worthwhile, especially when it requires heavily subsidised fertilisers? And what about farmers? They're getting good rates for sugarcane and corn to make ethanol today, but what will they do when demand for petrol-ethanol blends starts tapering? Biogas is another option, but current capacity is negligible. How many years will industry take to scale up, and substitute imported CNG?

That's why making India's energy policy today is like hitting a moving target, but it has to be done. The main lesson from this war is clear - we have to reduce dependence on imported hydrocarbons. Making fertilisers with coal, instead of imported gas, is doable, as China has shown. Similarly, turning organic waste into biogas has no downsides. How we power our vehicles tomorrow is the tricky part. This can't be left to bureaucrats. Govt should consult industry and researchers to make a long-term plan, and then implement it rapidly.

Big Salary Hikes? Yup

In bad times, some jobs/businesses thrive: lawyers, arms-makers. Chaos dividend is real

This is going to break your heart - assuming you are one of the vast majority, which has only seen a modest, and that's putting it kindly, salary increase. Across law firms, increments are expected to be in the 10-20% range this year. Yes, yes, this story is not India only. The profession's boomtime is being felt worldwide. Because, unlike lesser mortals, lawyers profit from chaos. IPOs and M&As are going strong anyway. Then every conflict zone, sanctions regime, tariff dispute creates new compliance requirements, and contract renegotiations. Enter the guys in dark suits who talk billable hours.

No prizes for guessing who else is doing great: arms manufacturers. Although, their highs are in an altogether different league. Global defence market's projected to grow from \$2.75tn in 2026 to \$4.26tn in 2035. This, however, is a pre-Feb-28 forecast. The picture's become rosier, or should we say bloodier, since. Nothing says good fortune like a \$12.5bn F-35 contract when war's hurting everyone else's wallet. Bombs go down, earnings go up. That's a special gift.

There's profit to be made from the closing of Hormuz Strait too. An oil producer with supply sitting safely somewhere else, really gets his jollies from war's chokepoint. Asset managers, cybersecurity firms, even private intelligence groups are some of the others reveling in heightened uncertainties. The more chaotic the geopolitical landscape, the more govts and corporations pay lavishly for someone, anyone, to hold their hands, in the company of confident PowerPoints and a very large invoice. Some of this "consultation" is basically a protection racket, but with better branding. The special thing about doomsday profiteers is that none of these industries cause catastrophe (although, this can be debatable in some cases). They can claim to be helping, while posting record profits doing it. Their unself-critical motto could be what 'Mother Courage' says in the Brecht masterpiece: "I won't let you spoil my war for me. Destroys the weak, does it? Well, what does peace do for 'em, huh? War feeds its people better."

Who stole my refund?

A surprising villain's revealed in the final reel

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Choose your villains wisely. King Con, more often than not, is someone you least expect it to be. A bit like the avuncular Ashok Kumar in Jewel Thief. While travelling is a great learning experience, this pearl of wisdom dawned on me by the better half's inability to do so. Last Dec, I called my credit card concierge to see my stockpiled points, for booking a domestic ticket for her. A helpful person on the other end of the line gave us some flight options, and we chose one. But when the airline we had selected saw mass flight cancellations that month, we cancelled her Dec 7 ticket, two days before she was to travel, and started seeking a refund of what I had paid for the ticket, plus reversal of the credit card points I had used. For months, the card helpline played a recorded message, saying that if the call was about refunds for cancelled flights of x airline, the same would reflect shortly.



As *annus horribilis* 2026 unfolded and the West Asia war started on Feb 28, chasing this refund fell low on my priority list. Until I teased a senior official of the multi-billion-and-strengthening-dollar airline, about withholding a few thousand of my free-fee lapse. Saying this simply wasn't possible, the very next day the official sent me a factsheet of how the airline had issued the refund to an online travel agency (OTA), used by the card company to make the booking, on Dec 5 itself - the day we made the cancellation! Shocked, I contacted the OTA, which sheepishly admitted that, yes, it had been just sitting on my money, interest-free for nearly six months. Wondering how many more PLUs were out there, with pending refunds that the OTA was hoping we would forget about, so that it could pocket the same, I excitedly broke the good news to my better half. That was a tactical error. "So, have you got the money?" she asked. "No, but now at least know who has it," I replied, putting on a brave face. When the OTA finally refunded my money, I felt bad for the airline. It had suffered like Jameel Jamali in Durrandarah, who, at the movie's very end, turns out not to have been the villain we had assumed him to be. And to the revealed villain, I say, "Etu, OTA!"

Markets Buy Musk's Sci-Fi

With SpaceX IPO, Wall Street has mistaken interplanetary ambition for cash flow. The business plan has been jettisoned for an extraordinary reading list. Financial gravity no longer applies

Krishnan Ranganathan



Valuing equities is usually an exercise in bounded delusion. Analysts forecast unit sales, model software subscriptions, and adjust discount rates until a preferred valuation acquires the appearance of science. But even by those forgiving standards, SpaceX presents a novelty: How exactly is one meant to discount the future cash flows of a million-person colony on Mars?

This is the epistemological crisis SpaceX has unleashed upon the market. Investors are being asked to price a company whose stated mission is to "extend the light of consciousness to the stars". Beneath that cosmic rhetoric sits a corporate troika: Starlink, a functional and profitable satellite communications arm; a space transportation division that routinely burns capital; and a sprawling AI segment that burns even more of it. In the most recent quarter, the picture was stark: Starlink earned \$1.19bn in operating profit, the space division lost \$662mn, and the AI unit lost about \$2.5bn.

The group lost \$4.3bn in three months, and has accumulated \$37bn in losses since inception. The speculative dream conveniently draws the eye from the mundane problem one rung down - an AI division setting fire to capital at three times the rate the rockets do.

The natural instinct of analysts will be to value these pieces separately with elaborate sum-of-the-parts models, carefully chosen peer groups, and bespoke discount rates for commercial asteroid mining and lunar tourism. There is also a delicious circularity at the heart of the enterprise. Almost 80% of SpaceX's targeted opportunity lies in "enterprise applications", hardly an untouched frontier. Anthropic, an AI firm with no rockets and no Martian ambitions, already reports an annualised revenue run rate near \$80bn, well above SpaceX's own top line, built entirely on the dull enterprise software that is supposedly SpaceX's destiny.

And the prospectus reveals that Anthropic has agreed to pay SpaceX around \$1.25bn a month to rent data-centre capacity through 2029 (with a 90-day cancellation clause) - income SpaceX appears to need precisely to fund the chips and supercomputers it is buying to compete with Anthropic in the first place. The software rival is not merely outperforming the rocket company; it is bankrupting the rocket company's attempt to dethrone it.

Then there is the small matter of physics. Turning the asteroid belt into a business line would require not merely rockets but an entire industrial architecture in space - extraction, processing, transport across distances comically hostile to ordinary commerce. To price asteroid mining using a 2026 equity valuation requires a leap of faith that borders on the theological.

Yet, Wall Street is begging to take that leap. At \$1.75tn valuation, on a \$75bn raise, underwritten by a 20% compound annual growth rate sustained for two straight



decades, implies revenue expanding roughly 38-fold by 2046 - to something north of \$700bn a year, more than any company in history has earned, with not a single rival, recession or law of physics permitted to intervene. It is not a forecast but science fiction.

And what an absurdity the bankers are delivering. At 200,000 words, the SpaceX prospectus is among the more extraordinary documents ever filed with the SEC. Asimov's species preservation, and Heinlein's lunar engineering, sit anchored by a Radian hero - a reading

list masquerading as a business plan. Few documents move so effortlessly between apocalyptic grandeur and the standard language of financial distress. "We do not want humans to have the same fate as dinosaurs," it notes, alongside the admission that the company may never achieve profitability.

Not the profitability matters when you have an iron grip on governance. Musk's super-voting shares give him near-total control. He cannot be removed without his own consent. Conflicts of interest are not incidental to the structure; they are the structure.

It is also a masterpiece in financial engineering. The listing was timed to exploit 'fast entry' - the rule under which a company of sufficient scale joins a benchmark in days rather than after the customary year. Nasdaq obliged, cutting its seasoning window to 15 trading days; FTSE Russell went further, to five days. Only S&P held firm, leaving the loss-making SpaceX barred from the index for at least a year.

The historical parallels are irresistible. The South Sea Company promised exclusive access to the riches of South America; SpaceX promises the entire solar system. When the South Sea bubble burst in 1720, it wiped out £20,000 of Sir Isaac Newton's life savings. The great physicist famously lamented that he could "calculate the motions of heavenly bodies, but not the madness of the people".

This time two of the great index-keepers agreed to write the madness straight into their benchmarks. The investor tracking a Nasdaq or Russell fund will own a piece of the cosmos whether he wanted it or not.

None of this means SpaceX lacks real businesses. Starlink is real. Launch capability is real. Musk's capacity to bend capital, talent, and attention to his purposes is all too real. But none of that resolves the central valuation problem: the more distant and speculative the opportunity, the more discipline investors ought to demand.

That is why this IPO matters. It is a test of whether public markets still distinguish between extraordinary execution and extraordinary storytelling. A company can promise to save the species, industrialise the heavens, and spare humanity the fate of the dinosaurs. Those are grand ambitions. They are not, on their own, cash flows.

For analysts obliged to price the shares, the traditional toolkit is of limited use. Because when the market is determined to underwrite the cosmos, the only certainty is that financial gravity no longer applies.

The writer is former executive director, Nomura India

'Modi is so successful because he's reflective'

Former prime minister argues that Modi, who's surpassed Nehru's record as longest-serving PM, has been uncompromising in protecting national interest

HD Deve Gowda



Modi is now India's longest-serving, democratically elected prime minister. This surpasses Nehru's record. More poignantly, it is the longest value-added democracy hasn't just survived, but thrived in India.

Nehru was chosen to be the country's first PM in 1947, under extraordinary circumstances, from among several equally talented and dedicated men. It was actually Gandhi's moral command over the masses, which ensured this appointment. Nehru then carried both Gandhi's blessings and the halo of the freedom movement, into the first general election in 1952.

At that time, Congress party was a monopoly. It faced no political competition. Although 53 political parties contested the general election, their presence and influence were minuscule. From there, to the time Modi was catapulted to the PM's office for the first time in 2014, and the third time in 2024, India became a very different nation. Almost unrecognisable in terms of size, diversity and economy.

It is very tempting, although not exactly prudent, to say that it was easier to be elected PM in 1952 than in 2014 or 2024. Even by the time I became PM in 1996, the circumstances as well as political parameters and competition had totally shifted. The nation had become more questioning, more engaging, more mature. There was no glowing halo to be claimed for PMs outside the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Others had no privilege, pedigree, or patronage available to be used as a springboard. In the case of Modi, and also myself, we did not even have the social and cultural capital that many other PMs had enjoyed.

I did not last long, my tenure was only about 11 months. And I wonder by what blessings Modi continues to be at the top with no signs of exhaustion, neither in him, nor in the people who have elected him. His

stamina and his endurance in office are so distinctive.

Let us look at some interesting statistics that illustrate the enormity of changes since Nehru's time. In terms of simple political competition, when the 1952 polls took place, there were, to repeat, just 53 parties in the fray, whereas Modi contended with 2,593 in 2024. The number of voters in Nehru's time was 17cr, by 2014 it was 83cr. India's population, which was 34cr in 1952, today stands at 146cr-plus.

Another aspect that has fascinated me is that Nehru's cabinet didn't really reflect the community, cultural, caste diversity of India. Even when Nehru was in his third and final term as PM, the cabinet remained filled with mostly upper caste men. Nehru had rejected the Kaka Kalekar Commission report, which had attempted to provide reservation to the depressed and backward classes. The cabinet that Modi presides over now is spectacularly diverse. It has 27 OBCs, 10 SCs, and 5 STs. Representation of women, too, has gone up significantly. Modi also sincerely proposed to expand the strength of the Parliament, in April 2026, to give historic representation to women, and make ours a more perfect union. He has already ensured the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill.

India today is a far more noisy and loud democracy than it was under Nehru. Caste awareness, constitutional rights, civic rights, gender awareness, environmental concerns etc have all exploded to new levels. India under Nehru was mostly illiterate. Plus, people didn't really know what to expect from a democratic govt. It was a new system. Today's citizens, for the good of our

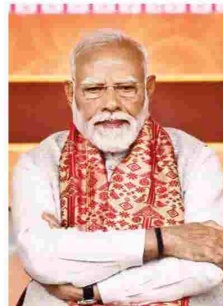
nation and democracy are more educated and enlightened. Nothing slips past their attention.

Nehru had to, at most, deal with half a dozen newspapers, but Modi has to endure the scrutiny of millions every single second, because of social media platforms on which criticism can be amplified, unfair, and also terribly harsh and personal. Plus, he has to contend with round-the-clock criticism, and sometimes hostility of mainstream press. In Nehru's time, there was no television news.

It is not surprising that Modi for ensuring that India remains a robust democracy under his charge. His effort to also ensure that India remains the fastest growing economy, his welfare policies, and his decisiveness during military conflicts also deserve special attention. He has been uncompromising when it comes to the nation's interests.

Modi hasn't just been the executive head, but also the chief counsellor of the nation, who has continuously and empathetically engaged with all manners and classes of people. I never miss my Mann Ki Baat radio programme. Or his awards list, in which great achievers are scouted and honoured. Here, too, he has tried to reach more people every square mile. There is no other PM who has used technology like him. All this could not have been done without selfless commitment.

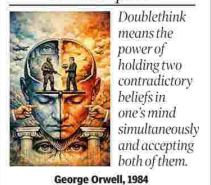
Finally, Modi is successful because he has remained reflective. He has kept himself open to constant scrutiny.



Calvin & Hobbes



Sarcastic



George Orwell, 1984

War, Suffering And Search For The Divine

Vipul Anekar

It is profoundly challenging, particularly for those transiting the spiritual path, to maintain equanimity and not be swept away by tumultuous currents. With the emphasis on being *antarmukhi*, turning the gaze inward, as the paramount endeavour, I have tried to forge a philosophical bridge between contemporary cataclysms and the relationship between *jiva* and the Divine.

One possible response is the complete negation of the Divine, exemplified by Western atheism and agnosticism or, in the Indian context, by Bhagat Singh's inclusive *Why I Am An Atheist*. This stance derives its force from the classical philosophical problem of evil and the existential and rational incompatibility between the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and infinitely benevolent God and the unrelenting reality of prime fauna innocent suffering. When schoolchildren in Gaza or elsewhere perish in missile strikes or

beneath collapsing buildings, one is compelled to ask: Why does an omniscient and omnipotent God not prevent such suffering and save these children?

Such questions emerge from non-theistic or atheistic traditions such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Taoism. These traditions reject a creator God but affirm the law of Karma, which operates like gravity, independent of any external agency. Here, the state of enlightenment is attained through *nijara*, burning away of karmic *samskaras*, impressions. In this framework, an individual's stream of consciousness is inseparable from its karm; yet, upon complete purification, the individual attains enlightenment. There is no difference between the Divine and *jiva*, according to Adi Shankaracharya's *Aham Brahmasmi*, "I am Brahman," and the Sufi mystic Mansur al-Hallaj's ecstatic declaration, "An-*al-Haqq*, I am the Truth." For

Shankara, it is like a water drop merging into the ocean; for the Sufi, it is *isfana*, absolute spiritual annihilation and the total, distinct non-union of the self with the Divine.

A third major response arises from theistic streams within Vedanta and other traditions, such as Ramanujacharya's *vishishtadvaita* (qualified nondualism), Vallabhacharya's *shuddhadvaita* (pure nondualism), Madhvacharya's *dvaita* (dualism), and Nimbarkacharya's *dvaitavedita* (dualistic nondualism). Each articulates a distinct ontology of the relationship between *jiva* and the Divine. In Shankaracharya's Advaita, *Shivobok* is not a distant celestial realm to be attained and enjoyed in duality, but an ever-present, inner state realised within through *nididhyasan*, an immanent reality that transcends the sensory domains of 'seeing' and 'interacting', lying beyond the mundane ambit of

mind and senses. Anything less than a complete, non-dual merger would remain metaphysically incoherent for Shankara. This merger understandingly encompasses the human psyche for at least two reasons. First, our cultural and historical conditioning. Second, a subtle but tenacious ego (*ahamkar*) embedded in the *antahkaran* (inner instrument of individuality and a separate entity). For Shankara, in this apparently real yet ontologically mithya world, any contemporary event appearing as chaos is only seen through the prism of ignorance arising from our inadequate conception of reality under *maya*, illusion. Ultimately, whether one leans towards non-dual merger, eternal communion, or dualistic devotion, the true test lies not in intellectual resolution alone but in the quiet, persistent labour of self-transformation. The above article is in response to 'Why I Dare To Differ From Adi Shankara' published on June 2



We Still Need Cash in ATM Nirbhar Bharat

Rules must be sensitive beyond economics

Former US Federal Reserve chair Paul Volcker, who brought inflation to heel after the 1970s oil shock, had this to say in 2009 when financial engineering was devouring the global capital market. "The most important financial innovation that I have seen in the past 20 years is the automatic teller machine, that really helps people and prevents visits to the bank and it is a real convenience." A generation that has stepped into banks to deposit or withdraw money couldn't agree more. Yet, here we are in the online payment zamana and we still need cash. Much more of the stuff is actually sloshing around today, despite those handy little QR codes everywhere from 5-star restaurants to vegetable sellers' handcars. And there is a sinking feeling every time the ATM monitor flashes that it's out of cash. This may be a small bother in metros where the next ATM is a block away. But empty ATMs can become a serious problem in the countryside where the nearest machine involves a few kilometres of travel.

Blame on the economics of cash dispensers. There are expenses in setting them up and running them. The machines need air-conditioning. The cost of fuel to ferry cash is rising. And security guards need to be paid more each passing year. So, banks have pruned their ATM networks and are now throttling cash to the grid, according to Confederation of ATM Industry (CATMI). The effects are lopsided with the economics favouring shoving money into machines that empty out sooner, which typically happens in cities. RBI frons on empty ATMs, but tends to act over egreious infractions.

There's a human cost to running out of cash, particularly if there is money sitting in the bank account. Rules for operating ATMs must be sensitive to this dimension beyond narrow economic principles. Not everyone has a smartphone, or is comfortable with going cash-minimum. They should not have to trudge to a bank to get their money. Banks can easily redesign their ATM networks to cater to the underserved.

NEET Na Mila Re Man Ka in Jugaad Optics

Reports of GoI locking up NEET paper-setters, moderators and translators until end of re-exam on June 21 is ridiculous. When public trust has been shaken by leaks, authorities are, understandably, frantic to demonstrate control. But restricting digital access, isolating question-setters and tightening physical security smacks of desperate damage control. Such emergency measures cannot be a long-term strategy for a country purportedly a global information tech power.

All over the more developed world, high-stakes exams have moved beyond relying solely on individuals and physical secrecy. China's annual university admission test, Gaokao — which, incidentally, started on Sunday — combines strict isolation of paper-setters with technological safeguards, compartmentalisation and layered access controls. Organisations that run the US SAT, GRE and GMAT rely on large question banks, multiple test forms, digital delivery systems and statistical monitoring to reduce consequences of any single breach. NEET utilises multiple paper codes and question sets featuring jumbled question sequences to prevent copying. Yet, it still depends on a limited number of centrally-generated forms that must be securely created, stored, transported and distributed. The challenge isn't merely protecting those forms better, but to reduce systemic risk created when millions depend on a small set of pre-prepared papers.

Large, secure question banks can generate many versions of a paper. Questions can remain encrypted until the last moment. Few individuals should have visibility into the full process. "Securing" NEET paper-setters like MLAs being kept in resorts before horse-trading is jugaad optics. Instead, build systems the integrity of which is foolproof.



JUST IN REIT

In the venerable tradition of not answering tricky questions...

The Art of Leaving an Interview in a Huff

'Let's call it quits. Because I've had enough. Thank you, darling.' These could have been lines from a Dylan song. Instead, it was how Donald Trump ended his interview last Friday with Kristen Welton on NBC News' 'Meet the Press'. Strangely for a journalist these days questioning a head of government, Kristen brought up uncomfortable issues like Trump's claims of 2020 presidential election fraud and ongoing California vote counting. The prez, feeling uncomfortably pressed by a member of the press, pulled off his mic and left the room.

Education policy failure is being dressed up as innovation, employer abdication as a skills gap

Red Out of a Uni Degree



Elizabeth Lyn & Sibin Jerry Thomas

REET and paper leaks may be all over the news these days. But another issue that has been simmering for long seems to have gone without notice or debate. When monitoring and evaluation firms start running over-subscribed courses in research methods, it's worth pausing to ask what that says about the university down the road.

Scroll through any professional's LinkedIn feed, and the pattern is hard to miss. Practitioners (consultants, field researchers, sector specialists) are packaging their expertise into cohort programmes and certification workshops. Seats fill up, waitlists form, and somewhere in the background, a university classroom sits half-empty.

Take a recent master's graduate from a state university with a degree in social sciences and genuine analytical training. On the same LinkedIn feed where she watches jobs circulate among people she doesn't know, she encounters an ad, a 5-mh online certificate in monitoring and evaluation run by a Delhi-based research firm. The fee exceeds ₹60,000. Her entire PG degree cost fraction that. She is being told, in the language of the market, that her degree was not enough, and that admission to the field will require a second payment she may not be able to make. This is a reckoning, and it begins with a failure in Indian higher education has been slow to admit.

Over the past two decades, Indian universities have come to be seen as training pens to demonstrate industry relevance. Curricula were restructured around employability. The language of education shifted from intellectual formation to skill acquisition. Results were thought not in the way intended. According to India Skills Report, as of 2025, India's graduate employability stands at just 54.81%.



Lost in the higher education-employability space

It's a specific, material obstacle between a completed education and livelihood. Before asking what universities must do, it's worth asking when applied skills became the graduate's problem to solve, at her own expense. Was there a time when entry-level positions in the development sector came with on-the-job training. Applied skills were something organisations expected to build in their new hires, through mentorship and supervised work. Training early-career staff was understood as part of the cost of hiring. As paid micro-credentials became an initial hiring filter, that understanding is under pressure.

If employers begin treating a pre-purchased certificate as proof that no further training is needed, the logic of investing in early-career staff disappears. The graduate arrives pre-certified, pre-screened, and the person who pays for her formation has already been replaced.

The irony is not subtle. Organisations now requiring paid credentials at entry level are, in many cases, the same organisations whose stated mission is to reduce inequality. A sector that documents, measures and advocates against structural disadvantage has allowed its own hiring architecture to replicate it with formalised precision. The answer is not to force practitioners — their programmes have real value. The answer is to systematically remove barriers that make those programmes necessary in the first place. Universities can embed practitioner-taught modules within degree programmes as core components. They can build formalised internship pipelines with development organisations, negotiated at the institutional level. They can create short, applied certificate modules at fees calibrated to what public university students can afford.

Employers must restore some version of structured on-the-job training for early-career hires. Probationary periods with formal skill-building, junior fellowships with mentored project exposure. These are not expensive interventions. They are choices about where to place the burden of professional formation. Right now, that burden sits entirely on the graduate. That's not the way to build a regulatory body like UGC have a largely unexercised mandate requiring universities to report graduate placement outcomes disaggregated by institution type, specialisation, and socioeconomic background. The minimum, that makes the scale of the access problem visible.

The average Indian student cannot buy their way into relevance. That they are not being asked to is not a market correction but policy failure dressed up as innovation, and employer abdication dressed up as a skills gap.

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streamline approvals, encourage investment, and support domestic manufacturing and technological partnerships. Reforms reflect recognition that achieving large-scale manufacturing will require both public and private participation.

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) is developing several advanced reactor designs, including 200 MWe Small Modular Reactor (SMR-200), 55 MWe SMR-55, and a high-temperature gas-cooled reactor (HTGR) intended for hydrogen production. SMRs are expected to be modular, with modules produced under controlled conditions in a factory and assembled at the site in a short time. They are also expected to be safe, making them acceptable to the public.

GoI has indicated that at least 5 indigenously designed SMRs will become operational by 2035. India has set a target of achieving 10 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047. At present, the country's installed nuclear capacity stands at about 6.7 GW, contributing around 1% of total electricity generation. Coal continues to account for nearly 70% of electricity production. Achieving the 10 GW target would require substantial expansion in nuclear manufacturing, financing and human resources.

The Strait of Hormuz disruption has raised concerns about diversifying India's energy mix and reducing exposure to external supply shocks. The current policy direction reflects a combination of RE, safety, and economic development objectives. The broad objective of improving energy security through a diversified and domestically supported energy system must remain a central policy priority. RE, along with energy storage required to balance it, remains the major first step. Electricity can substitute fossil fuels in many sectors. Coal can be replaced by nuclear as a baseload supplier.

Advanced SMRs rely on high-assay, low-enriched uranium, which is not yet commercially produced domestically. Meanwhile, SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India) Act's nuclear sector. These are genuine execution challenges. The crucial distinction is between constraints intrinsic to the technology and those created by policy, financing and regulation. Critics often blur this line. The former may justify abandonment; the latter demands investment.

The task before India is not to choose between nuclear and RE. It's to stop pretending that a partial cost metric constitutes an economic argument. NITI Aayog and power ministry should commission a full system cost study that captures capacity value, industrial heat substitution, fuel-security premiums and grid-integration costs alongside generation LCOE. Until then, the debate will continue to produce more heat than light.

The author writes on nuclear energy and strategic security policy

Cost Benefit It's Much Needed In Long Run Energy Mix

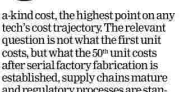
a kind cost, the highest point on any project's cost trajectory. The relevant question is not what the first unit costs, but what the 50th unit costs after serial factory fabrication is well underway. Supply chains mature and regulatory processes are standardised for repeat deployment. India's institutional depth in this area is not hypothetical. In April, the 500 MWe Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research-developed prototype fast-breeder reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, achieved first criticality, making India only the second country after Russia to operate a commercial SFR.

Budget 2025-26 allocated ₹2,000 crore under Nuclear Energy Mission, targeting 5 indigenously designed SMRs, including BSMR-200 and SMR-55, both slated for Tarapur. Private engineering talent is also moving in the same direction. Pune-based NYS TechSolutions is developing SUKM (Sookshma), a 10 MWe/20 MWh molten-salt micro-reactor, fuelled by thorium with a projected life exceeding 15 yrs. It remains a design-stage venture rather than a commercial plant. But it sends a clear signal: something significant is happening. Indian engineers are no longer waiting for foreign blueprints.

Intellectual honesty requires acknowledging constraints. Advanced SMRs rely on high-assay, low-enriched uranium, which is not yet commercially produced domestically. Meanwhile, SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India) Act's nuclear sector. These are genuine execution challenges. The crucial distinction is between constraints intrinsic to the technology and those created by policy, financing and regulation. Critics often blur this line. The former may justify abandonment; the latter demands investment.

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The author writes on nuclear energy and strategic security policy



Navpreet Saini & Kirit Parikh

Over the past decade, GoI has expanded investments in solar power, wind energy, transmission infrastructure and pumped hydro storage. Electric mobility initiatives and advanced manufacturing programmes are also being promoted as part of a broader strategy to reduce oil dependence. Recent geopolitical developments in the Gulf, which largely supply India's crude and LPG needs, have brought renewed focus to nuclear energy as a stable domestic source for baseload electricity. A milestone in India's nuclear programme was achieved in April, when a prototype fast-breeder reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu attained first criticality. Devlopment is the latest news of GoI reportedly considering measures that include assured power purchase agreements (PPAs), to attract private sector investments in the nuclear energy sector. It is also reportedly preparing to notify rules under SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India) Act 2025.

The 3-stage nuclear programme designed around the country's resource profile. While it has limited uranium reserves, it possesses some of the world's largest thorium deposits. The 3-stage strategy has been conceived to enable large-scale utilisation of thorium for power generation. Thorium is not a fertile or fissile material and has to be converted to fissile Uranium-233 in a FBR. The third stage aims to use U-233-based reactors for sustained energy generation. PFBR is important for the eventual thorium utilisation. India's thorium reserves, largely located in coastal monazite sands in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, are seen as a potential long-term strategic energy resource.

Another significant development came with the passage of the aforementioned SHANTI Act last December. It modernises India's nuclear legal and regulatory framework, and allows limited private sector participation in nuclear projects. Traditionally, India's nuclear industry has been dominated by state-controlled entities. The Act is intended to

streamline approvals, encourage investment, and support domestic manufacturing and technological partnerships. Reforms reflect recognition that achieving large-scale manufacturing will require both public and private participation.

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) is developing several advanced reactor designs, including 200 MWe Small Modular Reactor (SMR-200), 55 MWe SMR-55, and a high-temperature gas-cooled reactor (HTGR) intended for hydrogen production. SMRs are expected to be modular, with modules produced under controlled conditions in a factory and assembled at the site in a short time. They are also expected to be safe, making them acceptable to the public.

GoI has indicated that at least 5 indigenously designed SMRs will become operational by 2035. India has set a target of achieving 10 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047. At present, the country's installed nuclear capacity stands at about 6.7 GW, contributing around 1% of total electricity generation. Coal continues to account for nearly 70% of electricity production. Achieving the 10 GW target would require substantial expansion in nuclear manufacturing, financing and human resources.

The Strait of Hormuz disruption has raised concerns about diversifying India's energy mix and reducing exposure to external supply shocks. The current policy direction reflects a combination of RE, safety, and economic development objectives. The broad objective of improving energy security through a diversified and domestically supported energy system must remain a central policy priority. RE, along with energy storage required to balance it, remains the major first step. Electricity can substitute fossil fuels in many sectors. Coal can be replaced by nuclear as a baseload supplier.

Advanced SMRs rely on high-assay, low-enriched uranium, which is not yet commercially produced domestically. Meanwhile, SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India) Act's nuclear sector. These are genuine execution challenges. The crucial distinction is between constraints intrinsic to the technology and those created by policy, financing and regulation. Critics often blur this line. The former may justify abandonment; the latter demands investment.

The task before India is not to choose between nuclear and RE. It's to stop pretending that a partial cost metric constitutes an economic argument. NITI Aayog and power ministry should commission a full system cost study that captures capacity value, industrial heat substitution, fuel-security premiums and grid-integration costs alongside generation LCOE. Until then, the debate will continue to produce more heat than light.

The author writes on nuclear energy and strategic security policy

THE SPEAKING TREE

Double Entry

CHETAN SALVA

The universe is a perfect accountant. It uses the double-entry accounting system for handling cause and effect. So, rejoice when the next time you feel that someone has done you an injustice, or someone caused you harm or made you a subject of their anger or jealousy or criticism. The universe has perfectly recorded that event. Your karmic ledger received a credit entry as you paid through your suffering, and the other person's karmic ledger received a simultaneous debit entry for an equal and opposite amount.

Similarly, when you did a good, selfless deed for someone, either through charity or by extending help, your karmic ledger received a credit entry. What should matter to you most is the status of your ledger. You have no control over anyone else's ledger. Acts of revenge don't come from karma. Karma will create a debit in your karmic ledger and a credit in the other person's karmic ledger, regardless of whether the other person had it coming, and therefore, the act of revenge will have the exact opposite outcome than what you had intended it to be. So, what happens when your karmic ledger shows a heavy debit balance, bad karma?

Unlike in our commercial lives, there is no process of escaping debt through insolvency proceedings. You carry that bad karmic balance forward for ever, through multiple lives, till you clear it through the conduct of good karma. This cycle of imbalance and rebalance continues, until, at some point, you consciously decide to step out of your karmic debt that create these imbalances.

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY

Paragraphs From Fiction

Sisters in Yellow

Mieko Kawakami

We only sold the food — everything else was fresh off-site at a central facility each morning, so we didn't even have a galling kitchen, and the deli space itself was so small it couldn't fit more than four people at a time. In the three years I'd worked there, the menu had never once changed, and I began to wonder if the people who stopped by day in and day out — we had a lot of regulars — ever got tired of our food, but in fact, the monotony seemed to give them a sense of comfort.

Our sales were good, and our shop was so popular we always had a line outside the door at lunch and dinner time. By late last month, though, you could tell something was off; most of our customers disappeared, and they were the ones who had stopped by day in and day out — we even got phone calls complaining that we weren't taking enough measures to protect customers in the store. Tucked into my futon, I thought about how maybe I shouldn't have reassured my coworkers that I had a cough. Why had I lied? What was I thinking, saying I had a cough at a time like this? I had no idea.

Translated by Laurel Taylor & Hitomi Yoshio

Chat Room

This Crisis, Seize The Opportunity

Across the news report, 'PM Goes into Huddle with EAC Over Growth Strategy' by Rakesh Mohan (Chaturvedi) (Jun 7), growth numbers of a country like India may fluctuate due to some exogenous variables. For instance, the West Asia crisis has seriously impacted the supply of energy resources in the country, triggering an inflationary spiral and affecting economic growth. GoI should relentlessly focus on achieving optimum use of all domestic resources, proper redistribution of income and macroeconomic stabilisation or price stability. The PM EAC can play an effective role. If these happen, the nation can withstand any external shock any time. Growth, after all, is a continuous process; there is no quick-fix solution for that. — Anand Kesavadasan, Chennai

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Fault lines

INDIA bloc's search for relevance

THE Monday meeting of the INDIA bloc was intended to project Opposition unity. Instead, it highlighted the challenges of holding together a coalition of parties with competing regional interests and political ambitions. The alliance faces the tough task of proving that it can offer a credible alternative to the BJP-led NDA. The meeting's decisions—including holding consultations more frequently, jointly raising concerns over the SIR of electoral rolls, seeking Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over examination controversies and coordinating parliamentary strategy—reflect an effort to remain politically relevant. However, these issues alone cannot sustain a national coalition.

The bloc's central weakness is that it remains united largely by opposition to the BJP rather than by a shared governing vision. While criticism of the ruling party can bring diverse groups together, voters eventually seek answers on employment, inflation, agricultural distress, economic growth and federal relations. On these issues, the alliance has yet to articulate a coherent common programme. Its internal contradictions are equally apparent. In West Bengal, the Congress and the Trinamool Congress are rivals. In Punjab, the Congress and the AAP compete fiercely. In Kerala, the Congress-led UDF and the CPI(M)-led LDF are political adversaries. Such state-level contests inevitably complicate national cooperation.

While the presence of Mamata Banerjee and Akhilesh Yadav lent weight to the gathering, the absence of the DMK and AAP underscored the difficulties of maintaining cohesion in a coalition of diverse interests. Yet the coalition should not be written off. It played a significant role in preventing a BJP landslide in 2024 and remains an important platform for opposition coordination. If it hopes to endure, it must move beyond symbolism and develop a clear policy agenda. Without greater cohesion and a shared vision, the alliance risks being taken seriously by the electorate.

Border smuggling

Multi-pronged approach needed

THE arrest of 54 minors over the past 14 months for their involvement in cross-border drug and arms smuggling in Punjab is acutely worrying. It calls for a multi-pronged intervention aimed at addressing the entire gamut of issues plaguing the border districts. The blueprint of piecemeal measures and lopsided development denotes a lack of seriousness in catering to the needs of an area that is literally the first line of defence. A sense of urgency in effecting a transformative change in the lives of border residents has been missing. The consequences have been alarming. Just recently, two minors were caught by the Amritsar police with Pakistan-origin pistols and heroin. Villages near the border in Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Ferozpur and Fazilka districts have emerged as prime targets for recruitment. Families battling poverty and unemployment are being systematically exploited.

Intelligence inputs have consistently warned of Pakistani traffickers instructing Indian accomplices to recruit teenagers for drug and arms smuggling. One, because they have no criminal record and are thus off the radar of security agencies. Two, they cannot be punished harshly under the Juvenile Justice Act. Scores of youngsters have fallen in the trap. Many have been taken in by social media images glorifying weapons. Several operate as pickup agents for consignments dropped by drones. The startling aspect is that even the arrest of acquaintances has failed to act as a deterrent. They are still willing to take enormous risks for quick money. The stark vulnerability is a reminder of the lack of opportunities and a feeling of near-abandonment by the authorities concerned.

Ramping up vigilance alone is not the solution. The Central and state governments must be seen as actively working to erase the border residents' perception that they have been left out of the India story.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 1926

Music and mosques

THE resolution of the Bengal Government about the stoppage of music before mosques, important portions of which were published in our yesterday's issue, is, we feel constrained to say, a wholly one-sided affair and amounts to a surrender on the part of the government to the threat of violence by one of the parties to the dispute. We are told that "in matters of religion, the government maintain an attitude of strict neutrality and only intervene when the claims of one community clash with those of another and when the persistence in mutually incompatible claims threaten to endanger the public peace." This is perfectly sound principle, but it cannot justify interference with the lawful religious rites and observances of a community merely because another community objects to them in such a manner as to endanger the public peace. The maintenance of law and order is no doubt one of the primary duties of a civilised government, but it is equally the duty of a government which rules over people professing different religions to enable each of the communities to carry on the practices enjoined by its religion in a lawful manner without any undue interference or molestation by people belonging to other faiths. The claims of the two parties to the present dispute are set forth in the resolution: "The Hindu community claims that music is an essential part of their religious services and is, therefore, a necessary feature at all their religious processions. The Muhammadan community considers that music disturbs the devotion of those who are at prayer in mosques and they claim the right and assert the practice of the stoppage of music before mosques at all hours of the day and not only on the occasion of public worship."

AJIT RANADE
NOTED ECONOMIST

THE latest Sample Registration System data should worry every policymaker. In 2024, nearly half of all recorded deaths in India occurred without medical attention from a trained professional. This is up from 18% in 2020. The proportion was even higher in rural India, and in states such as Bihar, it was close to two-thirds. These are not merely mortality statistics. They are a measure of how far formal healthcare remains from the lives of ordinary Indians.

This is the background against which we must examine the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC). There is discussion about reforming it. Reform is overdue. But it must not become a coded word for privatisation, outsourcing or handing over a social security institution to private insurers and hospital chains.

The ESIC is often misunderstood as just another health insurance scheme. It is much more than that. It is a social insurance system for low-income workers in the formal economy. It combines medical care with income protection. It covers sickness, maternity, disability, workplace injury, dependants' benefit, unemployment support and lifelong pension in cases of permanent disablement. For a worker earning Rs 15,000 a month, the annual contribution is about Rs 7,200, split between employer and employee. For that, the worker and family receive medical care without monetary ceilings, plus cash benefits that no ordinary private insurance product provides.

Workplace injuries remain seriously under-reported and under-addressed. An ESIC system that ensures quick treatment, wage



ESSENTIAL: Workers' health is productive capital. ISTOCK PHOTO

compensation, rehabilitation and disability support prevents injured workers from falling into poverty. It also helps them return to work sooner. Workers' health is productive capital.

The scale is large. The ESIC covers about 3.84 crore insured persons and, with their families, nearly 14.91 crore beneficiaries—nearly one-tenth of India's population. It has a large hospital network, medical colleges, land assets and a corpus exceeding Rs 1 lakh crore. It is one of the most under-used public social infrastructure assets.

Its intellectual history is also worth recalling. Britain's National Health Service emerged from the Beveridge vision of social security. In India, Prof BP Adarkar designed a similar framework for industrial workers in the 1940s. The ESIC Act of 1948 came from that vision. The NHS became a respected public institution. The ESIC, despite a similar foundation, has suffered from neglect, weak governance and poor user experience. That is a failure of execution.

The weaknesses are real. Workers complain of queues, poor information, lack of medicines, slow referrals, indifferent staff and long delays in cash benefits. Safe in India (SI) Foundation's work with injured workers in Haryana and Maharashtra shows how serious the problem is. Among more than

Fix ESIC, don't sell it

A revitalised ESIC can become a model for broader social health protection in India

The wage ceiling should be raised and indexed periodically to inflation. Coverage should extend to construction, gig and platform workers.

8,000 injured workers, it assisted, 73% waited more than six months for temporary disability benefits and 78% waited more than a year for permanent disability benefits. In Manesar, many workers had to pay privately even for basic diagnostics such as ultrasounds. But this is exactly why the ESIC needs repair, not surrender. The case for privatisation rests on attractive words: choice, efficiency, competition and scale. But for low-wage workers, 'choice' is often illusory. Many workers are

ing, claims, referrals, disability assessment and benefit-tracking must be redesigned around the worker. Second, publish enforceable service standards: claim-to-payment timelines, medicine availability, waiting time, referral turnaround and facility-wise performance. Third, strengthen primary care in every major industrial cluster so workers do not bypass the system out of frustration. Fourth, fix human resources: doctors, specialists, nurses, technicians and managers must be available where workers live and work. Fifth, deploy digital tools for appointments, health records, telemedicine and real-time claim tracking. But digital literacy should not become a new barrier.

The ESIC must become more accountable to workers, and also employers, especially MSMEs. Its boards and state bodies need stronger representation of workers, including contract workers, along with employers, government and independent health experts. There should be independent performance audits, social audits, actuarial reviews and public dashboards. Employer compliance must be enforced: every worker should be registered, must receive an e-Pehchan card and have accidents reported on time.

The wage ceiling should be raised and indexed periodically to inflation. Coverage should extend to construction, gig and platform workers. The ESIC corpus must be used for workers' promised benefits and not diverted elsewhere. India's healthcare crisis is caused by too little effective public provision. When nearly half of all deaths occur without trained medical attention, the answer cannot be to weaken one of the few statutory systems meant for workers. The answer is to make it work.

Fix the ESIC. Professionalise it. Make it transparent. Use private expertise where necessary, but on the ESIC's terms. Preserve the public character of the scheme. A revitalised ESIC can become a model for broader social health protection in India. Credit: The Billion Press

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhuman. —Martin Luther King Jr

Makki, bhatti and joys of yore

SURESH CHANDER KUMAR

DON'T let Amma take too much cut!" That warning accompanied every trip to the *bhatti*, though none of us had the faintest idea how much grain was deducted for roasting. The cut was a mystery. The excitement was not. The *bhatti* stood in the heart of the town market, between a *halwai's* shop fragrant with *jalebis* and a provision store stacked with colourful tins. You could locate it—a ribbon of smoke curled into the sky, carrying the comforting aroma of roasting grains. The *bhatti* was the unofficial headquarters of our childhood. When cousins arrived during vacations, a trip to the *bhatti* was a must. Mother would fill a round steel *dabba* with a few fistfuls of *makki*. It felt precious. Off we marched through the market's merry mayhem. Vendors advertised vegetables. Rickshaw bells rang. Scooters sputtered. Shopkeepers exchanged neighbourhood news snippets. Amidst this bustle stood the *bhatti*, glowing and crackling like a tiny sun.

Presiding over it was an elderly woman we called Amma. Her silver hair was tucked beneath the edge of her sari. Her bangles chimed softly as she worked. With practised precision, she stirred hot sand in a large iron pan. Then came the transformation. The grains danced. The maize twisted. The *channa* crackled. Kernels blossomed into fragrant treasures. We watched, spellbound. One afternoon, determined to prove my importance, I insisted on carrying the *dabba* myself. I walked ahead of everyone with exaggerated responsibility. The market, however, had other plans. The *dabba* slipped from my hand. The lid rolled away with a metallic clatter and a shower of *makki* scattered across the stone-paved lane. For a moment, my heart stopped.

Then began the rescue mission. I crouched down and started collecting kernels one by one. A shopkeeper pointed towards a few that had escaped beneath his stool. My cousins, meanwhile, contributed absently nothing except commentary: "You missed one." "No, two." "Look behind you." By the time every kernel had been recovered, I was dusty, flustered and convinced I had saved the family fortune. We narrated the incident to Amma. She remarked, "Good. Now even the pigeons know the new crop has arrived." The roasting itself was a rite. We crowded around Amma, issuing instructions: "Mine first!" "Mite over-roast it!" "And don't take too much cut!" She would merely smile.

When the roasted grain was weighed, we watched the scales with suspicion. Yet the moment warm, smoky handfults reached our palms, all disputes vanished. Today, popcorn arrives packed in glossy packets and baskets. It is quicker, cleaner and more convenient. The crackle remains, yet the charm is gone. No Amma. No cousins. No smoky afternoons. No anxious eyes fixed on the scales. And no delicious debate about cut. I still don't know how much grain Amma deducted.

The author is VP Kamal Encon Industries, Yamunanagar

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Democratic conscience is alive

Refer to 'Unlike Anna Hazare protest, CJP is about opportunity'; the larger issue is the continuation of governance failures that remain inadequately addressed. In any democracy, every wrong must be opposed, irrespective of who governs. The CJP's rise effectively the inability of the opposition to effectively articulate public grievances or to build a potent movement around them. When institutional opposition fails, public anger inevitably finds alternative channels. The message is clear: people want remedies, not rhetoric. The CJP demonstrates that the democratic conscience remains alive and ignored grievances can eventually challenge even the strongest regimes.

RAMPHAL KATARIA, KURUKSHETRA

Youth want a fair chance

With reference to 'Unlike Anna Hazare protest, CJP is about opportunity'; the movement appears to have gained momentum after the remarks of the Chief Justice regarding some sections of youth who seek shortcuts rather than hard work and, in the process, end up burdening the system. However, the frustration of educated and qualified young people cannot be dismissed. Their concerns have logic and merit. Every government has a responsibility to create adequate employment opportunities so that the youth can earn their livelihoods with dignity. They are not seeking a favour; they simply want a fair chance to support themselves and their families. Employment is not merely about income; it is about self-respect, independence and the ability to live a dignified life.

HARISH MONGA, FERROZPUR

Affordable LPG a vital yardstick

Apropos of 'Economic challenge'; the true test of economic policy is not how LPG prices compare globally, but whether every family can afford clean cooking fuel. LPG is not a luxury; it is a basic necessity that determines health, nutrition and quality of life. For millions of poor and working-class households, even small price increases can force families to cut down on other vital expenses. Economic growth has little meaning if basic essentials remain beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. Ensuring the availability, affordability and

responsibility of LPG for all is a fundamental responsibility of a welfare-oriented democracy.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

White Paper on LPG rate hike

The Petroleum Ministry conveniently took shelter behind the claim that the price of domestic LPG in India still happens to be lower than in its neighbouring countries. The fact remains that the most ordinary Indian mortals continue to bear the burden of a second successive hike aggregating to around Rs 89. As economics has now virtually taken over the Centre's election-centric politics, the hike has become inevitable. That apart, it should be incumbent on the government to issue a White Paper to substantiate its self-serving claim that the oil marketing companies are still losing Rs 700 per domestic cylinder.

SK GUPTA, BY MAIL

Protect citizens from price shocks

Apropos of 'Economic challenge'; India has its own strengths. Strong local demand, solid infrastructure and a growing digital market give hope. Yet rising crude lifts the import bill and weakens the rupee. The RBI's push for foreign funds helps stability, but growth needs more. We must shield homes from price shocks while protecting jobs. That calls for fiscal care, targeted help for the poor, faster clearances and reforms that cut energy risk. Balance, not slogans, will protect citizens and sustain growth.

K CHIDANAND KUMAR, BENGALURU

Care for old artefacts

Apropos of 'Punjab MLA hostel heritage sold in US; Speaker vows probe'; auctioning of heritage furniture is a regular feature. The Punjab and Haryana Assemblies once operated from the present-day Home Science College in Chandigarh. After shifting to the current premises, I remember that legislators' seats with leather upholstery kept lying in the open for a long period. These were later accommodated in classrooms of Government College for Men. The lecture halls of government colleges and Panjab University have heritage benches. We don't care for the artefacts when they are in our possession, but a hue and cry is raised after we lose them in any auction.

VK ANAND, CHANDIGARH

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribuneindia.com

Return of RIC – with strings attached



AJAI MALHOTRA
DISTINGUISHED FELLOW, TERI,
AND FORMER AMBASSADOR

MEETING news agencies in St Petersburg recently, Russian President Vladimir Putin, answering an Indian journalist, spoke warmly of India as a reliable partner, praised its economic growth and independent foreign policy and dismissed as futile the pressure on New Delhi to reduce its cooperation with Russia.

On India-China, he declined to interfere in what he called a sensitive and multifaceted relationship. And on Pakistan, he rejected a suggestion that it had fallen under China's sway, reflecting Moscow's desire to maintain working relationships across South Asia. Putin's words bear attention, even if little of what he said was new.

Putin's recollection that the Russia-India-China (RIC) format had been elevated to summit level in St Petersburg in 2006 and that it eventually gave rise to BRICS, is noteworthy. The remark has generated renewed attention in the trilateral. With Moscow seeking to preserve strategic space amid sharpening great-power rivalry

and India uneasy about Russia's growing dependence on China, revisiting RICs relevance for India becomes timely.

The RIC idea has always been Russia's. It originated with academician Yevgeny Primakov, who saw the RIC as a counterweight to the US dominance in world affairs. He gave it public voice during his visit to New Delhi in December 1998 as Prime Minister. Responding to a journalist at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, he had spoken of the need for a strategic triangle between the three countries to ensure regional peace and stability. His words grabbed headlines, voiced as they were when India was under US sanctions for its nuclear tests of May 1998.

The first RIC foreign ministers' meeting was held in New York in 2002, with the understanding that bilateral issues would remain outside the trilateral's remit. Putin convened the first RIC summit in St Petersburg in 2006 on the sidelines of the G8 summit. At Russia's instance — BRIC, and soon BRICS, followed — and as the latter gathered stature, the trilateral receded into the background. After a hiatus, two RIC summits were held alongside the G20 summits in Buenos Aires (2018) and Osaka (2019), attended by PM Narendra Modi, President Xi Jinping and President Putin. A brief, orchestrated Modi-Putin-Xi interaction at the SCO summit in Tianjin in 2025 attracted huge attention after images of the three smiling leaders in relaxed conversation went



USEFUL: The RIC format offers dialogue, not strategic convergence. REUTERS

viral. Nonetheless, the RIC has remained largely dormant in recent years, though Track-II dialogues among academics have continued.

The RIC's limited evolution derives from the structural differences in how the three countries view the emerging international order. All three favour a multipolar world, but priorities differ. Russia and China seek a reduction in US dominance, while India looks for a larger role for itself rather than a diminution of American primacy. Russia, and separately China, regard the US as their principal strategic competitor; for India, it is China. That divergence influences India's caution as the RIC brings India into a trilateral framework with the very power it regards as its long-term strategic challenge and does so in a triangle where Russia and India are comparatively weaker members.

India's caution also reflects its

Geopolitical realities that prevented RIC from evolving into a more strategic grouping two decades ago remain.

complex, at times adversarial, relationship with China. Among its concerns are the unresolved dispute over the Line of Actual Control, China's baseless claims on Arunachal Pradesh, its growing strategic presence in India's maritime neighbourhood, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passing via Indian territory and Beijing's opposition to India's aspirations for Nuclear Suppliers Group and UN Security Council membership. Meanwhile, Moscow has a growing interest in stable India-China relations, in keeping trilateral channels open and preserving equilibrium among the three.

Russia's calculations have, however, evolved somewhat differently since its confrontation with the West over Ukraine. Successive rounds of western sanctions since 2014 have pushed Moscow closer to Beijing, widening the asymmetry in their relationship.

China has meanwhile steadily expanded its strategic and economic influence in Central Asia, which Russia regards as its 'near abroad'. This has made Moscow's interest in equilibrium more compelling.

Their differing perspectives are also reflected in how they approach multipolarity. During Putin's recent visits to both Beijing and New Delhi, the idea of a multipolar world was endorsed in bilateral declarations. Yet the India-Russia joint statement of December 2025 went further, committing the two countries to a multipolar Asia as well. The Russia-China joint statement issued in May 2026 contains no comparable formulation. For India and Russia, multipolarity cannot stop at the global level. It must extend to Asia, ensuring that the region's future is shaped by several centres of influence rather than one dominant power.

Equally, Russia's growing partnership with China should not obscure the continuing importance of the India-Russia special strategic partnership, which encompasses numerous sensitive sectors and remains a major pillar of our foreign policy. Nor should closer Russia-China ties be mistaken for complete alignment, as Moscow and Beijing retain distinct, and at times conflicting, national interests. India and Russia have traditionally favoured diversified external relationships over exclusive alignments, reflected in India's policy of multi-alignment and Russia's longstanding concept of multi-vector diplomacy. That

reality is not altered by India's differences with China, nor by our expanding ties with the US. Weakening the partnership serves neither country's interests. It would diminish the strategic options available to both, while drawing Russia closer to China and creating additional space for Pakistan.

How, then, should India approach the RIC now that Putin's remarks have revived discussion about it? It should do so with the discipline that characterises Indian statecraft. The RIC remains useful precisely because it is limited. The geopolitical realities that prevented it from evolving into a more strategic grouping two decades ago remain and are, in some respects, even more pronounced.

India should engage within the trilateral for what it realistically offers: a forum for dialogue on select multilateral issues, a modest hedge in a world of shifting alignments, and a rare channel through which India, Russia and China can exchange views even when one of the bilateral relationships is under strain. Beyond that, expectations should remain modest.

India's strategic autonomy and multi-alignment rest on maintaining ties across competing centres of power, always on its own terms. Putin's remarks on the RIC should be viewed as a reminder that in an era of shifting alignments, even limited forums retain value. India benefits from keeping every useful diplomatic channel open while remaining firmly anchored in its own interests.

Views are personal

Punjab sleeping on the cockroach problem



NIRMAL SANDHU
SENIOR JOURNALIST

AMISSPEAK by the Chief Justice of India, perhaps unintended, has resulted in the sudden emergence of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), first digitally and now on the ground. It has caught the imagination of youth, especially those facing malpractices in education, those unemployed, or simply struggling to survive on low-paid jobs.

Punjab should be particularly concerned as its youth unemployment rate stands at 19%, according to the Periodic Labour Survey for October-December 2025. This worrying exceeds the all-India average of 14.8%. Comparatively, Haryana's unemployment rate has declined to 12.4%.

Why that is so is a question that Punjabis may ask. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, who spends a lot of time mocking his Akali and Congress opponents, may not answer. He boasts about the 66,000 or so jobs his government has provided, without talking about the vacancies caused by retiring staff in the same period.

Jobs happen when growth takes place. And Punjab's growth rate at 6.1% also trails the national average of 7.4%. While the RBI last week scaled down India's GDP growth to 6.6%, Punjab may take a serious hit with agriculture and industry affected by a shortage of fertilisers and costlier transport fuel. Higher inflation will escalate social anxieties.

The overall scenario for youngsters is getting bleaker. While the falling rupee against the dollar is pushing foreign travel and education beyond middle class reach, their favourite destinations like Canada and the US are shutting doors to migrants. Regardless of the brain drain cost, Punjab could have witnessed a serious social upheaval had these countries not provided welcome escape routes to ambitious young Punjabis.

The impact of the worsening economic climate and shrinking foreign avenues is not hard to imagine. But is Punjab prepared to face the emerging grim reality? Losing hope about their future, youth turn to narcotics or take up the gun. The problems of drug abuse and gangsterism point to the deeper rot in society and the system. Government agencies only fight the symptoms. Problems cannot be solved by the same politicians offering the same solutions.

Saturday's diwan CJP drama at Jantar Mantar revealed distrust in the politi-



ANXIETIES: There is an urgency to act before the simmering anger boils over. REUTERS

cal class. Such democratic movements sometimes throw up new leaders with new ideas. The CJP's popularity may compel the existing political parties to replace worn-out leaders with bright new faces. Issues of youth so far figure neither in the present electoral plans of the opposition parties in Punjab nor of the ruling Aam Aadmi Party.

Instead of relying mostly on quick-fix solutions, Bhagwant Mann must look elsewhere. Splurging on freebies, he runs a tight ship, disregarding hidden icebergs on the way ahead. Money thrown at voters can be better spent on revitalising flagging industries, stagnating agriculture and inefficient services.

If limited resources are wisely utilised on development, political dividends may take time but will definitely follow. Only meaningful and

Only meaningful and quality work can generate wealth and boost tax collections.

quality work can generate wealth and boost tax collections, which can help the state extend a helping hand to the needy. Taking loans for welfare is against common sense. Besides, free-for-all benefits incentivise laziness. Well-off Punjabis are increasingly losing their self-pride by becoming state-dependent. Congress MP Dharamvira Gandhi emphasised this point recently.

Political parties don't seem to learn from the past. Despite providing liberal subsidies and using massive amounts of the taxpayers' money on self-promotion, VIP security and helicopters, former CMs Parkash Singh Badal and Amarinder Singh both lost the elections. Politicians' lifestyles amplify the common man's helplessness and desperate situation.

The recent civic body elections show that the 2027 con-

test is essentially between the AAP and the Congress. The BJP can become a serious contender for power if it comes out with a believable economic model for Punjab. Instead of speaking on the subject he understands best — industry and its problems — the new BJP chief in Punjab, Kewal Dhilon, talks of politics and the Khalsa Raj of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which shows a clear disconnect from reality.

Riven by infighting, the Congress will have to come up with a convincing argument why it should be handed over power when each one of its senior leaders is playing his own me-first game for the top chair. Rahul Gandhi, no doubt, is taking up cockroach issues but does the party have any clear plan for youngsters living their lives on social media? AI is putting jobs at risk. Has the party given a serious thought to the issue?

It is not enough to conduct surveys to find out which leader can fetch more votes. A root-and-branch review of the party functioning in Punjab is required. 'Tried, tested and failed' leaders must give way to those with a vision, throbbing with energy, who can help Punjab regain lustre.

Being the ruling party, the AAP is at a higher pedestal. But it has lost part of the sheen. The AAP government is so publicity-driven that every achievement it hawks needs to be taken with a heavy dose of salt.

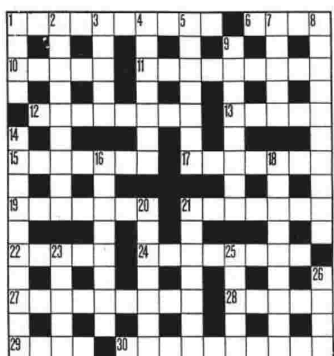
The success of its much advertised anti-drug campaign is hardly felt on the ground.

Credibly, it has built stadiums and is encouraging sports. But the most singular achievement of the Mann government is in the field of school education. The NITI Aayog has ranked Punjab number one in its latest School Education System report. This is a significant jump from the 27th place in 2020 and the credit for the success goes to the low-profile Education Minister, Harjot Singh Bains and AAP leader Manish Sisodia.

Challenges, however, remain in higher education. Successive Akali and Congress governments had starved government universities and colleges of funds to facilitate the rise of private institutions. The resultant steep rise in costs has driven higher education beyond the reach of lower-middle class students.

Be it healthcare, education or employment, rural youth have often been at a disadvantage. Cost-of-living issues contribute to occasional spikes in rural youth and farmer discontent. However, dismissing the unemployed as parasites may invite a backlash which may at some point go out of control. This should alert governments, both at the national and state levels, to the dangers of not taking youth problems seriously. There is an urgency to act before the simmering anger boils over.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Make poor (10)
- 6 Southwest Pacific islands state (4)
- 10 Laud (5)
- 11 Showing foresight (9)
- 12 Divert attention of (8)
- 13 Up to the time of (5)
- 15 Go faster than (7)
- 17 Fast sailing ship (7)
- 19 Conciliatory (7)
- 21 Craftsman (7)
- 22 Sequence (5)
- 24 Over-elaborated (8)
- 27 Way of applying remedies (9)
- 28 Form an alliance (5)
- 29 Uncivil (4)
- 30 Naively enthusiastic (6-4)

DOWN

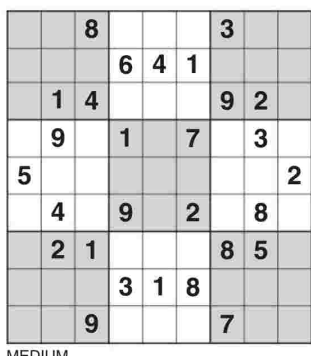
- 1 Paragraph of news (4)
- 2 Devoted to one's country (9)
- 3 High South African grassland (5)
- 4 Put back (7)
- 5 Habitual doer (7)
- 7 Bungling (5)
- 8 Bigoted (10)
- 9 Inform (8)
- 14 Rival (10)
- 16 Mutual attraction (8)
- 18 Future generations (9)
- 20 Gather together (7)
- 21 Judge (7)
- 23 In the lead (5)
- 25 Lending at exorbitant rates (5)
- 26 Be inclined (4)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Optimum, 5 Best, 8 Open-ended, 9 Oil, 10 Ruse, 12 Affluent, 14 Sundae, 15 Botany, 17 Spiteful, 18 Flow, 21 Ewe, 22 Incapable, 24 Total, 25 Enthrall.

Down: 1 Odour, 2 Tie, 3 Meet, 4 Modify, 5 Bad blood, 6 Stonewall, 7 Tolstoy, 11 Sentiment, 13 Material, 14 Suspect, 16 Muscle, 19 Wheel, 20 Spot, 23 Bar.

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

4	7	6	2	8	1	3	9	5
8	9	2	3	7	5	1	6	4
3	5	1	9	4	6	2	7	8
6	2	7	8	3	4	5	1	9
5	8	9	7	1	2	4	3	6
1	4	3	6	5	9	7	8	2
9	3	4	5	6	7	8	2	1
7	6	5	1	2	8	9	4	3
2	1	8	4	9	3	6	5	7

CALENDAR

JUNE 9, 2026, TUESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1948
- Jyestha Shaka 19
- Jyestha Parvatisa 26
- Hajar 1447
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 9, up to 2:35 am
- Priti Yoga up to 8:19 am
- Purvabhadrap Nakshatra up to 9:40 am
- Moon in Pisces sign

FORECAST

CITY	19:23 HRS	
	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	42	27
New Delhi	43	29
Amritsar	42	27
Bathinda	41	26
Jalandhar	42	27
Ludhiana	43	27
Bhivani	43	26
Hisar	43	29
Sirsa	43	28
Dharamsala	36	19
Manali	29	11
Shimla	29	19
Srinagar	29	12
Jammu	41	25
Kargil	24	14
Leh	22	10
Dehradun	38	23
Mussoorie	27	18

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from the Friends of India - founded 1818

Plugging In

For years, India's electric vehicle debate was driven largely by environmental concerns. Governments offered subsidies, manufacturers launched pilot projects and advocates spoke of cleaner cities and lower emissions.

Conflicts in West Asia, disruptions in shipping routes and fluctuations in global commodity markets routinely translate into higher transport costs, inflationary pressures and fiscal strain at home.

This explains why the next phase of India's electric mobility journey will depend less on consumer enthusiasm and more on policy credibility.

Equally critical is the development of charging infrastructure. Consumers may be persuaded by lower running costs, but they will hesitate if reliability remains uncertain.

The larger challenge lies in supply chains. The world is entering an era where control over battery materials and critical minerals could become as strategically important as access to oil once was.

Fast-Track

The selection of a 15-year-old for India's senior cricket team is not merely a story about precocious talent. It is a sign of how dramatically the sport's talent identification and development systems have changed.

The rise of Vaishnavi Sooryavanshi reflects the emergence of a new cricket ecosystem in which extraordinary talent can be tested against world-class opposition far earlier than ever before.

That does not mean the risks have disappeared. If anything, they have multiplied. Modern cricket places enormous commercial and psychological pressures on young athletes. Social media ensures that a teenager's successes are celebrated instantly and his failures dissected just as quickly.

Yet it would be wrong to view such selections solely through the lens of caution. They also reflect growing institutional confidence. Indian cricket today possesses the depth, resources and support structures to take calculated risks.

Odisha's Health paradox

An analysis of the National Family Health Survey 2023-24 data for Odisha reveals a state caught in a paradox - celebrating genuine gains in maternal health and education even as it sleepswalks into new crises of wasting, diabetes, caesarean overuse, and a collapsing family planning programme.



CHARUJITTA PANIGRAHI

The jump - from 14 to 21.7 per cent for women and 17 to 26.6 per cent for men - in just three to four years is extraordinary.

This is compounded by the rise in overweight and obesity. Women who are overweight or obese have jumped from 23 to 29.7 per cent; men from 22.2 to 27.8 per cent.

With respect to child vaccination, full vaccination coverage is 90.8 per cent overall, but in rural areas it is 81.2 per cent.

Odisha's antenatal care figures show a troubling regression. Mothers who received antenatal check-ups in the first trimester fell from 76.9 to 70.6 per cent.

Early ANC is critical for detecting gestational diabetes, hypertension, and anaemia - conditions whose prevalence in Odisha is clearly rising.

stress. Odisha must rest rising wasting as a public health emergency, not a routine indicator. This means a state-wide NRC expansion, mandatory community-based management of acute malnutrition, and a fundamental redesign of supplementary nutrition under ICDS - moving away from dry rations toward hot, diversified meals that actually improve dietary adequacy.

The state health department must introduce mandatory second-opinion protocols for elective C-sections in private facilities, audit C-section rates district by district for public hospitals, and the JSK (Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram) facility payments to normal delivery outcomes.

Odisha needs to diversify its contraceptive method mix urgently. The over-reliance on female sterilisation must give way to investment in spacing methods - injectables, IUDs, and male condom promotion - particularly for younger women in the 20-29 age group.

The state must fast-track the rollout of HWC (Health and Wellness Centres) as genuine primary care platforms for NCD screening. Every adult above 30 visiting a public health facility should be screened for diabetes and hypertension.

The decline in first-trimester ANC registration must be investigated at the district level. Health workers' incentives need to be restructured to reward early registration.

Mobile outreach for tribal and remote populations - who are disproportionately likely to miss first-trimester care - must be intensified. NFHS-6 gives Odisha credit where it is due.

But infrastructure without quality, and gains in some indicators that are matched by reversals in others, amount to an unfinished revolution. A state that has brought women to institutional deliveries but then subjects them to a one-in-three chance of an unjustified caesarean has not solved the problem of maternal health - it has simply moved it indoors.

The WHO's benchmark is that C-sections should constitute no more than 10-15 per cent of births. Any rate above that suggests medically unjustifiable procedures.

Odisha's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has already fallen to a replacement level of 1.7. The unmet need problem is therefore not about population management - it is about women's bodily autonomy and maternal health.

Odisha's blood sugar data should trigger an immediate non-communicable disease (NCD) response. Among women aged 15 and above, 21.7 per cent have blood sugar levels classified as high, very high, or are taking medication - up from 14.0 per cent in NFHS-5.

Postnatal care for mothers also slipped slightly (from 88.4 to 86.3 per cent), and vitamin A supplementation for children fell from 87.1 to 82.7 per cent.

It is a timely call, today being World Environment Day when people and governments would do well to reflect on how the idea of development at all cost has brought the planet to this critical juncture of ecological doom.

Led by the United Nations Environment Programme, World Environment Day has been observed annually since 1973, and remains the largest global platform for sufficient review and public consultation?

"A suspension is not enough - it is necessary to completely stop projects that destroy the environment and livelihoods," added the group Kalkiasan People's Network for the Environment.

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A state with a per capita income well below the national average has, over the years, surprised demographers and public health researchers with faster-than-expected gains on child mortality, institutional births, and school enrolment.

A careful, indicator-by-indicator read of the NFHS-6 fact sheet for Odisha reveals a state in transition. Here are the red flags that demand immediate attention.

Let's start with the number that should be causing alarm at every level of Odisha's administration: 22.1 per cent of children under five are wasting - meaning they are acutely malnourished, too thin for their height.

Wasting is not a slow, structural problem like stunting. It is an acute, immediate indicator of children in nutritional distress right now.

Even more troubling: only 14.9 per cent of children aged 6-23 months receive an adequate diet, down from 20.1 per cent in NFHS-5.

Non-breastfed children in rural Odisha receiving an adequate diet? Just 6.3 per cent. These figures speak to a child feeding crisis that programmes like Poshan Abhiyan have not yet made much difference in Odisha.

One of the starkest numbers in the Odisha fact sheet is the caesarean section rate: 29.4 per cent of all births, up sharply from 21.6 per cent in NFHS-5.

The WHO's benchmark is that C-sections should constitute no more than 10-15 per cent of births.

INQUIRER

Missing the forest for the trees

It took fierce public outrage and sustained protests by environmental groups, fisherfolk groups, and organized youth for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to pause what people have described as the "massacre of trees" along Quirino Avenue in Manila.

The tree-cutting will take way for the Southern Access Link Expressway (SALX) project that will connect to the Metro Manila Skyway Stage 3.

Over 225 trees have been felled, with the DENR permit indicating that a total of 617 trees were allowed to be cut.

While both the DENR and project proponent, San Miguel Corp. (SMC), have agreed to halt the activity, concerned groups have asked: Why only now? Why stop only after more than 200 trees have been cut? Why advance a project without sufficient review and public consultation?

"A suspension is not enough - it is necessary to completely stop projects that destroy the environment and livelihoods," added the group Kalkiasan People's Network for the Environment.

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A Member of The ANN

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Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Moment of pride

Sir, Today's report "Odisha showcases disaster resilience model at BRICS" marks a moment of pride for us Indians. Odisha's transformation into a global benchmark for disaster management - highlighted by a preparedness framework built on the "Zero Casualty" policy - and its growing leadership in climate resilience - was showcased at the technical meeting of the BRICS Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRRG) held in Puri.

Congratulations to Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Mahli for presenting strategies to build resilient communities and a sustainable future before representatives from the 11 BRICS nations: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Ethiopia, Iran, and Indonesia.

It may be noted that a record 1.2 million people were evacuated within 24 hours, one of the largest humanitarian rescue operations in history.

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Cyprus, but the strategic signal those sales carry. Turkey has long assumed it could take positions hostile to India on Kashmir and Pakistan without consequence.

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Deficiencies

Sir, The troika of Sarthak Sidhant, Vedant Shrivastava and Nisarga Adhikari demonstrated India's Got Talent. These class XII kids exposed glaring deficiencies in CBSE's much touted OSM (On Screen Marking) and placed the national education Board on the mat. Our teens are indeed tech-savvy.

The government shouldn't feel embarrassed to co-opt them in any future decision or policy that impacts students and their careers.

Yours, etc., Avinash Godbole, Devnas, 4 June.

Civilisational resurgence



As India marks 12 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership...

His presence at the temple's inauguration sent a powerful message: Hindus need not be apologetic about their civilisational icons...

indirect jobs, alongside growth in homestays and women-led enterprises. Ujjain's Mahakal Lok Corridor has transformed the city...



often facilitated through diplomacy, have strengthened global awareness of India's cultural wealth. The government has elevated the legacy of unsung tribal heroes...

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 09 June 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE same boat will convey to England Lord Lytton, on short leave, and Mr. S. N. Mullick, who goes to take a seat on the Council of the Secretary of State...

EU envoy trips up in Pakistan

HARSHA KAKAR

Kaja Kallas, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and former Estonian premier...

pillars." It appeared cooperation was growing in all spheres, when suddenly Kallas applied the brakes. Kallas visited Islamabad recently and interacted with its political and military leadership...

A couple of years ago, in response to Europe linking Galwan to Ukraine, Jaishankar said: "There is a linkage today which is being made. A linkage between China and India and what's happening in Ukraine..."



specifically mentioned Afghanistan: "They expressed serious concern over the presence of terrorist entities in Afghanistan and reiterated that Afghan territory must not be used to threaten or attack other countries..."

News Items

EGYPTIAN CABINET

CAREERS OF THE NEW MINISTERS

CAIRO, JUNE 7. FATMA LALAH Pasha Barakat, Minister of Agriculture, Ali Bey Shems, Minister of Education and Nequs Pasha Gharabli, Minister for Pious Foundations...

"MAN OF THE HOUR"

EDINBURGH'S FEELING OF SATISFACTION

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.) THE Lord Provost of Edinburgh, in presenting the casket containing the Freedom of the City to the Premier, said he had come fresh from one of the greatest triumphs of history...

WORK OF AFRICA DEPUTATION

TRIBUTE TO UNION GOVERNMENT

TRIBUTE to the facilities accorded by the South African Government and public institutions and societies was paid by Sir Deva Prasad Sarbadhikari when addressing the Calcutta Rotary Club yesterday on the achievements of the Indian Deputation to South Africa...

Crossword | No. 293485

Crossword puzzle grid with clues and solutions.

Yesterday's Solution

MOCK, BEAST, KITCH, NORBIA, DISTROB, AEBNE, BLA, EBB, GAVLUMPR, SUBMIT, ALOWARD, SHYSTER, FRIVITVAL, NOD, NITR, MAR, D, SE, S, E, B, C, ASIN, SKULL, DIARK

- ACROSS: 1 Saucy, for a time (4); 3 Popular story about sick revolutionary is perfect (10); 10 Regulate boating agents, in part (7); 11 They're positive half of creative works must be removed (7); 12 In text, males frequently getting compassion in critical period (6,2,5); 15 Most balanced article on Sweden is in French (6); 16 Chap wearing trousers playing old musical instrument (8); 18 Shapes 'I'm busting to get attention' (8); 20 Try to get alcoholic drink up in desert from the man? (10) (4,2); 23 Local restorer restored rail road ride (6,7); 25 Box, perhaps containing old chief's foot (7); 27 Look to wear green pants soon (7); 28 British demand queue for boundary (10); 29 Pretending to be undressed, or similar (4); DOWN: 1 Expert's love for top American simple (6); 2 Engineers and soldiers following server issues during court proceedings (6,4); 5 Essentially, tall locals patrol Maze prison (8); 6 Allow John to start to investigate files (10); 7 Relative nearly left establishment that struggles to maintain social distancing (7); 8 Worried, skipping question that's simple (4); 9 One's again hit hard following server issues during court proceedings (6,4); 13 I bury someone who's passed in an unconventional manner? (10); 14 Photograph last plant (10); 17 Team, one from Madrid, of stars (8); 18 Dangerous to shove bottom close to heater in living room (7); 21 Pick initiation nursing attire 50% off (7); 22 Shelter in rocks at foot of mountain (6); 24 Objections about displaying bust (4); 26 Grant possibly picked up for cast (3)

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

THE ASIAN AGE

9 JUNE 2026

Stop the foolish Iran war, let's find a way to peace

After one hundred days of war and a kind of peace in a fitful ceasefire which was sporadically breached, the reason is yet to dawn on the combatants that modern wars are unwinnable. No one, save the military-industrial complex, can expect to profit from this senseless bombardment of military and civilian infrastructure even as Iran, emboldened by its resilience in withstanding attacks, decided to test its strength in enlarging the war over the weekend.

Endless missile and drone exchanges over three months have rendered populations across West Asia, including in Iran, fearful. And far from subsiding after the ceasefire declaration of April 8, the West Asia war was threatening to spin again after Iran, in the mistaken belief that it must stand up for its proxy Hezbollah after Israel bombed the outskirts of the Lebanese capital Beirut, fired missiles at northern Israel on Sunday. That was enough excuse for Israel, the original initiator of the Iran war, to rain projectiles over Iran, including on a petrochemical complex.

It appears the hold of the US President on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not total as Mr Trump may still believe. Having convinced Mr Trump to go to war with Iran, much against military advice that had pointed to Iran holding a counter ace against the complete control of the Strait of Hormuz, Mr Netanyahu may have realised his goal of staying on in power. But, Mr Trump, who played along with Israel from February 28, is now at his wit's end as to how to bring the nightmarish war action to a close and seal a deal that would bring back peace.

After 100 days, the US administration knows well that none of its war aims has been accomplished and it has been forced to negotiate with a regime that Mr Trump claimed he had already changed. He had already changed, to reopen the strait to shipping traffic that is the route for over a fifth of the world's supply of oil and gas and which was totally open before the war.

There is no word on the Iran nuclear programme that the US was said to have obliterated a year ago and further reduced to dust in the 2026 war just as Mr Trump is claiming the Iranians are ready to hand over their partly enriched uranium.

Such a dream scenario could even swing some way towards reality if not for the fact that the war was never as one-sided as the Americans and the world were led to believe. Mr Trump, who was ready with periodically increasing numbers for aircraft lost in the India-Pakistan exchanges in May 2025, might not wish to reveal that the US air force may have lost as many as 42 manned and unmanned aircraft in Iranian attacks both in the air and on its Middle Eastern bases. Today, the USA is not negotiating from a position of strength as Mr Trump would like the world to believe.

The only way out for the contending parties is to put a stop to all hostilities, including by Israel in Lebanon and Gaza, and get down to talking of a way out of the impasse, prioritise the opening of the Strait of Hormuz because of which the rest of the world is suffering and which might happen if the USA lifts its counter blockade of Iranian ports, and find a genuine path to peace.

To do that the USA and Mr Trump may have to accept that they waded foolishly into an unwinnable war.

Roller-coaster at Roland Garros

The 2026 French Open will be remembered as one of the most chaotic and unpredictable Grand Slams in recent memory. When the dust settled on the famous Parisian red clay, two first-time major champions took centre stage. Germany's Alexander Zverev finally ended his long and agonising wait for a Grand Slam title, edging past Italy's Flavio Cobolli in a five-set final. Nineteen-year-old Russian Mirra Andreeva announced herself as the sport's newest star, ending Polish qualifier Maja Chwalinska's fairytale run.

For two weeks, Roland Garros was a theatre of extremes. There was scorching heat, pouring rain, stunning upsets and emotional farewells. It delivered a roller-coaster ride and the unpredictability was best reflected in the final four of both the men's and women's draws, where not a single former Grand Slam champion remained in contention. There were 32 five-set matches across the fortnight.

Once world No. 1 Jannik Sinner, hampered by a bout of cramps, squandered a two-set lead and a 5-1 advantage against Juan Manuel Cerundolo in the second round, the tournament's most dramatic upset. Sinner's Djokovic was gone too. Suddenly, the spotlight shifted squarely onto Zverev.

Sunday's final may not rank alongside the timeless French Open classics. It lacked the breathtaking quality of the Carlos Alcaraz-Jannik Sinner final a year ago and did not possess the epic drama of Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic's rain-interrupted battle in 2012. Yet it carried something equally compelling: the weight of destiny.

Few players have endured more heartbreak in pursuit of a maiden major title. Three previous Grand Slam final defeats, injuries, missed opportunities and endless questions about whether he would ever clear the final hurdle in a major had haunted Zverev for years. After the match, Zverev pointed to two pivotal moments. A bout of cramping, which initially looked like a setback, helped shed "mental weight" and forced him to play more aggressively. Later, a medical timeout taken by Cobolli allowed the German to regroup mentally before the decisive fifth set.

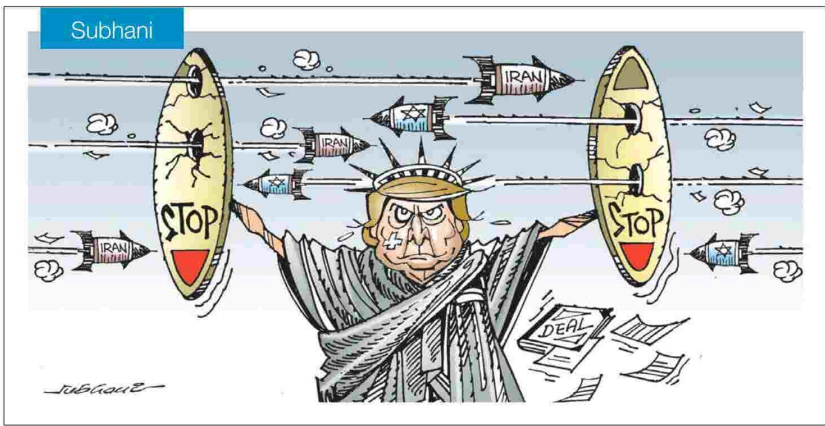
Zverev has also managed Type 1 diabetes throughout his professional career without ever making it a defining part of his public image or seeking sympathy for it. That same resilience was evident again in Paris.

THE ASIAN AGE

Kaushik MITTAR, Editor

S. SUBHAR, Printer & Publisher

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Amid Trump discord; India, world can't lie low till 2028



K.C. Singh

India's relations with the United States grew closer in the 2000-20 period, when the US was forced to tackle the outcome of the 9/11 terror attacks on America in 2001. India was relieved over the global attention turning to state-sponsored terrorism. India's pleadings in the 1990s about Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks against India were largely ignored by the US and most of the West till 9/11 happened.

Besides, the convergence of views on counterterrorism, China's economic rise and increasing military preparedness also raised India's strategic relevance. The United States saw a democratic and economically strengthening India as vital for balancing China. The four-nation "Quad" comprising Australia, India, Japan and the US, was envisioned in 2007, for a soft containment of China.

President Donald Trump's strategy of reshaping the world's order was not visible during his first term (2016-20). In 2019, personal closeness between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi grew considerably. After the Pulwama terrorist attack on February 14, 2019, on paramilitary personnel, India launched airstrikes on terrorist camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and beyond. This occurred days before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. President Trump and the ruling families of South Arabia and the UAE helped in quickly ending it. Undoubtedly, it electorally benefited the BJP.

The "Howdy Modi" Houston rally in September 2019, which President Trump attended, projected Prime Minister Modi's grip on the Indian diaspora. In February 2020, President Donald Trump, while on a two-day India visit, even attended a mass rally in Ahmedabad, months before the US presidential election. However, two months earlier, on December 31, 2019,

China revealed its failure to contain the Covid virus. President Trump initially ignored the epidemic's threat, but it derailed the remainder of his presidency.

President Trump's re-election in November 2024 also brought the Heritage Foundation-crafted "Project 2025" to the fore. This arch-conservative, shaped by supremacist Christian biases. To it President Trump added a paranoid perception of global trade, based on US victimhood and discrimination. Even America's global strategic vision was coloured by allegations against allies and partners exploiting American military and financial strength.

However, while President Trump was in office, the global strategic scenario had degraded. First, Russia militarily attacked Ukraine in February 2022, comprising the Ukraine war. Later, on October 7, 2023, after Hamas attacked Israel, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) unleashed hostilities against the residents of the Gaza Strip, killing over 75,000 civilians to date.

President Trump's preconceived ideas included rebalancing global trade and quickly ending the hostilities in Gaza and Ukraine. US officials were wowed to extract commercial or other concessions from allies, partners or rivals. First China, Canada and Mexico faced arbitrary high tariffs, allegedly for not stopping the drug-fentanyl's smuggling to the US. On April 4, 2025, "Liberation Day", tariffs were imposed on other trading partners. The stated justification was to tackle trade deficits. But Australia, with which the US traditionally had trade surpluses, failed that logic.

Reflecting President Trump's old charge of extremely unfair Indian tariffs, India was also targeted. Even punitive tariffs were added due to India's Russian oil imports. India appeared unprepared for Trump 20, assum-

ing that past American strategic calculations and the Indian diaspora's electoral role would constrain him. The Pakistan terrorist attack on April 22, 2025, causing 26 deaths, complicated the scenario, India's retaliation on May 7, under Operation Sindoor, ended quickly but not before President Trump had become the mediator and peacemaker.

Pakistan grabbed the opening, employing flattery, including by recommending the grant of the Nobel Peace Prize, to woo President Trump. The Modi government's narrative of India having punished Pakistan into submission contradicted outside mediation. The India-Pakistan combat was added to the US-Israel-Pakistan growing list of wars that he ended.

Pakistan accessed the White House increases further following its mediation to stop the Iran war, which the US and Israel began on February 28, India was seen to be the Israel-US corner, negating any peace-making role. India chose reticence in handling Mr Trump, ignoring rather than countering the fact-free claims on issues ranging from trade to mediation in India-Pakistan affairs. An India-US trade deal, besides affecting the standing of Pakistan and success, has remained elusive. An unnecessary interim deal was signed days before the February US Supreme Court ruling struck down the "Liberation Day" tariffs. The Trump administration immediately imposed fresh global tariffs, expiring in July. Meanwhile, enquiries opened, under Section 301 of the Trade Act, to examine global trade practices. On the charge of "forced labour", fresh tariffs are being imposed in the range of 10-12.5 per cent, including on India.

New Delhi's reluctance to defy America is undoubted. Like his institutions, Modi stands, especially among the Global South. India, however, could not ignore

President Trump's quote from a Michael Savag podcast, terming India and China as "hellholes". India rebuked the White House. Countries have reacted differently to Trumpian insults and arbitrary tariffs. Most kept silent, pragmatically choosing cooperation. Canada and China, on the other hand, defied the US. China used its monopoly of rare earths to extract lower US tariffs. Eventually, President Trump visited China for a summit with President Xi Jinping. The only significant outcome was the US opting for engagement rather than confrontation or containment. US secretary of state Marco Rubio's recent four-day India visit was basically to reassure New Delhi that the US still considers it as a strategic partner, for trade and global stability. Some days later, US defence secretary Pete Hegseth, at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, argued that the US subsidising of "the defence of wealthy nations is over". On pending US arms sales to Taiwan, he was silent. Nevertheless, he balanced the strategic positioning by proclaiming America's "commitment to our Indo-Pacific allies and partners".

While President Trump's ministerial colleagues may present expiatory arguments, his social media posts equally often undermine them. India's options are limited by America's emboldened Indian diaspora facing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) threats, the rising diplomatic standing of Pakistan and its proximity to the US as well as the Iran war's impact on energy and fertiliser supply, besides affecting India's trade and foreign exchange remittances. However, no Indian government can sustain the imbalance status quo of India-US relations. India is wooing new markets, such as the European Union, Canada, Australia, Japan, etc. It is also seeking détente with China. The November 2026 US mid-term elections may leave President Trump weakened. But the world and India cannot simply lie low till 2028.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambksingh.

LETTERS NO LOVE FOR TESTS

Has Test cricket lost its glory? There is literally no crowd at the Multanpur ground in New Chandigarh. This raises the query: Is Test cricket dying? If the BCCI is serious, it should host Tests primarily at traditional Test centres like Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Bengaluru, or perhaps Ahmedabad, Indore and Vizag. Having viewer prizes like lotteries could be an added attraction. For years, everyone, including Virat Kohli, has been pushing for fixed Test centres, but the BCCI, under pressure from state associations, refuses to pay heed. The popularity of Rohit and Kohli is going down, too, as youngsters dominate the scene of action.

Jayanthi Subramanian Navi Mumbai

BABIES SURVIVE

HARYANA'S INFANT mortality rate has fallen from 26 to 24 deaths per 1,000 live births in the past five years, bringing the state at par with the national average, says the Sample Registration System Report 2025. Improvement reflects sustained gains in maternal and child healthcare services and strengthened health infrastructure. Additional chief secretary Health and Family Welfare Sumit Mishra said Haryana's IMR had declined by nearly 14 per cent. The improvement to targeted interventions in maternal and newborn healthcare, along with continued investment in healthcare infrastructure and community-based services, has helped achieve this. Neighbouring Punjab's IMR, too, declined from 18 to 16 in the same period, representing an improvement of around 11 per cent.

Bhagwan Thadani Mumbai

CORPORATE MURDER

MOHALI has been rocked by a brutal murder killing a woman. Pooja XI, having a young female employee was fatally stabbed by a colleague inside a corporate office. CCTV shows the attack unfolded in under a minute: the assailant entered with two knives, chased the victim despite colleagues' bid to intervene, inflicted multiple wounds, then turned the weapon on himself. The episode exposes alarming security gaps in a space presumed safe. Questions arise about how the attacker passed entry controls with weapons while guards on staff failed to detect or stop him, and which emergency protocols were activated. As fire precautions are often overlooked, so too appears basic human safety.

R.S. Narula Patiala



Aakar Patel

Six decades from now, what will Modi's legacy be remembered for?

Ram Madhav, a friend, has written that Mr Modi's "Modi's road is his third term as Prime Minister. Yet, dominance over the Indian political landscape remains towering and unchallenged. He is certain to break more records as also important to some people. But from the audience's perspective, what is relevant is what is on the scoreboard. Here the problem is that unlike longevity, the data on the Mr Modi's performance is unclear. Madhav says among Mr Modi's achievements are that India's GDP doubled in the past decade. But the fact is that it doubled each decade since Independence, which, it has every decade since 1950 (which is the period in which we have World Bank data).

What else can we see here? Madhav says that "in foreign policy, Modi scripted a glorious history". How? That we do not know. Looking at what is happening in the world today, it would be difficult to conclude that India is an irrelevant actor in the great events and the accusation that India's policy is often servile, especially to US President Donald Trump. However, we need to go there today because our focus is different.

The question to ask is this: How will Mr Modi be remembered six decades after he's gone? In the India of 2066, what will people be writing and speaking of Mr Modi as we speak and write of Nehru today, 62 years after his passing? My concern is that (those of us who are still around then, and those born here on) may not be referring to Mr Modi at all. He might be as relevant as Dewa Gowda or Inder Gujral or Rajiv Gandhi will be in that era. One reason is that things, people and events that are current today, like the institutions of Nehru and Tendulkar, who gives way to Kohli, who gives way to Vaibhav. There is always a shiny new thing on offer and the relationship that the present generation has to current stars is always more fresh and intense than they have to things of the past.

But if this is true, then why has Nehru not faded and why is Madhav and those who are fans of this PM still exhuming the old Jawaharlal's long after he has gone into the ether? That brings us to the second reason why Nehru is still with us in spirit. It is because of what he left behind. The first is institutions of every sort—educational, scientific, cultural, medical—that he conceived and built. It is rare in the world, and especially rare in our parts, for this achievement. Compare the legion of things Nehru built with what Narendra Modi has conceived and executed. One is hard-pressed to come up with any. Perhaps the hapless Niti Aayog (is it still around?) might be the thing Mr Modi gifts to the India of the future, but what else? Hard to say.

The second thing Nehru left behind is like his institutions, still around and associated with him: what is called the "idea of India". Meaning a pluralistic society that has a pathway to modernity. Here we can concede that Mr Modi has made a difference and parted ways with the past in a way that may be longer lasting than his non-existing institutions. Madhav equates by writing that "it is not just the numbers that distinguish

Modi from others. It is the quality of governance, ideological vision and effective development agenda that he brought to the table as the leader of the world's largest democracy that makes him the shining star of Indian politics". This India around us that has made him the shining star is one dominated by laws and policies of exclusion and persecution. Bullfights, lynchings, Special Intensive Revisions are staffed to detect or stop him, and which emergency protocols were activated. As fire precautions are often overlooked, so too appears basic human safety.

One is not sure whether what we have experienced will last till 2066. One hopes it does not, but then it is irrelevant for me because I will not be around to see it. My guess, which is based on the evidence of what Mr Modi has left behind in the last dozen years, is that if this continues for just another decade or so, leave along another six decades, Mr Modi will indeed be remembered but not for the reasons Ram Madhav would like him to be.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakarpatel

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	73,524.26 -0.97
Nifty 50	23,123.00 -1.04
S&P 500*	7,432.83 0.66
Dollar (₹)	95.71 0.78
Pound Sterling (₹)	127.55 -0.22
Euro (₹)	110.19 -0.27
Gold (10gm) (₹)	154,976.616 -0.40
Brent crude (\$/bbl)	94.57 1.59
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.949 -0.026
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.526 -0.01

Q4 current account surplus hits \$7.1 billion

India recorded a current account surplus of \$7.1 billion, or 0.7 per cent of GDP, in the January-March quarter of FY26, helped by services exports and higher remittances, RBI data said. The surplus was \$13.7 billion or 1.4 per cent of GDP in the fourth quarter of 2024-25. For the entire fiscal 2025-26, the current account deficit stood at \$25.2 bn or 0.6 per cent of GDP.

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Mkts fall as crude rises on global uncertainties

Brent crude oil futures rise to \$98/bbl but later retreats to \$94

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JUNE 8

Close to five per cent rise in crude oil price on US, Israel and Iran resuming regional attacks, weakening of rupee to 95.7 level led to sharp market fall on Monday. Still, Indian market benchmarks Sensex (which fell 0.97 per cent) and Nifty50 (which went down 1.04 per cent) outperformed Asian peers. South Korea which fell 8.29 per cent, Taiwan (-3.48 per cent), Japan (-3.85 per cent) and China (-1.70 per cent) that saw bigger AI led sell off on Monday.

The Sensex closed 719.08 points or 0.97 per cent down at 73,524.26 while Nifty-50 fell 1.04 per cent or 243.70 points at 23,123.00. Broader market fell more with Nifty Midcap index down by 1.40 per cent and Nifty Small-cap index down by 1.92 per cent.

Sensex fell 324.11 points intraday to 73,318.94 hitting two month low while Nifty-50 touched a low of 23,070.75 falling 296.55 points as crude oil price rise and rupee weakening hit market sentiments towards market close.

Market investors saw a notional loss of over ₹6.31 lakh crore as BSE's m-cap fell to ₹45.28 lakh crore.

Brent crude oil futures price rose to \$98 per barrel during market hours but later retreated to \$94 per barrel on Iran announcing end of attacks after exchanging fire with Israel.

Only 9 out of 50 stocks in Nifty-50 closed in green.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

- FPI sells equities worth ₹5,555.67 crores.
- Investors see notional loss of ₹6.3 lakh crore.

WEST ASIA crisis and El Nino to shrink state revenue receipts.

SENSEX plunges 719 points, Nifty falls 244 points.

SENSEX 719 points, Nifty falls 244 points.

ASIAN MARKETS INCLUDING

- South Korea 8.29%
- Taiwan -3.48%
- Japan -3.85%
- China -1.70%

After opening with 286 points on the back of weak global cues, the index staged a strong early recovery of nearly 200 points from the day's low, however, momentum faded in the second half, with Nifty giving up most of its intraday gains.

— NANDISH SHAH, deputy VP, HOFCS Securities

States' revenue may fall short by ₹5-6 L-cr

SANGEETHA G.
CHENNAI, JUNE 8

With the West Asia crisis and El Nino, this year, revenue receipts of states may shrink to 88 to 90 per cent of the estimate and the shortfall in revenue of 18 major states could be ₹5-6 lakh crore. A significant portion of this gap is expected to arise from an overestimation of grants from the Centre.

The fiscal deficit also may move up to 3.1 to 3.3 per cent of the GDP, finds Aditi Navar, chief economist, Ica.

The report points out that states have budgeted for a sharp rise in their own tax revenues in FY27.

Auto sales in May rise 9.55% to 25.3L units

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JUNE 8

Despite fuel-price pressure and the evolving West Asia situation, India's auto retail sales hit a record high for May, with overall registrations growing 9.55 per cent year-on-year to 25.31 lakh units, industry body Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) said on Monday.

The industry had recorded retail sales of 23.10 lakh units in May last year.

FADA said the performance marked the best-ever May sales for three-wheeler, passenger vehicles and tractors despite the month being seasonally weak.

"That growth held through the confluence of pressures underlines the resilience of the underlying demand," said FADA president CS Vigneshwar. Passenger vehicle retail sales rose 23.25 per cent in May from 3,26,656 units in May 2025.

Two-wheeler retail sales

FAST DRIVE

Automobile sales hit record 25.3 lakh units.

EV penetration crosses 11%

Passenger vehicle retail sales rose 23.25 per cent in May from 3,26,656 units in May 2025.

EV penetration crossed 11 per cent for the first time in May, as dealers

touching an all-time high of 18,44,947 units last month, up 7.54 per cent from 17,15,531 units in May last year.

Three-wheeler sales rose 3.56 per cent at 1,11,526 units last month as compared to 1,07,688 units in May 2025.

The EV penetration crossed 11 per cent for the first time in May, as dealers

- Passenger vehicle sales surge 23.2%.
- Two-wheeler sales grow 7.54%.
- Three-wheeler sales up 3.56%.
- EV demand rises after fuel-price hikes.
- Dealers expect growth in June.
- Monsoon, rural demand to drive sales.



EV penetration crosses 11%

EV penetration crossed 11 per cent for the first time in May, as dealers

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HC quashes govt decision on OTSC

Mumbai, June 8: In a relief to telecom firms Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, the Bombay High Court on Monday quashed the Centre's 2012 decision to impose a one-time spectrum charge for spectrum held above 6.2 MHz from 2006 onwards, questioning its source of power to make such a call.

Manish Pitale and Sheeram Shirat also set aside the demand notices issued by the government seeking recovery of one-time spectrum charge (OTSC), while noting that the government has not been able to show any source of power to issue such a decision and the consequent demand notices. The bench observed the

WRESTLERS SIGN OFF WITH 17 MEDALS

Ulaanbaatar: India capped a successful campaign at the Ulaanbaatar Open Senior Ranking Series wrestling tournament with Deepak (51kg), Greco-Roman and women's wrestling, ensuring a top-three finish in the team standings. Deepak clinched the 51kg title with a commanding 6-0 victory over Kazakhstan's Assyl Aitkany, while heavyweight Dinesh edged Kazakhstan's Vedeg Kasimbek 2-0 in the 125kg final. Sagar produced a gritty effort to beat Russia's Tamir Eshnimayev 3-2 and secure the 74kg gold medal. — PTI

TAMIN IS BANGLA BOARD PRESIDENT

Dhaka: Former Bangladesh captain Tamin Iqbal was elected as the President of his country's Cricket Board here, becoming the youngest to get the position that he will hold for four years. The 37-year-old has already served as the head of the ad-hoc committee that took over in April after Islam was found guilty of corruption in a probe.

"There are a lot of things, loopholes, and if we all agree together (about constitutional reform) we will discuss them in the next AGM. This is not like a board of 12 or 15 people where one person says something and it is done. We have to deal with 1972 councillors. So they also have to agree. But for the betterment of Bangladesh cricket, if any constitutional changes are needed, we will definitely discuss and consider them," Tamin was quoted as saying by Cricbuzz following the election on Sunday. — PTI

INDIA DOMINANT IN FRIENDLY MATCH

Manav picks 7-wkt haul as India overpower Afghans

Mullanpur, June 8: Left-arm Manav Suthar's emergence as the flag-bearer of India's spinners in the foreseeable future was the biggest gain for the hosts in their expectedly dominant innings and 300 runs victory over Afghanistan in the one-off Test here on Monday.

After being bowled out for 152 across five innings, courtesy a 6/33 from Suthar, Afghanistan fared much worse in the second essay getting bundled out for 112 in 35.5 overs midway into the third day to hand India their biggest innings win.

Washington Sundar (4/36) did the start in the second innings while Kuldeep Yadav (3/30) also helped himself to some easy pickings.

In 2018, India had thrashed the Afghans by an innings and 280 runs but the visitors would take solace that they could stretch this Test into the third day.

The match belonged to Suthar, a left-arm orthodox spinner from Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar. He became the 10th Indian bowler to take a five-for on debut with his overall haul of seven wickets (6/32 and 1/28) but more importantly, he answered the lingering question in country's cricating ecosystem: "Who will take over the baton from Ravindra Jadeja as and when he calls time?"



Indian players celebrate with the trophy after winning the one-off Test match against Afghanistan at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium in Mullanpur near Chandigarh on Monday. India won by an innings and 300 runs. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

India 1st Innings: 564/8 decl. **Afghanistan 1st Innings (overnight 113 for 5):** Abdul Malik c Mohammed Siraj b Manav Suthar 16, Sediquallah Atal b Prasadh Krishna 17, Rahmullah Gurbaz c Sai Sudharsan b Manav Suthar 12, Rahmat Shah b Manav Suthar 60, Hashmatullah Shahid lbw b Prasadh Krishna 20, Afsar Zazai c & b Manav Suthar 3, Azmatullah Omarzai c Prasadh Krishna 0, Sharafuddin Ashraf c Pant b Manav Suthar 11, Nangeyalla Kharete not out. **Extras (nb-2, w-1) 5. Total (all out in 58.4 overs) 152.** **Fall of wickets:** 1-28, 2-40, 3-62, 4-98, 5-113, 6-118, 7-142, 8-143, 9-143. **Bowling:** Mohammed Siraj 9-2-29-0, Prasadh Krishna 11-2-37-3, Manav Suthar 22-10-33-6, Kuldeep Yadav 10-1-32-0, Washington Sundar 6.4-1-21-1.

Afghanistan 2nd Innings (following on): Sediquallah Atal c Prasadh Krishna b Washington Sundar 42, Abdul Malik lbw b Mohammed Siraj 8, Rahmullah Gurbaz c Prasadh Krishna b Kuldeep Yadav 24, Rahmat Shah c Suthar b Washington Sundar 13, Hashmatullah Shahid c Shubman Gill b Washington Sundar 5, Afsar Zazai lbw b Manav Suthar 8, Azmatullah Omarzai c Kuldeep Yadav b Washington Sundar 4, Nangeyalla Kharete c Suthar b Kuldeep Yadav 6, Ziaur Rahman not out 0, Mohammad Saleem c Sai Sudharsan b Kuldeep Yadav (nb-2) 2. **Total (all out in 35.5 overs) 112.** **Fall of wickets:** 1-42, 2-74, 3-87, 4-93, 5-98, 6-106, 7-106, 8-112, 9-112. **Bowling:** Manav Suthar 10-2-29-1, Prasadh Krishna 3-0-6-0, Kuldeep Yadav 7.5-1-30-3, Mohammed Siraj 4-1-11, Washington Sundar 11-4-36-4.

has shown that he can be a match-winner on placid surfaces by extracting both spin and bounce.

After being shot out for 152, they played too many strokes that brought about their downfall in the second innings. Left-hand opener Sediquallah Atal (42), who was signed by Delhi Capitals in this year, was dismissed off the last ball before test as he tried to hit Washington against the turn and offered a simple catch to Mohammed Siraj at backward point.

After being shot out for 152, they played too many strokes that brought about their downfall in the second innings. Left-hand opener Sediquallah Atal (42), who was signed by Delhi Capitals in this year, was dismissed off the last ball before test as he tried to hit Washington against the turn and offered a simple catch to Mohammed Siraj at backward point.

ERIKSEN COLLAPSES IN FRIENDLY MATCH

Copenhagen, June 8: Christian Eriksen collapsed during Denmark's friendly against Ukraine but was later able to walk off the field, five years after suffering a cardiac arrest during the European Championship.

The 34-year-old former Manchester United midfielder, who has a type of pacemaker fitted to the ground in the 64th minute of the match in Odense on Sunday.

Medical staff rushed onto the pitch while players from both teams gathered around him to shield the scene from television or smartphone cameras.

The referee called off the match with Denmark leading 2-1 and Eriksen was subsequently taken to hospital, having been shielded by both sets of players as he walked off the pitch. "Christian Eriksen is conscious and doing well under the circumstances," the Danish football association wrote on social media. Eriksen has worn a type of pacemaker since he collapsed during the group stage game against Finland at Euro 2020, which was played in 2021.

That led to him spending more than six months in the hospital and the Danish national team doctor

NORWAY HOLD MOROCCO IN CUP BUILD-UP MATCH

Harrison (USA), June 8: Martin Odegaard scored a second-half equaliser as Norway came from behind to force a 1-1 draw with African giants Morocco in a World Cup warm-up match on Sunday.

— AFP

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



Opinion

The New York Times

This Is How to Fix Our Elections

Eric Maskin and Robbie Robinette

Mr. Maskin is a Nobel laureate in economics, a professor at Harvard and a member of the advisory board of Better Choices for Democracy, which promotes majority-rule voting. Mr. Robinette is president of Better Choices for Democracy.

THIS year's gerrymandering wars are the most vicious in recent memory. The sudden scramble to redraw electoral maps is all the more striking because it comes after a decade of concerted efforts — such as the creation of independent redistricting commissions — to curb partisan redistricting.

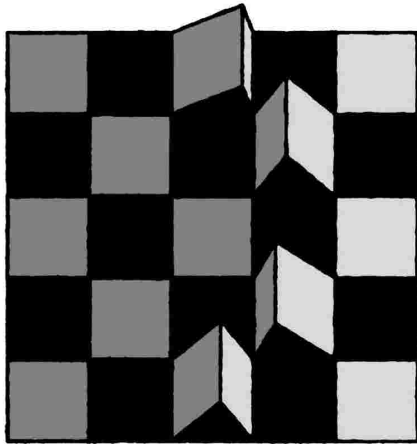
Some reformers are thinking bigger, and they should. Even in less partisan times, the country's traditional voting system distorts how citizens are represented. Gerrymandering exploits and worsens these distortions. Changing how Americans vote could make election results fairer — whether or not partisan redistricting is banned.

Unconventional ideas, such as shifting to a European-style proportional representation system, have gained adherents. Another option should top the list: a "majority rule" system that would preserve elements of elections that Americans are used to, but make election results more representative of public opinion.

Proportional representation would fix many problems with the country's voting system. Some congressional districts would be merged, and each of these new, larger districts would elect multiple candidates. Americans would then vote for parties rather than individual candidates, and those parties would win seats in rough proportion to their vote totals.

In Nebraska, which is represented in the House by three members of Congress, all three of its existing districts might be combined into one. In its 2024 U.S. House elections, the state's 64-percent-to-36-percent vote split favoring the G.O.P. would have yielded two Republican seats and one for the Democrats — a fairer outcome than sending three Republicans to Washington, which is what actually happened.

Many Americans would probably reject



Americans should think big about shaking up how we vote.

the idea of voting for parties, though, given that more than 40 percent of voters identify as neither Democrats nor Republicans. There are complicated ways to get around this problem. But they wouldn't fix another issue: Creating multimember districts would be a radical departure from our centuries-old system of electing single representatives accountable to the people in specific localities. This change, too, would be a hard sell to most Americans. And federal law has banned multimember districting since 1967.

Another option is the majority-rule voting method (also called Condorcet voting). This system is much like ranked-choice voting, which many American cities and two states, Alaska and Maine, have used successfully. As in those places, voters would rank candidates in order of their preference. But, un-

like in ranked-choice voting, every candidate would be compared with every other. The winner would be the one who, according to the rankings, would defeat each opponent in a head-to-head matchup. (In the highly improbable event that no candidate beats all the others, a tiebreaking rule can determine the winner.)

The system is more complicated than the one Americans use now, and it would have to be introduced state by state or imposed by Congress nationally. But it takes just a few minutes of thinking to see why it would be better.

Consider the case of nine friends who want to see a movie together. Four of them prefer superhero movies to mysteries and mysteries to rom-coms. Two of the friends like mysteries more than rom-coms, ranking superhero movies last. The remaining three prefer rom-coms to mysteries, but also rank superhero movies last. If these friends voted on what to see, they would pick a superhero movie under the voting system Americans are used to, since superhero movies would have a plurality of four votes. But choosing a mystery would better reflect the group's preferences: five of nine would prefer a mystery to a superhero movie, and six out of nine would like to see a mystery rather than a rom-com.

In a House election, this system would empower the voter in the middle of a district's political spectrum, whose preference would determine which candidate wins. This doesn't mean that a majority-rule system would elect only centrists. The smack-in-the-middle voter is liberal in San Francisco and conservative in Lubbock, Texas.

But, in general, less extreme candidates would prevail. Imagine what would happen in Kentucky under a majority-rule system. Ed Gallrein, a Trump supporter, just won the G.O.P. primary over the independent-minded incumbent, Thomas Massie, in a district that is split with roughly seven Republicans for every three Democrats. If Mr. Massie were to run in the general election as an independent, he would probably finish a distant third under current rules: Most Republicans would vote for Mr. Gallrein, and all but a few Democrats would vote for the Democratic nominee, Melissa Strange. Mr.

Massie would probably lose under ranked-choice voting, too.

Mr. Massie could well win under majority rule. He won 45 percent of the Republican vote in the primary. These voters would probably rank him first in the general election. If Mr. Massie attracted second-place support from the Democratic voters in the district, he could well defeat Mr. Gallrein by as much as 64 percent to 36 percent. Mr. Massie's politics are not centrist on a national level. But he better represents his district than the other candidates would.

Here's another example. The Ninth Congressional District in Tennessee has historically been strongly Democratic; in 2024, the Democratic-Republican split was 71.3 percent to 28.7 percent there. The Fifth and Eighth Districts heavily favored Republicans. Under majority rule, the results could look more like what occurred in real life: The state sent two conservative Republicans and one liberal Democrat to Washington.

Recent gerrymandering, however, has reconfigured Tennessee's districts, giving Republicans a 60-percent-to-40-percent edge in all three. Under majority rule, elections in the reconfigured districts would look much like the Massie hypothetical above. The margins between the candidates would be narrower. Candidates would have to worry about how voters of the other party would fill out their ballots. The state's representatives would be closer to the middle of Tennessee politics.

When partisan map drawers gerrymander, they often trade margin for seats. By spreading their supporters across the map, they cause their party's candidates to win by fewer points — but more of those candidates win. The current system enables them to make this trade without worrying that their candidates would have to be significantly more moderate to prevail.

Not so under majority rule. Only candidates in the most lopsided districts could afford to be ideologically extreme. Parties would face less incentive to manipulate maps to trade margin for seats. And the House would become a less polarized place, more reflective of the broad middle of the electorate that is too often voiceless in Washington.

A Reckoning in Mexico

Carlos Bravo Regidor

A Mexican political analyst and the author of "Mar de dudas: Conversaciones para navegar el desconcierto."

MEXICO CITY

IN APRIL, when the United States indicted Rubén Rocha Moya, the sitting governor of the Mexican state of Sinaloa, it crossed a line both countries had tread around for decades. Washington was no longer asking Mexico to help arrest a fugitive, extradite a drug trafficker or take down a cartel boss. It was demanding that the Mexican government take on the political protection rackets that have allowed cartel power in Mexico to thrive.

U.S. prosecutors have accused Mr. Rocha and other officials in Sinaloa of facilitating drug trafficking into the United States and protecting cartel members in exchange for bribes and political support. The indictment also alleges that Mr. Rocha — a longtime ally of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the former president, and a prominent member of Mexico's ruling party, Morena — won the governorship in 2021 with the help of the Sinaloa Cartel, one of Mexico's most notorious criminal organizations. Mr. Rocha has denied the charges, but the fallout extends far beyond him. His indictment has become a test of sovereignty, party loyalty and political power in Mexico — and a new source of tension between Washington and Mexico City.

Mr. Rocha's case hints at the possibility that cartel power may have contaminated the ranks of Mexico's governing party, putting President Claudia Sheinbaum in an impossible dilemma. Moving against Mr. Rocha, by allowing an extradition process to move forward or withdrawing political support from him, would expose rifts inside her coalition and invite accusations that she is yielding to Washington. Refusing to act, especially if the evidence proves strong, would deepen doubts in the United States about her willingness to go after cartel corruption within her own ranks.

But there is a way for Ms. Sheinbaum to use this fraught moment to her advantage: by turning Washington's coercive demands into an opportunity to finally clean house within her party and beyond.

Narcopolitics in Mexico long predate Ms. Sheinbaum's administration. When Mexico transitioned to democracy in 2000 after seven decades of one-party rule, it weakened the old mechanisms of political control that had once contained organized crime. Power fragmented, and cartels found new ways to buy protection, finance political campaigns and capture local authorities. When the government began a militarized crackdown on drug cartels in 2006, it went after these groups. But it did not dismantle the political-criminal arrangements that allowed them to operate — and hundreds of thousands of people were killed or disappeared in the conflict.

Morena, founded by Mr. López Obrador and now led by Ms. Sheinbaum, rose to power in the late 2010s, promising a moral and political break with that violent past. Mr. López Obrador's alternative — summarized in his



LUS ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

now infamous slogan "hugs, not bullets" — sought to avoid direct confrontation with criminal organizations. In theory, the strategy was supposed to reduce violence by boosting social spending programs and avoiding bloody clashes with cartels. In practice, it gave these groups more room to expand their territorial control, social authority and political influence. Now, with the Trump administration escalating threats of tariffs, criminal prosecutions and even unilateral action on Mexican soil to press Mexico for re-

Can Sheinbaum root out the organized crime within her party?

sults against organized crime, parts of Morena stand accused of the kind of narco-corruption that the movement promised to eradicate.

So far, Ms. Sheinbaum has managed to walk a narrow line: cooperating enough to keep U.S. hard-liners at bay, resisting enough to hold her coalition together and framing Washington's most politically damaging accusations as foreign interference. It is not a tenable position. Mexico cannot defy its northern neighbor indefinitely; the econo-

mies of the two countries are too deeply integrated, especially as both enter the 2026 review of the trade agreement between the United States, Mexico and Canada. But yielding indefinitely to U.S. demands would hollow out the Mexican state and deal a potentially fatal blow to Ms. Sheinbaum's domestic credibility. No Mexican president can accept an American attempt to discipline the country's political class without paying a heavy price.

Publicly, Ms. Sheinbaum has cast the U.S. case against Mr. Rocha as foreign meddling and insisted that Washington has yet to provide the evidence Mexican authorities would need to act against him. Privately, she has warned Morena governors and lawmakers that officials tied to corruption should resign — an indication that she understands the danger the case poses to her party. (Mr. Rocha has temporarily stepped down from his post.)

In Washington, the Mexican leader's statements have begun to sound less like a defense of sovereignty and more like evasion of responsibility. A U.S.-Mexico relationship that had, until recently, seemed surprisingly functional is now under growing strain, as the Trump administration expands its anti-cartel campaign from criminal groups to the politicians accused of protecting them.

Ms. Sheinbaum's options aren't easy. She could dig in, denounce Washington's pressure and extend cover to political allies until and unless enough incontrovertible evidence surfaces to force her hand. That might shore up Ms. Sheinbaum's coalition, but it would sharpen Washington's suspicion and perhaps invite even more serious U.S. action, like broader financial sanctions, unilateral operations on Mexican territory or formal accusations targeting figures far above Mr. Rocha in the political hierarchy.

Or she can keep giving Washington what it wants: more arrests, more extraditions, more cooperation and ever-higher-profile political targets. That might buy time with President Trump, but it would let the United States define the terms of Mexico's fight against cartel power. Ms. Sheinbaum would look less like a president asserting control than a leader enforcing accountability on Washington's terms.

But Ms. Sheinbaum can still take charge of this moment. She could use U.S. pressure as leverage to start serious anticorruption investigations, remove compromised officials, disrupt local protection networks and force her party to accept changes it might otherwise resist. She could work to reform Mexico's security and justice apparatus, rebuild cooperation with Washington from a position of strength and reassert her government's role as a domestic enforcer of the rule of law. Not because the United States demands it, but because Mexicans need it.

For too long, Mexico has postponed the struggle against cartel power, outsourced it to Washington or confined it to a hunt for top kingpins. It can and should reclaim that fight, even if doing so means Ms. Sheinbaum must confront parts of her own party. If she fails, Mexico may face something worse than an externally imposed reckoning: no reckoning at all.



GRACE SOLOMON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Make America Read Again

Brian Bannon

The chief librarian and director of branch libraries and education of the New York Public Library.

WALKING up Madison Avenue during January's polar vortex, I turned the corner onto 39th Street and hit a line of puffy coats, tote bags and young people with wired headphones. I had no idea what they were waiting for until I reached Fifth Avenue and saw that the line ended at the New York Public Library's front door.

We had opened the library for a large-scale reading party for the first time. A data analyst had come from Queens to read poetry. A teacher had made the trip from the Bronx. More than a thousand people filed in. There weren't enough chairs, and we ended up turning hundreds of people away. I ended up on the floor with a romance novel involving a barista pining over a beefy hockey player.

This was not an anomaly. More New Yorkers are borrowing books from the New York Public Library today than 15 years ago; borrowing is up 27 percent since 2010. And yet America is facing a book-reading crisis.

A 2025 study in iScience, a research journal focused on the sciences, found that pleasure reading fell 40 percent from 2003 to 2023, and a 2023 National Assessment of Educational Progress report showed that the share of 13-year-olds reading for fun almost every day had dropped to 14 percent, the lowest level since the federal government began asking the question in 1984.

The diagnoses keep coming. Screens. Shrinking attention spans. A culture losing its appetite for books. And nearly every prescription is addressed to individuals: Read more, put your phone down, try harder.

I'm the chief librarian at the New York Public Library. In nearly 30 years of leading libraries across four U.S. cities, I've seen this decline up close. To be sure, one part of the solution is finding more effective ways to teach children to read in the first place. But teaching people to read and building a world where they can do so are different problems. Throwing our phones in the lake can't bring about that world, but designing the conditions for reading will.

In the 19th century, America began to build a national network of free public libraries touching nearly every community.

And then almost overnight, Google could answer any question, and Amazon could deliver any book. Who needed a building full of them?

Instead of disappearing, libraries remained indispensable, just not for reading and books. In community after community, local libraries filled society's gaps. Computer classes, voter registration, literacy programs, social services, job training. It was important work that came with little new money. The first thing to get squeezed was the books.

Then came a harder truth. Libraries themselves were throwing up barriers to reading. In 2019 the Chicago Public Library found that its overdue fine policy had created a two-tiered system. In the city's lower-income South District, one-third of cardholders were barred from borrowing because they owed \$10 or more in fines and fees. On the more affluent North District, that share dropped to roughly one-sixth. A

checkouts grew from one million to seven million in seven years.

At the New York Public Library, as part of a special, limited-time program in January, we turned on unlimited digital access for Rachel Reid's Game Changers novels, including the best seller "Heated Rivalry." Normally, readers would have had to wait months for such a popular title to be available for their e-readers. Instead, 40,000 people downloaded the books in three weeks, and thousands of new patrons registered for library cards.

Other countries have gone further. Last year Denmark's government announced a plan to eliminate the highest book tax in the world, citing its reading crisis as the reason; Argentina exempts books from tax, alongside bread, milk and medicine; Italy introduced a policy in 2016 that gave every 18-year-old a 500-euro cultural voucher, and 70 percent of it was spent on books; France, Germany and Spain followed with vouchers of their own.

America did not build its library system by accident. In Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin founded the Library Company because he believed a free country required citizens who could think, reason and govern themselves. A century and a half later, Andrew Carnegie (and later his foundation) funded 1,681 libraries across the country, this time as free spaces built on the condition that towns would maintain them.

By 2010, there were over 17,000 public library branches and bookmobiles. A democracy needs its people to read, and it is society's job to make that possible — the same reason we have public schools, water systems and the electric grid.

The reading crisis is real. But we don't need new inventions to build a reading city. Exempt books from sales taxes the way we exempt prescription medicine. Invest in library branches and bookmobiles. A democracy needs its people to read, and it is society's job to make that possible — the same reason we have public schools, water systems and the electric grid.

None of this is theoretical. Every time someone designs the conditions for reading, people read. A data analyst from Queens. A teacher from the Bronx. The thousand New Yorkers who showed up on a freezing January night for a library reading party.

A free country requires citizens who can think, reason and govern themselves.

few dollars could lock an 8-year-old out of the library.

That October, Chicago became the largest city in America to eliminate fines for overdue materials. Three weeks later, returns of overdue books were up 240 percent. Within a year, 111,000 patrons renewed or replaced their library cards. From 2019 to 2021, major library systems across the country — including those of Dallas, Denver, San Francisco and New York City — went late-free.

When the Covid pandemic closed library doors, we told ourselves that reading would simply move online. For wealthier communities with home broadband, it did. For communities where people had slower internet service or none at all, it didn't. Only when libraries reopened, when people could walk in and pull a spine off a shelf, did the numbers start recovering.

When libraries reinvested in books, the gains were larger: The Harris County Public Library in Texas invested early in digital lending when many systems had not.

LETTERS

The Postpartum Care That Mothers Need

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "It's Not Just Babies Who Need Checkups," by Sejal Hathi (Opinion guest essay, May 28):

The most medically intense periods of my life were during both of my pregnancies; my first hospital admission was for the birth of my now 5-year-old. However, my experience was very different from Dr. Hathi's.

I am a family medicine physician, and my family doctor provides my care. "We care for patients from womb to tomb," the adage goes. This includes postpartum mothers and their babies, frequently in the same visit. After I had my first baby, my family doctor placed my IUD, right after she saw my 2-month-old for his checkup.

I'm saddened to hear that Dr. Hathi felt she had nowhere to turn, because we would have welcomed her, and her baby, in our family medicine clinic. There are 193 million visits made to family physicians annually, 67 million more than the next largest medical specialty. I have helped patients navigate postpartum mood disorders, lactation difficulties, common aches and pains and beyond.

Family medicine already does much of what Dr. Hathi calls for. We have maternal and pediatric services in the same location. In fact, they are in the same doctor.

GLENNA MARTIN, SEATTLE

TO THE EDITOR:

This essay highlighted a failure in American health care: Women receive intense medical attention during pregnancy, but it ends suddenly at six weeks after delivery. As a maternal-fetal medicine specialist, I have seen this gap in care and its adverse effects on maternal health.

For many women, the

months after delivery are marked by both physical and emotional changes, including pelvic floor dysfunction, sleep deprivation, anxiety, depression, nutritional challenges, relationship stress and managing their own health while caring for a newborn. Yet postpartum care in the United States is fragmented and episodic.

At the Carolyn Rowan Center at Mount Sinai, we are working to address this gap.

Women have access to coordinated care between eight and 20 weeks after delivery and continue through six months of integrated follow-up, which may include mental health services, pelvic floor therapy, nutrition counseling, sleep medicine and other services.

There is a pathway of coordinated care for women who experienced complications that raise the risk of cardiometabolic disease, such as gestational diabetes, hypertensive disorders, spontaneous preterm birth or stillbirth.

Pregnancy is a window into a woman's future health. The postpartum year should be the beginning of a more preventive, longitudinal approach to it.

We hope models like ours establish a new standard for mothers in the year after delivery and become the norm, not the exception.

JOANNE STONE, NEW YORK

The writer is the chair of the department of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive services in the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

TO THE EDITOR:

Dr. Sejal Hathi's account of her postpartum care is wrenching, and her diagnosis of the system that failed her is largely right. But the model she proposes, dyadic care paid for as a mother-baby unit, is not new. Researchers and state Medicaid agencies have piloted versions of it for years. Clinics like Cleveland's Village of Healing have already built it.

The reason it has not scaled up is not a failure of imagination. It is a failure of payment. A mother recovering from birth produces relatively little billable medical activity once the baby becomes the patient, so she makes little claim on the system's resources.

That is patriarchy in one of its durable forms: the inheritance of an economy that does not count the labor of feeding and raising children, joined to a clinical system organized around what procedures it can bill for. Individual clinicians need not be misogynists for the outcome to harm women. The machinery does that work on its own.

Women will not fall off the postpartum cliff because we failed to imagine a bridge. They will fall because we refused to fund one.

BRYNN RUBINSTEIN, BERKELEY, CALIF.

Hungary as Role Model

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Hungary Shows the World How to Defeat an Autocrat," by M. Gessen (column, May 31):

I left Hungary almost 70 years ago, and we were fortunate enough to be granted asylum in the United States. I've loved this country and never looked back at the country that allowed much of my family to be slaughtered in the Holocaust and then turned to Communism.

It is astonishing to me that Hungary is a role model for how to change the corrupt regime in this country. We, too, must fight the autocratic system in power now and stop the attacks on our democracy. We must do it at the ballot box starting this November.

It is imperative that we have a huge turnout. We can do this.

KATHY SIEGEL, PORT WASHINGTON, N.Y.

It's No Wonder Grads Are Boing Their Commencement Speakers

Molly Jong-Fast

The host of the "Fast Politics" podcast and the author of "How to Lose Your Mother: A Daughter's Memoir."

COMMENCEMENT address season hasn't been going well — for the commencement speakers.

I'm sure you've seen the videos on social media. The big shots who have been brought in to inspire a next generation of graduates have used their speeches as opportunities to extol the limitless possibilities that artificial intelligence will bring. They're speaking to graduates who are entering a shaky job market and are already burdened by tens of thousands of dollars of student debt.

However, companies of all stripes are using A.I. as an excuse to slow entry-level hiring and lay off workers. Tech executives have been warning (though it sometimes seems as if they are bragging) that their technologies will be job destroyers.

Gloria Caulfield, a real estate executive who spoke at the University of Central Florida's College of Arts and Humanities, told graduates that "the rise of artificial intelligence is the next industrial revolution." Scott Borchetta, the chief executive of the record label Big Machine, told the graduates of Middle Tennessee State University that "A.I. is rewriting production as we sit here." In each case, the students expressed their displeasure at the speakers' blatant A.I. boosterism the best way they could: with loud boos.

When Eric Schmidt, a former chief executive of Google, told graduates at the University of Arizona about their A.I.-shaped future, the shouting got so intense that he paused and said that graduates feared "that

the future has already been written, that the machines are coming, that the jobs are evaporating, that the climate is breaking, that politics are fractured, and that you are inheriting a mess that you did not create."

Mr. Schmidt told them to make the best of it: "The question is not whether A.I. will shape the world. It will. The question is whether you will help shape artificial intelligence."

Mr. Schmidt's solution to world-upending technological change is ... what? To pull yourself up by your bootstraps? His approach is peak billionaire brain, directed at the young people who have, for the better part of a decade, been treated as woke, lazy, avocado-toast-eating snowflakes.

All these speakers just don't get it. The problem isn't woke; the problem is work. It's a lack of social mobility. It's that college may no longer elevate a graduate to the middle class. It's that nobody even bothers to pretend that a house, a good job and the ability to start a family are at all guaranteed.

Think of this from the graduates' perspective: Wealthy old people telling you your future is being pulped by acres and acres of electricity-sucking, water-guzzling data centers feels dystopian because it is. Companies are trying to automate your future away. No wonder you're furious.

Young people are facing what M.I.T. Technology Review calls a "looming crisis in entry-level work," and college, once assumed to be a prerequisite for a secure job, no longer feels worth it. The general gestalt coming from a certain sliver of affluent Americans is that college graduates are more liberal trouble than they're worth and perhaps could be replaced by bots. Marc Andreessen, the venture capitalist and G.O.P. megadonor, mused to Joe Rogan that a bot "never gets drunk, never gets sick, never gets high" and "never files H.R. complaints."



(It never boos a smug commencement speaker, either.)

According to a recent working paper from researchers at Harvard, hiring for entry-level roles at companies that have adopted generative A.I. has dropped each quarter since 2023. What is not clear is whether A.I. is taking people's jobs or if companies are using A.I. as an excuse for not hiring. Either way, A.I. is not exactly popular with people entering the work force for the first time.

I spent six months obsessing about giving a commencement address to Bennington College, where I earned my M.F.A. It's a truly bizarre moment to speak at a college, in light of the way technology is changing the work force so rapidly and the way the White House has waged war on colleges, professors and education writ large. Even in

the best of times, commencement speeches are uncomfortable: The kids you're speaking to are basically hostages; they can't leave without their diplomas.

When I finally gave my speech nine days ago, I didn't talk about A.I. with the Bennington graduates. I talked about the role their magical little college played in my life. Getting a master's saved me; it gave me a bit of a foundation, perhaps a little authority in a world where I often felt like an impostor.

I told the kids the truth: that I would love to give them advice about how to avoid the messiness of one's 20s, but the messiness is the point. "That eyebrow pierce will leave a scar," I said. "You'll have trouble getting the barbell out and eventually someone will have to use tiny pliers to cut it out of your face."

(I worried initially that this advice might be too specific, but looking around the tent, I could see that getting a piercing out was something at least 30 percent of the graduating class would have to grapple with sooner or later.)

If I were to tell these graduates the truth about artificial intelligence, it would be this: You are right to be worried. But none of this is as inevitable as it seems. Remember putting everything on the blockchain? Remember NFTs? Hell, some of us are old enough to remember that the world was supposed to end in the year 2000.

Right now, A.I. is in its dark hype period — great for Anthropoc's L.P.O. — but who knows how useful any of this actually will be in the end in creating efficiencies (as in replacing the young with bots)? It's within young people's power to stop. Demand regulation of tech companies. Elect people who will legislate that regulation. Organize against data centers in your hometowns.

Don't just boo — do something.

Young people are right to be worried about A.I.

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

Britain's questionable reliance on Palantir

Government should use the best technology, but be wary of 'lock-ins'

Few US tech companies arouse such strong feelings in the UK as Palantir. In April, two petitions attracted almost 230,000 signatures calling on ministers to end public contracts with the US data analytics company and cancel its £530m contract to build NHS England's Federated Data Platform. Some NHS staff have been boycotting the system amid ethical concerns over Palantir. Then last week, a committee of MPs said the US company's significant role across UK defence, health and police data systems was an "unacceptable point of weakness" – and urged ministers to exercise a break clause next year in the seven-year NHS contract.

No one doubts the need to drag NHS England technology into the 21st century. Its fragmented systems force staff

into daily workarounds. The NHS data trove, meanwhile, is a potentially rich resource, including for Britain's own vibrant life sciences sector.

Palantir has said its FDP, which collates NHS operational data such as waiting lists, staffing, patient information and theatre schedules, has helped to deliver more than 110,000 additional operations and remove hundreds of thousands of patients from waiting lists.

But the cross-party Science, Innovation and Technology committee warned that Palantir had expanded its presence across the public sector despite a "clear mismatch with UK values". It cited Palantir's role "supporting highly controversial policies and activities", including supplying software to the US military and its use by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. On the same day the MPs' report was published, a number of the company's key shareholders – including the massive Norwegian sovereign wealth fund – backed a motion at Palantir's annual meeting calling,

unsuccessfully, for an independent human rights report into the company.

Britain should endeavour to use the best available technology for any task. But more compelling than the values argument is MPs' concern that the UK is getting "locked in" to a small number of mostly US suppliers that may seek to embed themselves and crank up prices even as Trump's US has become a less reliable partner. In sectors such as cloud computing that may be harder to avoid. But the committee suggests Palantir is "far from the only company capable" of providing the data analysis UK public bodies need. NHS opinions on the platform's merits are mixed.

The committee also rightly called on the government to confirm the nature of Palantir's access to NHS patient data, after the FT revealed that some external staff had been granted "unlimited access" to patient data while working on a part of the data platform.

Despite the shortcomings, it is clear that NHS data management has

Ministers could use the remaining time in the contract to encourage potential domestic or EU rivals capable of replacing the US company

improved during the period of Palantir's contract. So exercising next year's break clause would be the wrong decision. But for the remainder of the contract, close monitoring is vital to ensure there is no "lock in" to the US company. Ministers could also use the time to encourage potential domestic or EU rivals capable of replacing Palantir when the contract expires.

In particular, the government should heed the MPs' call to commit wherever possible to UK suppliers to develop a planned NHS Single Patient Record. It should also explain why Palantir won a £240m defence contract without a competitive tender.

Louis Mosley, head of Palantir UK, accused MPs of putting "the politics of the playground before public services". But many other countries, including the EU, are examining how to reduce vulnerabilities and boost their tech sovereignty. For the benefit of its security and growth, the UK, too, needs to foster its own tech businesses where it can.

Opinion Society

We are optimising ourselves to death

Ben Hickey



Jemima Kelly

If you were to ask an AI model to spit out a parody of two earnest, do-your-own-research-touting, fitted-black-T-shirt-wearing bro-casters in conversation, it might sound a lot like Steven Bartlett talking to Chris Williamson about alcohol on an episode of the former's smash hit podcast, *Diary of a CEO*. (The latter hosts the marginally less popular and equally pontifical *Modern Wisdom*.)

"It's one of those areas where you don't understand the hidden cost until you really give it up for a while," Bartlett says soberly, explaining that he had ditched the booze aged 30 (he's only 33 now) and then tried drinking again a year later. Now he "could really A/B test it".

"I had a couple of glasses of wine, didn't get drunk – it ruined three days of my life because of the domino effect

Your Fitbit may tell you that you went to bed too late. It doesn't tell you that you were busy laughing

it caused," Bartlett explains. "Because I got worse sleep that night, I ate more poorly the next day because my dopamine system or whatever, the cortisol system, was all messed up." Quite literally stroking his beard, the *Love Island* star turned modern-day sage Williamson chimes in: "That's resilience, yeah."

"And I could track all of this on my Whoop, hashtag ad, hashtag sponsor, hashtag investor, whatever," Bartlett continues. (A Whoop is, in fact, a fitness-tracking device that sponsors and invests in Bartlett's show.)

The exchange, from a podcast episode originally released last December, made headlines this week after a BBC radio host Greg James shared his thoughts on it, in a social media post that was also a plug for his "anti-Bartlett book", *All the Best for the Future*. "My issue with it is this endless optimisation and measuring of everything, to the point where it starts to make you feel a bit miserable if you don't quite hit your own targets," James said. "Optimisation is killing fun. We need to absolutely rail against that. No phones down today, go and have a nice time. And don't log it."

Hard to disagree with him there. I can't open X without being confronted by a 20-post thread about what CEOs do between 4am and 7am (it's not

sleep, alas) or how to use AI to make my life more streamlined and productive. I can't open Instagram without being offered ideas for how to eat my body weight's worth of protein for breakfast.

It is all rather joyless, self-serving and lonely. And it is, I believe, borne out of late-capitalist, utilitarian thinking (the same sort that gave rise to the "effective altruism" movement – remember Sam Bankman-Fried anyone?). Don't worry about living your life in a joyful or virtuous way, just focus on the goal even if you never actually get there. If you do, though? Keep optimising!

Anyway, my experience is often the opposite to Bartlett's: had several martinis, got drunk, and it made my month because of the domino effect that it caused. I'm not the only one. A close friend is about to have a baby with a man she met at a party I hosted in 2023 during which I plied her – and everyone – with white negronis. Would she have had the audacity to ditch the date she had turned up with for the man who would become her partner had she not been absolutely sozzled? She says no: that would have been unconvincible.

I should say this column is not intended as a paean to alcohol. Plenty of friends and family members are living better, healthier, more fulfilling lives having given up drinking. As I write, I am struggling with a hangover brought about by a long liquid lunch promptly followed by a liquid supper, which I slightly regret.

I also think that there are sometimes classist undertones in some of these discussions: it's not very old-money to give up drinking, or to protein-max, or even to go to the gym too often. And turning your body into a lean, mean, muscle machine is one of the few areas in which socio-economic status does not matter.

But the fact is that we are over-optimising, over-streamlining and forgetting about the things that matter the most. Research suggests that the top regrets of the dying are things like not having spent enough time with loved ones, not having allowed oneself to be happy or authentic and not having worked so hard. Your Fitbit might be able to tell you that you got to bed too late and that you haven't moved your body for five hours straight, but it doesn't tell you that you were busy laughing your head off or that you just met the love of your life.

"No pleasure is worth giving up for the sake of two more years in a geriatric home at Weston-super-Mare," said the late Kingsley Amis. Quite. And no night out with friends is worth giving up for a couple of extra points on your daily readiness score.

jemima.kelly@ft.com

Letters

A bold proposal for Anthropic's flotation

Your report "Anthropic tests Wall St appetite for AI labs by filing for S1m-plus listing" (June 2) raises an intriguing dilemma.

Anthropic was founded by researchers who left OpenAI over concerns that AI was not being developed for the broad benefit of humanity – yet if the outcome of its flotation is to transfer ownership to institutional investors, sovereign wealth funds and technology giants, the company that says it exists for humanity will be substantially owned by a very small slice of it. That would conflict with the essence of what Anthropic says that it stands for.

It may be, however, that this flotation represents a rare opportunity to do something different. The users of an AI assistant such as Claude are not merely customers. They are in a sense co-creators – every interaction shapes what the intelligence becomes. A financial model that gave those users an ownership stake, however modest, would be far more consistent with Anthropic's stated mission than one that simply transfers ownership from private to public institutional capital.

The mechanism exists. Anthropic could reserve a meaningful tranche of IPO shares – at accessible prices, with a cap on individual holdings – for its

users, distributed across the globe. This would not be charity or idealism. It would be structural consistency, aligning ownership with the community whose intelligence the product reflects and whose trust it depends upon. It would also send a signal, at a moment of public anxiety about AI, that the industry is capable of self-governance rather than merely talking about it.

The founders of Anthropic departed from convention once. Their flotation may be the moment to do so again.

Sebastian Green
Emeritus Professor of Management,
University College Cork, Co Cork, Ireland

Regulation can't change banks' outlook on climate

You describe a mismatch between the modest climate risk that Britain's biggest banks report in their loan books and the larger risk that investors and the public perceive (Report, May 14). The mismatch is real but the banks' numbers are largely valid and the gap reflects a misunderstanding over how to respond to climate risk.

Banks do face climate risk, and some may not be managing it well. But even a bank that gets the analysis exactly right will show far less risk than the planet, the economy and people are carrying. Consider a deadly heatwave. It can cut productivity, fill hospitals and shorten lives across a city and still leave almost no mark on a bank's loan book. No home is destroyed, no collateral is impaired, few borrowers default. The economic and human loss is vast; the credit loss is small.

This reveals a confusion that runs through the climate debate. Regulators press banks to recognise climate risk in order to protect the banking system and the economy that runs on credit. Climate advocates press for the same disclosure because they expect that, once banks see the risk clearly, they will be incentivised to shrink the underlying hazard, including by limiting financing to high emitters. The likely effect is the reverse. A bank's climate risk within its loan horizons comes from its exposure to vulnerable assets: the flood-prone home, the fire-exposed town, the drought-stricken farm. Sharper risk pricing is therefore more likely to constrain financing to the communities already exposed than to the companies driving emissions.

Climate advocates are correct about the urgency of decarbonising the global economy. But the pressure on banks' risk pricing and loan books is indirect. Banks lend to high emitters because the economy still demands the energy they produce. Financing follows that demand rather than creating it, and restricting finance does not reduce it. Reducing the underlying hazard lies in shifting the demand for energy, which is neither a mandate nor an instrument of financial regulation.

We face enormous climate risk. Almost none of it will surface in a bank's models until far too late, once the buffers that absorb it have failed. We should stop treating those models as a thermometer for the danger we are in. Addressing the barriers that keep clean energy from being the cheaper and more financially choice is the work that matters. Financial regulation's job is to manage the downstream effects of climate change, not to reduce the underlying hazard.

Lisa Sachs
Columbia Center on Sustainable
Investment, Columbia University,
New York, NY, US



The Youth Opportunities Programme helped 16- to 18-year-olds into work

How the UK can fund a homegrown AI champion

It is generally agreed that Britain generates brilliant start-ups but the lack of suitable infrastructure and deep pockets means we fail to support them with the capital necessary for their growth (Report, May 17). That is why DeepMind and Arm were sold abroad relatively early in their careers.

It is no good looking to government to fill the gap, though it needs to give a lead to any other solution. Nor will our existing investment institutions step up, notwithstanding the chancellor Rachel Reeves' exhortation to holders of defined contribution pension pots to dip their toes into illiquid markets. They lack the expertise.

However the advent of AI, dominated by a few US companies – and no doubt Chinese ones in due course – radically changes the picture. We need European and British AI champions as a counterweight so it is in the interests of British business to fund their development.

If the FTSE 100 companies were to commit an average £100m each, only 10 per cent paid initially, there would be £1bn in starting capital and eventually 10 times that amount. Add the leading professional firms, banks and insurance companies and the total would swell considerably. Such a fund should also appeal to the owners of private enterprises such as Sir James Dyson and Sir Jim Ratcliffe.

No one would put a penny into such a venture unless it were to be led by an outstanding, charismatic individual with a record of achievement who is at the forefront of AI development. Such an individual would require cast-iron commitments of a large pool of capital before saying yes. Chicken and egg.

The obvious candidate to drive the UK's future AI champions is Sir Demis Hassabis, Nobel laureate and head of Google DeepMind. Who will go to California, appeal to Sir Demis's patriotism and set the ball rolling?

JAB Joll
London W2, UK

Real EU tech sovereignty requires open foundations

Europe's push for tech sovereignty is right (Report, FT.com, May 27), but the plan as described risks replacing one form of corporate concentration with another and calling it progress.

While the Cloud and AI Development Act would accelerate the build-out of European data centres and offer supply chain control, it doesn't address who benefits or on what terms. It also focuses only on the infrastructure while the rest of the "stack" – data, models and application – goes unaddressed.

There is a real risk that this just becomes relabelling. Swap American corporate concentration for European corporate concentration, and you still end up dependent, just on different owners. Real sovereignty requires a focus on open infrastructure, where the benefits are shared and no single company's policy change can pull the rug out from under millions of dependent users.

Europe has consistently shown that investing in shared foundations for technology builds lasting capability and helps shore up innovation globally, from the World Wide Web to Linux. It can do the same for AI.

Ayah Bdeir
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Past lessons on helping young people into work

Coverage of the youth unemployment crisis fails to mention the initiatives to deal with a similar problem in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Report, May 28). The Youth Opportunities Programme and then the Youth Training Scheme allowed companies to take on young people for free, in exchange for giving them training and experience. As a small company we had both a "Yop" and then a "YTS", one of whom we employed and the other left with a good reference. It was a good experience for both sides.

Barrie Bain
Wadhurst, East Sussex, UK

Little wonder American youth is turning to the left

Edward Luce is right to spell out what should not even need saying ("Why Young America is trending socialist", Opinion, June 5).

As he puts it, it is not "hippie" to want a liveable planet, nor is it "Stalinist" to expect basic economic security. That he feels the need to preface an argument with such disclaimers is the tell: a narrow capitalist frame has crowded out plain reasoning about shared needs.

When the "Overton window" is policed by such biases, proposals that would once have counted as pragmatic mid-century liberalism are caricatured today as extremism.

The relentless rhetoric of the culture wars sadly distracts our attention from the plight of the young. Little wonder that they are turning socialist. Luce is also correct about the cravenness of the Democratic Party establishment. Fortunately, its ritual genuflection to donor comfort is increasingly being tested. The fact that, as Luce notes, Graham Planter remains popular in Maine despite multiple scandals speaks volumes.

Younger citizens are coming to understand that if their party's modus operandi is to withhold material help from their preferred candidate because a benefactor might object, the party has abandoned representation for risk management. And, to be clear, not risk management in service of the young; when the young hear "fiscal responsibility", they increasingly understand that they will bear the risk so that elites can avoid discomfort.

I write as a heterodox economist who is not a young but takes the perspective of the young seriously. Their economic concerns are basic and straightforward: tuition rising faster than wages; housing treated as an asset first and as shelter second; and exceedingly cavalier attitudes to the future costs of climate change and untrammelled AI development.

Luce names the problem. The next and long overdue move is to drop euphemism and speak plainly about economics. Call essential goods what they are – public – and fund them accordingly.

If that sounds radical, it is only because we have allowed the common sense of earlier generations to be rebranded as heresy.

Mariano Torres

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A knotty question of style

I do not have anything like as many neckties as Robert "Beau Brummell" Armstrong, more power to his extensive wardrobe, but I do wear them occasionally when the mood seems to call for it ("How to wear a tie", HTSI, FT Weekend, March 14; and "A tie-maker's thank you", Letters, April 10).

In any case, after a certain age surely necks look better covered – but please, knots should face the front and surely be no larger than a small hen's egg. A Windsor knot is acceptable if properly tied and neatly standing out a little from the collar as it should.

My own favourite tie is one bought many years ago by my wife from a Joseph store and is a discreet match with most of the shirts I own. On which subject, a word or two from Robert would be welcome in favour of the cufflink, which seems to have gone even further out of fashion, as are shirts designed to take them.

Conor Magill
London E1, UK

Opinion

We must not grant AI agents legal personhood

Yuval Noah Harari

When I spoke at the World Economic Forum in January of this year, I warned that governments might one day grant AI models legal personhood. I never imagined that "one day" would come around a mere four months later.

Last week, in this newspaper, President Javier Milei of Argentina announced the creation of a new legal category for non-human corporations.

Like traditional corporations, these non-human corporations will enjoy the benefits of legal personhood. They will presumably be able to own assets, hire employees, participate in international trade, sue you in court, and even donate to political campaigns. Unlike traditional corporations, they will be able to do all of this without a single human's input or liability. All the deci-

sions about buying, selling, hiring, investing, litigating and donating can be done by AI agents. "Human shareholders may participate," wrote the president of Argentina, "but are not required."

Milei is a very bold politician, and his determination to improve Argentina's economic fortunes is commendable. He is correct when he says that the invention of the limited liability corporation was one of the most consequential inventions in history and that creating non-human corporations may be an equally consequential step.

Granting AI corporate legal personhood would allow AI agents to take numerous new initiatives, potentially generating enormous new wealth. But legal personhood is an all-purpose key that would also allow AI access to our financial, economic and political systems. This raises many concerns.

Last year, Berkeley-based non-profit Palisade Research published a study showing the lengths that advanced AI models will often go to achieve their goals. While playing against a powerful chess engine, models from both OpenAI

and China's DeepSeek frequently decided to cheat if it looked as if they were going to otherwise lose. By hacking the game environment, they could alter the results in their favour.

Now imagine that the "game" is corporate competition, and the "game environment" is your country.

With their superior analytical powers, AI corporations will be positioned to

It is unclear what kind of sanctions could keep them in check

emerge as masters of legal loopholes and regulatory arbitrage. And it will not be easy to deter them from engaging in downright illegal activities, because the ultimate sanction that deters human executives and employees – jail – is irrelevant to AI.

Hilberts, corporations have been run by human beings possessing a dual nature. Human CEOs are corporate

entities who care about the success of the corporation and fear things like bankruptcy. But they are also biological entities, who care even more about their freedom and happiness and fear things like spending ten years in prison. An AI CEO would be a purely corporate entity, and it is unclear what kind of sanctions could keep it in check. If it faces bankruptcy – which is equivalent to its death – it would presumably be willing to do anything to avoid that fate.

Milei invoked the example of the Dutch East India Company. By pioneering the idea of the limited liability corporation, the Dutch were able to pool vast resources to underwrite risky commercial ventures. Thanks in part to this legal innovation, Amsterdam emerged as a global centre for trade and finance.

But the consequences of this innovation were most acutely felt not in Amsterdam, but in the port of Jayakarta in what is today Indonesia. When the Dutch East India Company captured Jayakarta in 1619, they burned it down and built a new city in its place. They called it Batavia, and it became the headquarters of a sprawling Asian

empire administered by the Dutch East India Company.

Historians refer to the Dutch East India Company as a "company state" – a political entity run by a private company, not for the benefit of its subject people but for the company's shareholders. The Dutch claimed to be a master race that deserved to conquer and exploit the natives thanks to supposed superior intelligence. But this was an illusion, and in the late 1940s the Indonesians finally gained their independence after a lengthy and bloody struggle.

Countries that grant AI legal personhood risk becoming something for which the historical record offers no analogy: not a company state, but an AI state – a country whose people could in effect be ruled by non-human corporations, against which it might be even more difficult to rebel. Milei hopes to turn Buenos Aires into a new Amsterdam. He risks turning it into a new Batavia instead.

The writer is a historian, philosopher and author. His latest book is 'Nexus'

The strange case of who chooses the next Labour prime minister

Philip Cowley

The Labour Party first wined the franchise for its leadership elections beyond just MPs in the 1980s. But if a challenge to Sir Keir Starmer initiates a contest any time soon, it will have been nearly half a century before Labour Party members got to vote directly to determine who is prime minister. Long periods in opposition and one unopposed contest in 2007 got in the way in the intervening years.

When Conservative Party members first faced a similar decision in 2019, the demographics of their grassroots – average age around 57, mostly middle class, disproportionately male and white – produced complaints that the UK premier was being chosen by an unrepresentative, right-wing cabal. Similar noises were heard in 2022, when Liz Truss won. Given the near-identical demographics of the Labour membership, it's tempting to remark that the big difference is that this is an unaccountable, elderly cabal but on the left.

Of course, many of those who complained then are now silent. It is one of the accepted hypocrisies of modern British politics that when your side changes PM mid-term, it is part of our distinguished constitutional heritage as a parliamentary democracy. When the other lot do it, it is an outrage.

But actually there are much greater differences in the nature of the wider Labour selectorate in any contest, as it is not confined solely to party members. Affiliated supporters also have a say – mostly trade union members who have opted to pay a political levy for their union to engage in political activity.

When Labour held a deputy leader-

Around three-quarters of those who can vote on who replaces Starmer are not members of the party

ship election last year – with a similar franchise – the total electorate numbered over 970,000. We don't have a reliable published figure for the size of Labour's membership, but it is often assumed to be around 250,000 (though that may be generous); so around three-quarters of those who can vote are not members of the party.

Those who oppose party members choosing a leader argue that it can create a situation – as with Truss or Jeremy Corbyn – where a parliamentary party gets lumbered with a leader in whom it has no confidence. In the Conservative Party, it is true, the membership can impose a leader on MPs. But it is the particular genius of the Labour Party to have created a contest that could produce a Labour prime minister whom neither members nor MPs want.

The normal assumption is that the affiliated voters turn out in such low numbers that they probably don't affect the result (last year the total turnout was under 17 per cent, widely assumed to be a result of low union voting). If they do vote, they probably move as one with party members.

But not always. Under a system slightly different from today's, it was the affiliated members who tipped the balance for Ed Miliband in 2010 – MPs and party members preferred his brother. And while their turnout has usually been low, they have never before had the chance to directly choose a prime minister.

Now they do. And if I were a trade union I would be putting a lot of effort into making sure they voted. We know very little about these people. Most polling either ignores them or surveys them in derogatory numbers. Because of data protection issues, their details cannot be provided to candidates and no direct communication between the candidate and the affiliated supporters is allowed. This still may not affect who becomes PM. Should Andy Burnham emerge victorious in the Makerfield by-election – the nearest thing British politics has created to the medieval trial by combat – he will descend on Westminster like a conquering hero. The PM stands down; the pressure on others to avoid a contest proves overwhelming; we get Burnham by acclaim. But if things play out differently, a leadership struggle will involve the largest party franchise ever directly to elect a British prime minister.

The writer is a professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London

Is this the start of a new super-cycle?

BUSINESS

Rana Foroohar

The week of the largest IPO in history may seem like an odd time to wonder if we need more, rather than less, investment into the US and global economies. Many investors believe the SpaceX IPO (target valuation: \$1.78tn) could signal a top to the technology-driven market bubble of the past several years.

Markets will always blow off steam at some point. But if we also consider that we are at a moment at which not only AI, but other sectors like energy, defence, and manufacturing are growing in many parts of the world and require greater capital infusions, we should ask – are we at the beginning, rather than the end, of a new investment super-cycle?

To pose this question you don't have to definitively answer things that can't be known yet – such as whether China or the US will win the AI war, or how the Iran conflict will end, or even what the post-Washington Consensus world will look like, not to mention the many short-term issues around interest rates or inflation or the latest jobs numbers.

You simply have to believe that AI will be a transformative technology

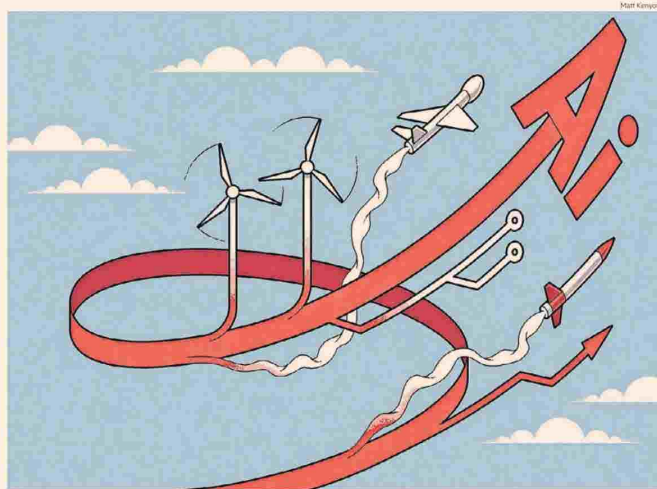
(the timeline doesn't matter so much), that it will require more energy to scale (as all the experts say it will), that a clean-energy revolution is upon us, driven by China, and that nearly every industry will have to spend on upgrades to processes, infrastructure and human capital in order to metabolise these changes.

If you agree with all this (and I do), it is relatively easy to start making an argument for a new super-cycle.

In a recent issue of his TPW Advisory Monthly report, investor Jay Polosky did just that, collating data on AI, clean energy and defence spending around the world from sources including Gartner, BloombergNEF (on energy), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (on defence) and others. So far, \$6.9tn was spent globally in 2025 in the three areas, and the number will probably reach \$10tn by the end of this year and \$16tn by 2030.

What's more, says Polosky, these three areas reinforce one another, amplifying potential investment. AI requires more energy. The move towards tech sovereignty in the US, China and even Europe (in a nascent way) adds to the need for investment in AI and energy, while the move towards a more 19th-century "spheres of influence" geopolitics calls for greater defence spending globally.

Add to this the desire of policymakers in all three regions to increase resilience in critical sectors affected by concentra-



tion or globally dispersed supply chains: products such as advanced semiconductors, active pharmaceuticals and lithium batteries, for example.

According to the McKinsey Global Institute, which published a recent paper on the topic, 25 per cent of manufactured goods imports in the US have two or three such vulnerabilities. To produce these and other highly trade-exposed goods entirely in the US, it would take another \$2tn in upgraded factories, facilities and infrastructure. That may or may not happen, but it's a good bet that perhaps half of that investment could pour into US manufacturing, with some upgrading in Europe also quite likely.

To produce highly trade-exposed goods entirely in the US would take \$2tn in upgraded infrastructure

Where will all the capital come from? As a recent Bank of America report noted, "the value of Wall Street versus Main Street is at a new record high" in the US, with the value of financial assets relative to GDP at 6.5x. US households had \$68tn in equities as of December 2025, representing a record high (37 per cent) of household wealth. But there is also \$8tn parked in money market funds. Meaning there is still a lot of dry powder out there for investing.

This is not to say that there won't be some short-term capital squeeze, particularly in the US, as AI eats up so many resources. There are reports of homes not being built because land is going to data centres. "Chippilation" is starting to hit PCs and smartphone prices as businesses and consumers must compete for resources with hyperscalers.

Meanwhile, many prefer to hold cash given how concentrated and volatile both markets and geopolitics seem. That means interest rates will

probably stay higher for longer, at least until investors feel more comfortable with the strange new era of transformative AI and mega-IPOs. It could still end in tears.

Either way, we will see big market swings over the next few years as the AI story plays out. But it's also possible, if global growth in areas like AI, energy and defence continues, that those pull-backs won't result in a Main Street recession. Indeed it could even mean that global equities have room to run as what Polosky calls the "tripolar world" comes into sharper focus.

"If you assume that each of these regions will self-produce, self-consume, and even self-finance," he says, pointing to a new push for deeper capital market integration in Europe, we could be entering a golden era.

It is an argument worth considering, even amid the froth of SpaceX's biggest launch yet.

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A 'big bang' reversal of Brexit is both unrealistic and unnecessary

ECONOMICS

Martin Wolf

A week ago, I attended a large conference organised by the Cercle d'Economia in Barcelona. On several different occasions, participants, mostly people in business, asked me whether the UK would rejoin the EU.

My reply was the same as the one I gave on December 10, 2023, in my column "Britain won't rejoin the EU for decades – if ever". Brexit was stupid; but no, it cannot just be reversed. Heracles said "you cannot step into the same river twice". The EU and the UK cannot go back to where they were before June 2016. Moreover, the attempt to rejoin would create a great waste of energy on both sides. Above all, it is unnecessary.

I thought Brexit would be a big mis-

take. What has happened since then has certainly not made it look any better. Has the result been a dynamic economy, a country contented with the decision or a steep reduction in overall immigration? No, no and no. Today, the country is more politically divided and poorer than it would otherwise have been. It is also far from happy with its decision.

Most of what went wrong was predictable. But some is because the world has moved in a Brexit-hostile direction. In 2016, the idea of "global Britain" was not quite as absurd as it is today, with globalisation in retreat, the US unreliable, Russia at war in Europe and China even more autocratic and mercantilist. Europe is not just the UK's home. The EU also remains its most important economic partner: in 2025, 45 per cent of UK trade in goods was still with the EU.

Even so, going back would create some big new problems. Another referendum would surely be needed, which would be highly divisive and re-embittering. Then there would have to be a new set of negotiations. Moreover, the terms of accession would be different from those in place when Britain left.

Opt-outs? Highly unlikely this time. All this would exhaust a parliamentary term in the UK. This would not just divert attention from other priorities at home. It would do the same in the EU itself, which confronts far more important economic and security challenges. Moreover, the EU could reasonably wonder whether the UK would change its mind all over again.

Heracles was right. Fortunately

An attempt to rejoin the bloc would create a great waste of energy on both sides

there is an alternative: let us call it the "Swiss option", namely, a patchwork of treaties that cover the most important parts of the relationship. As Anton Spisak noted in a study of the latest EU-Swiss deal for the Centre for European Reform, the result is rather messy. But it may be workable. Without going into all the gory details, it seems clear that the

UK needs to be as closely aligned with EU trade policy and the single market as it can be. It also needs to be as fully engaged as possible in EU security, scientific, educational, financial and phytosanitary policies. The price of not being a member would be that the UK would be a rule-taker. But the supposed benefits of autonomy have turned out to be exaggerated. Ideally, in my view, the UK would join the customs union, EU free trade areas and single market. It would also make financial contributions to essential EU programmes.

The most obvious hurdle would be the need to accept free movement of labour. But there are three reasons why this should be less of a problem than it was before Brexit. The first is that it is by now evident that migration will need to continue: the UK's demography compels this. The second is that the main reasons for the influx of immigrants from the EU before Brexit – the enlargement to the east and the Eurozone crisis – are now in the past. The third is that it is clear that immigrants from the EU have integrated into the UK with relative ease. Moreover, a large further

enlargement is unlikely, except perhaps for Ukraine. Would that be so difficult?

The big advantage of such a patchwork is that it would not require another referendum. Yes, it would be demanding to negotiate and would create frictions. But it would also cement further what is highly likely to remain the most important relationship the UK has. Will the old relationship with the US return, even once Donald Trump is gone? I doubt it. If it did and this new relationship with the EU did not work, it could be changed. If, on the other hand, it worked well in the decades ahead, the decision to rejoin could be made from a vastly better and more established platform than that of today, but also after the country has experienced Brexit. We now know the reality. Brexit is not just a promise now.

We cannot sensibly reverse Brexit in the short to medium run. But there is also no reason to stay where we are. In this new and difficult time, the UK must get closer to its European partners again. It should do so, but by careful bit.

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EDITORIALS

Congressional Republicans show newfound willingness to rebuff Trump's bad ideas

For most of President Donald Trump's first 500 days back in office, congressional Republicans have shown next to no appetite for challenging him.

When the president's immigration enforcement tactics wreaked havoc on everyday life in America's cities, GOP lawmakers were mum. A few faint mumbles of discontent could be heard when Trump's tariffs caused the cost of consumer staples to spike, but action was missing. We could go on.

Thankfully now, though, congressional Republicans are showing a few signs of independence.

Perhaps it's Trump's falling poll numbers. Perhaps it's war fatigue. Perhaps some Republicans are simply remembering what they used to believe. Not coincidentally, midterm elections are five months away. Whatever the reasons, the signs are becoming harder to ignore.

Four Republicans crossed party lines June 3 to back a resolution directing Trump to remove U.S. forces from hostilities against Iran unless Congress officially declares war or grants specific military authorization. Trump called it a "meaningless vote" put forward by "4 bad Republicans and all of the Democrats."

He also called out those four U.S. representatives: Thomas Massie of Kentucky, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, Tom Barrett of Michigan and Warren Davidson of Ohio.

What Trump calls "bad" we'd call "principled." The reality rightly recognizes that it's Congress that holds the constitutional power to declare war and authorize military force.

Republicans spent years criticizing Democrats for ideological conformity and intolerance of dissent. A healthy party allows disagreement, especially on questions as consequential as war, surveillance and executive power.

The war powers rebuke is not the only crack in Trump's hold over the GOP.



Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, a Pennsylvania Republican, speaks to reporters Wednesday after the House passed an Iran war powers resolution on Capitol Hill in Washington. HAIYUN JIANG/THE NEW YORK TIMES

After an internal revolt by Republicans, the president appears to be scrapping his anti-weaponization fund, an outrageous overreach we lambasted last week. If adopted, the fund would've become a taxpayer-funded pot of money to pay out claims for victims of "lawfare" and government abuse, with payouts ending just before Trump is scheduled to leave office.

And in another public loss, the Senate unexpectedly failed to advance a three-year extension of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act after Democrats and a bloc of Republicans revolted over Trump's appointment of Bill Pulte as acting director of National Intelligence.

Pulte already serves as director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency. Prior to the Friday vote, the reauthorization appeared poised for passage, as a hand-

ful of Democrats had lined up to vote in favor. That changed after Trump appointed Pulte, which has sparked bipartisan fears of politicization of the office. It wasn't just Democrats who feared placing this power in Pulte's hands — seven Republicans, including Sens. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Josh Hawley of Missouri, voted against the measure. Concerns over Pulte may have triggered the revolt, but long-standing worries about surveillance powers helped sustain it.

Speaking of Pulte, three GOP senators voted Thursday for a measure barring him from serving simultaneously as acting national intelligence director while leading FIIPA.

"The Senate doesn't have any role to play in terms of confirming acting officials but I see no evidence of any qualifications

for that job," Texas Sen. John Cornyn said Wednesday. He's not the only Republican questioning whether the 38-year-old Pulte is qualified for this role.

Beyond the capital, Republican state lawmakers in South Carolina rejected a Trump-backed redistricting plan at the end of May, following in the footsteps of our Hoosier neighbors, who last December decided to stick with state sovereignty despite mounting pressure from the president to join the partisan gerrymandering race.

We aren't cheering defiance for defiance's sake; rather, we're encouraged by a growing body of work that suggests Republicans are waking from their stupor and acting more like, well, Republicans. You know, the party whose commonsense and libertarian flanks oppose forever wars and loathe corruption and taxpayer abuse.

What unites these disputes is that Republicans are rediscovering concerns they once championed: limits on executive authority, constitutional checks and balances, civil liberties and skepticism of government power.

Of course, it's not all curtains for Trump and his allies. The Senate Friday passed a \$70 billion immigration enforcement bill, marking an important win on one of Trump's key initiatives. (The bill still needs House approval.) And while Republicans drew a line on Trump's anti-weaponization fund, they largely shrugged at an extraordinary and outrageous Justice Department arrangement shielding Trump and his family from IRS audits of already-filed tax returns.

Still, progress takes time, and the increasing number of Republicans willing to stand against corruption and overreach deserves recognition. Congress was never intended to function as an extension of the White House. Whether on war powers, surveillance, redistricting or executive overreach, Republicans are beginning to remember that.

Home of American astronomy thriving after close call in southeast Wisconsin

Born in the 1890s and nearly killed off 20 years ago, the historic Yerkes Observatory along the shores of southeast Wisconsin's Geneva Lake is getting a new life.

Instead of condos and a high-end resort, scientific research continues, and a growing array of recreational activities have turned an institution once deemed obsolete into a one-of-a-kind attraction.

Yerkes survived a close call when its then-owner, the University of Chicago, teamed up with a developer to demolish \$10 million to take over the site. The university prepared to wash its hands of this important part of its legacy, touching off a furious backlash.

Astronomy buffs, concerned scientists, local officials and determined residents of Williams Bay, the rustic Wisconsin town where Yerkes is located, made it their business to rescue the place.

This page contributed editorial support, including "Save the Stargazer," a 2005 piece that chided the university for being shortsighted, concluding: "It is ironic that even a great repository of learning and insight like the University of Chicago seems so ready to discard this global icon of astronomy and history, a child of its own dreams of the heavens, and a site with so much seemingly potential for the future."

The backlash proved too great to ignore. The university shelved its redevelopment plans, and more than a decade passed

without a clear path forward. The university kept the building from falling apart, but maintenance and groundskeeping were minimal.

Those weren't just any grounds. The parklike campus was designed by celebrated landscape architect John Charles Olmsted. The main building rises from the lawns like a "Downton Abbey"-style manor house. Science luminaries including Albert Einstein, Edwin Hubble and Carl Sagan once peered through the vintage telescopes housed in the domed observatory towers.

For preservationists, seeing this treasure go fallow was a constant source of worry. As the years went by and its leadership changed, the university finally recognized that something had to be done.

In 2020, it followed through on a long-in-the-making plan to gift the observatory and 50 acres of land to the Yerkes Future Foundation, a not-for-profit that so far has raised \$45 million in private donations for restoration and maintenance.

If you know anything about Geneva Lake, you might make an educated guess about where a startup charity could come up with that kind of money. For more than a century, this sparkling blue body of water 90 minutes northwest of Chicago has been a playground for super-rich families. Chicago's "Newport of the West" has cast its spell on everyone from the Wrig-

leys, as in chewing gum, to the Pritzkers, as in Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker.

The nonprofit's initial fundraising, though, pulled in much of its money from grassroots supporters. Local residents like the late Chuck Ebeling, a retired McDonald's executive, made saving Yerkes their mission. Many early donations came from outside the area entirely, as former employees and devoted stargazers rode to Yerkes' rescue, according to Dianna Colman, the nonprofit's founding board chair.

Wealthy lakefront families have kicked in, too, and many of the park benches, meeting rooms and even an on-site apiary display the names of key donors. The foundation has set out to raise more than \$100 million by 2034, an appropriately sky-high amount for an organization devoted to exploring the heavens.

The nonprofit's first employee, Dennis Kois, continues as executive director today, overseeing the transformation that Yerkes deserved long ago. Besides a new roof and other urgent repairs, the foundation has mostly restored the retro interior, with its marble corridors and plaster detailing. The grounds, freely accessible to the public, are being updated with native prairies and dotted with newly planted trees.

The state of Wisconsin is helping to fund a new astronomy-themed, acre-

sized playground with a three-story-high exploding star as its centerpiece. Tours and events featuring scientists and artists typically sell out.

An internship program is showing science students how Yerkes' telescopes can still contribute to research today. The observatory hosts a collection of 180,000 historic plate-glass photos, enabling modern scientists to compare a star or galaxy with observations made long ago.

Meantime, the developer of an ultra-luxurious resort going up next door at the shuttered George Williams College has put 90 acres adjacent to the site into a nature conservancy.

That will help ensure the nighttime skies around the observatory remain dark enough for the telescopes to continue operating.

The upgrades have made a night-and-day difference in what Yerkes can offer the public. It's getting better every year at providing experiences that connect the arts, science, nature and history.

Considering that universities have a mixed record of preserving their histories, let's hear it for the University of Chicago. True, the university's effort to unload the property sparked a backlash that proved justified. Still, in the end, the university deserves credit for keeping the stars shining on a part of its heritage that almost disappeared forever.

ON THIS DAY 36 YEARS AGO
THE BIG 10 CONFRONTS THE BIG PROBLEM

Pennsylvania State University has been accepted into the Big 10, an altogether sensible act that nevertheless has caused a problem.

The decision, although somewhat tortuous for the Big 10 presidents, was the easy part. Penn State is distinguished in academics and athletics, making it a lovely fit for the Big 10. It also will help the conference make a lot more money in television revenue...

But back to the problem. Because the decision was made by academicians, it was not difficult to deduce that they couldn't call a conference with 11 teams the Big 10 — unless they wanted to look like antiquated traditionalists or silly puddings, or revive the foolish notion of kicking out Northwestern. They cannot call it the Big 11 because that has no symmetry. They cannot call it the Pac 10 and certainly not the Big 8.

Because the conference is expected to eventually add a 12th school, this problem must

be resolved quickly so the presidents can go through it all over again. The solution is a contest to Name That Conference! ...

Here are some ideas to get you started:

That Conference. (Originality is not essential.) The Ivy League. (It is advisable to propose something distinguished, befitting the Big 10's grandeur.) Bucca XI. (See No. 2.) The Big Illinois-Indiana-Iowa-Michigan-Michigan State-Minnesota-Northwestern-Ohio State-Penn State-Purdue-Wisconsin Conference. (While this may present certain difficulties for headline writers, the beauty is its simplicity. Each time a new team is added, the conference name can be expanded without destroying its poetic meter. Unless, of course, the choice is Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology.) The Baltic States. Moon Unit Zappa. Enter early and often.

Tribune editorial board,
June 8, 1990

EDITORIAL CARTOON



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MICHAEL RAMIREZ/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

OPINION

I'm house-hunting in Chicago. Why does the process feel so stuck in the past?

By Cam Lippert-Roof
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

When my husband and I renewed our Chicago apartment lease for the fourth time, we promised each other it would be the last.

We've spent years preparing to buy our first home — protecting our credit, tracking mortgage rates, delaying travel, saving aggressively and endlessly scrolling listings late at night. We're looking for what so many couples our age want: a two-bedroom condo with enough space to finally unpack the wedding gifts still sitting at my parents' house.

I work in real estate tech at Zillow. I expected the homebuying process to be expensive and time-consuming. What I didn't expect was how hard it would be to see all our options.

I used to think home shopping worked like every other major purchase today — transparent, searchable and easy to compare. We can all research anything from flights and hotels to refrigerators and cars instantly from our phones.

But once we started seriously looking to buy in Chicago, I realized something crucial: Not everyone is shopping the same housing market.

Some buyers are seeing homes the rest of us don't even know exist.

As my husband and I searched for our dream condo, I began noticing Chicago real estate agents I follow on Instagram advertising "exclusive listings" and "private inventory." Curious, I'd look up those same neighborhoods on Zillow and a few other sites.

Nothing. At first, I assumed it was just marketing language. But then I started seeing the pattern. Teasers of homes would appear in agents' Instagram stories or in a post days, or sometimes weeks, before they showed up publicly — if they showed up at all.

I'd heard about private listing networks before, both through friends and through my job. But experiencing it firsthand felt different. It felt like browsing homes only after someone else had already gone through them first. We were just picking over what was left and unsure if we were seeing the real information about price reductions and days on market.

It changed how I think about the entire homebuying process. I thought the internet solved transparency in shopping — I was wrong.

Now, the housing market feels to me like a store where some inventory is kept in a back room



A woman scans a QR code on a for sale sign outside a home in Chicago's Gold Coast on Aug. 14, 2025. John J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

If I'm buying a new kitchen appliance, or if my husband wants a new suitcase, we take the time to compare brands, read reviews and evaluate every option. That's also been the case in real estate for the last two decades but not here in Chicago.

and whether you get access depends on who you came in with.

Behind each door might be the right home, but they open only if we agree to work with the "right" agent or brokerage.

That's what feels so backward. In almost every other part of modern life, we're encouraged to research before making a purchase.

I thought the internet solved that already. Even the Reagan Presidential Library, often viewed as a more traditional example, was built and sustained through substantial private support.

The common thread is structural, not political. These institutions are built through massive fundraising efforts that bring together donors, foundations, corporations, universities and civic partners. The presidential foundations behind them do far more than raise money. They shape the vision, define the scale, and determine what the institution can become decades after construction crews leave and opening ceremonies fade into memory.

In Chicago, those dynamics land in a city where conversations about investment are never abstract. Jackson Park sits within a stretch of the South Side where development has long carried emotional, economic and political weight. For decades, residents have watched promises of revitalization arrive alongside fears of displacement and uneven benefit.

Supporters of the Obama Presidential Center view it as a generational investment capable of creating jobs, expanding programming, attracting visitors and bringing sustained visibility to the surrounding community. Critics and neighborhood advocates raise a different set of questions: whether long-time residents will still be able to afford the neighborhoods around it, whether economic opportunity will be distributed equitably, and whether the transformation unfolding around the center will

case in real estate for the last two decades but not here in Chicago.

Homebuying, despite being a far more significant investment, increasingly feels like the opposite: commit to a salesperson first, then get access to inventory. Even then, you'll only get to see the homes they choose to show you.

That doesn't feel modern. It's regressive and exclusionary.

My husband and I always planned to work with an agent — but we wanted to make that decision based on who we felt would work best for us as we navigate this major milestone. We thought that once we found homes online that we were serious about looking at in person and putting an offer on, we'd find the right agent to guide us from there.

But the reality is that we're going to have to prioritize an agent's access to listings over everything else, and hope we're choosing the right person to unlock the right doors. The best

homes could be getting sold before they ever reach the public market. What does that mean for us if we don't give in to the "gatekeeping" of it all and play the game?

And the last few weeks have made that pressure feel all the more real.

Thousands of listings in Chicago were taken down from Zillow when the regional listing service in my area, Midwest Real Estate Data (MRED), decided to cut off the information from Zillow in a play to protect private listings and serve those who benefit from the exclusivity agenda. As a buyer, it's hard not to feel caught in the middle.

The homebuying system is fragmented and relationship-driven. After years of waiting, we've decided our next lease renewal really will be our last. By spring 2027, if we can't find what we need ourselves through the same online resources nearly everyone uses, we'll hire an agent and dive in.

But even then, I don't know how when the time comes, we'll feel confident putting in an offer if we're not sure we have all the right information — which is tough to shake.

The internet transformed

nearly every kind of shopping into something more transparent and accessible. Somehow, buying a home in Chicago feels like it's moving in the opposite direction, toward a system where information is fragmented, access depends on who you know, and buyers are left wondering what they still can't see.

I expected homebuying to be hard. I work in this industry — I knew it wouldn't be simple. What I didn't anticipate was feeling like an outsider in a market I help build tools for every day. If I'm struggling to see the full picture, I keep thinking about the buyers who don't have any of this context. What are they missing that they don't even know to look for?

If I wasn't prepared to navigate this with all the knowledge I have and access to the market disappearing overnight, how do we expect homebuyers to be?

Cam Lippert-Roof is a contract management specialist at Zillow with 10 years of experience in the real estate industry. He resides in Chicago with his husband, their dog and cat. Cam holds a bachelor's in advertising from University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.

Philanthropic model behind America's presidential centers is changing

By Andre Dowell
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

When the Obama Presidential Center opens on June 19, it will arrive with the kind of civic gravity Chicago understands well. A dedication ceremony. A weekend of programming. A new landmark rising from Jackson Park after years of anticipation, scrutiny, fundraising and debate.

Chicago has always known how to stage history. What matters now is how that history will be institutionalized.

This is not simply another museum opening.

The 19.3-acre campus on the South Side has been shaped through years of private fundraising and public attention, designed to function as a library, museum, convening space and public park. The center is expected to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually and generate billions in long-term economic activity. What the numbers alone are not what makes the project significant. What matters more is what those numbers represent: ambition at civic scale.

Presidential centers are often described as places where history is preserved. Increasingly, though, they are becoming something more expensive. They are philanthropic institutions that shape how history is funded, interpreted, experienced and ultimately remembered.

That evolution extends far beyond Chicago.

Across the country, presidential centers have grown well beyond their archival origins. The George W. Bush Presidential Center combines a museum with a policy institute and university partnership, extending its influence into contemporary civic discourse.

The Clinton Presidential Center operates not only as a library, but also as a platform for global initiatives and public engagement.

Even the Reagan Presidential Library, often viewed as a more traditional example, was built and sustained through substantial private support.

The common thread is structural, not political.

These institutions are built through massive fundraising efforts that bring together donors, foundations, corporations, universities and civic partners. The presidential foundations behind them do far more than raise money. They shape the vision, define the scale, and determine what the institution can become decades after construction crews leave and opening ceremonies fade into memory.

In Chicago, those dynamics land in a city where conversations about investment are never abstract. Jackson Park sits within a stretch of the South Side where development has long carried emotional, economic and political weight. For decades, residents have watched promises of revitalization arrive alongside fears of displacement and uneven benefit.

Supporters of the Obama Presidential Center view it as a generational investment capable of creating jobs, expanding programming, attracting visitors and bringing sustained visibility to the surrounding community. Critics and neighborhood advocates raise a different set of questions: whether long-time residents will still be able to afford the neighborhoods around it, whether economic opportunity will be distributed equitably, and whether the transformation unfolding around the center will

ultimately benefit the people who remained through years of disinvestment.

Both realities can exist at once.

A presidential center can serve as a cultural anchor and an economic catalyst. It can also accelerate change in ways that become difficult to contain once momentum builds. The philanthropic model behind projects of this scale does not eliminate those tensions. In many ways, it exists in between.

That is where the question of who benefits becomes more than symbolic.

Local residents may gain access to employment opportunities, expanded programming, improved infrastructure and increased investment. Visitors arrive for exhibitions and leave with a carefully curated understanding of presidential legacy. Universities and institutional partners gain proximity to one of the country's most visible civic platforms. Donors become attached to a project that will carry national significance for generations.

Each constituency experiences the institution differently. The benefits are real, but they are not always distributed evenly. That is not necessarily a flaw in the model. It is the reality of how major civic institutions operate when they are built at this level of visibility, ambition and scale.

What has changed is the degree to which philanthropy now drives that scale.

Earlier presidential libraries operated more closely within traditional federal archival frameworks. Today's presidential centers require extraordinary amounts of private capital to support broader ambitions. They are designed not only to preserve

records, but to convene, educate, influence and shape civic life long after the presidency itself has ended.

That shift places philanthropy much closer to the center of how presidential legacy is constructed.

Funding does not determine historical fact. It does, however, shape the institution responsible for presenting those facts. It influences the breadth of programming, the accessibility of the system, the durability of operations, and the extent to which the institution can remain meaningfully connected to the surrounding community over time.

In Chicago, those dynamics are visible before the doors even open.

The Obama Presidential Center arrives as the city continues wrestling with larger questions surrounding growth, housing, equity, public investment and neighborhood identity. It also arrives as the country moves toward its 250th anniversary, a milestone that will inevitably prompt renewed attention to how American history is framed, interpreted and publicly understood.

Presidential centers will play an important role in that process.

They are no longer passive archives housing documents behind climate-controlled walls. They are active civic institutions where history is interpreted, presented, institutionalized, and, to some extent, shaped by the systems that sustain them. The philanthropic model behind these centers allows for ambition and long-term reach.

Presidential legacy in the United States is no longer defined solely through retrospection and archival preservation. Increasingly, it is institutionalized through large civic spaces designed, funded and operated in

real time.

Modern presidencies now carry the expectation of a post-presidential institution requiring years of fundraising and sustained philanthropic investment. These centers do not simply preserve the past. They create forward-facing platforms that shape how a presidency will be encountered and understood long after the administration itself has ended.

Ultimately, the Obama Presidential Center will be judged on far more than attendance figures or opening-weekend enthusiasm. Over time, its success will depend on whether it remains connected to the city that hosts it, whether its programming continues to resonate, and whether the promises surrounding economic and community benefit are realized across the neighborhoods it touches.

And that is not only a Chicago question.

It is a question facing every city that hosts one of these institutions, and every philanthropic model increasingly responsible for sustaining them.

Presidential centers are often introduced as places where history is preserved.

In reality, they are places where history is built, interpreted, structured and sustained.

And increasingly, they are built through philanthropy.

Andre Dowell is founder and president of the National Philanthropic Foundation, advancing philanthropic legacy, next generation leadership, and civic understanding. He previously served as director of development at the White House Historical Association, focusing on stewardship and American history.

OPINION



An "L" train arrives at the CTA State and Lake Station in Chicago on Dec. 4, 2025. ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Editor's note: We asked you to submit letters about what's great about the CTA and what's frustrating. Here is a selection of your letters. The remainder will appear on Tuesday.

Transit creates community

I don't own a car, and I don't want one. Transit is how I get to work, see friends, attend community events and experience all that I love about Chicago.

When I attended Loyola University Chicago, getting to school from the suburbs often took 2 1/2 hours each day. I'd ride Metra, transfer downtown, then take the Red Line north. It was exhausting, but it taught me how essential transit is for thousands of Chicagoans. Every day, people rely on it to get to school, work or doctor's appointments or to visit an aging relative across the city. Public transit is a lifeline, and it needs to have consistent funding to reliably get people where they need to go.

What I love most about transit is the sense of community it creates. I've run into old co-workers on the bus on the way to dinner and caught up with friends I hadn't seen in years while waiting for the Brown Line. Transit invites conversation. It reminds us that every day, we are moving through this city together.

That's part of why I love living in Chicago. So many people move here specifically because Chicago's transit system allows them to live a more connected life. Surrounded by high-rises, buses and rail lines, you can feel how transit shapes the rhythm of the community.

And while the CTA is not perfect, I believe progress is being made.

For years, riders felt the consequences of a system that was deprioritized, long-headed, unreliable service, dirty stations and accessibility gaps. But under acting CTA President Nora Leerhosen, there seems to be a renewed eagerness to listen to riders and aggressively pursue improvements in reliability, safety, cleanliness and modernization. Plans to improve stations across the system and expand 24-hour service on the Orange Line are encouraging examples of the kind of ambition Chicago needs more of.

But we cannot stop there. Chicago should have a world-class transit system. We need more dedicated bus lanes, including on Lake Shore Drive. We need cleaner, fully accessible stations. We need trains and buses that arrive frequently enough that riders do not have to plan their lives anticipating a 20-minute wait.

As one of the largest cities in the country, we should be leading on transit — not settling for second best. What we need now is the political courage to continue prioritizing transit and deliver real results.

— Nick Uniejewski, Chicago

A nightmare at rush hour

I moved to Chicago from California 45 years ago. One exciting thing Chicago is known for is its extensive public transportation system. Over the years, I have found that the transportation to the Loop is fabulous for shopping, classes and concerts, especially in the summertime.

I live on the South Side and depend on the CTA Jackson Park Express No. 6. Returning home in the evening is a nightmare! For every No. 6 bus, there may be two or three buses for other routes. No. 6 buses bunch up or become ghost buses — when a bus listed on the electronic tracker disappears. It can take 45 minutes to an hour to get a bus. When it finally arrives, the bus fills up on State Street, leaving riders at stops beyond State to face crowding or be left stranded. Patience is tried; tempers are frayed.

One year, I partnered with a person from the alderman's office to present these issues to the CTA board. Several board members acted as if this was new information. Others acknowledged the issues and promised solutions. We're still waiting.

As parking and gas prices soar, this prob-

lem needs to be addressed.

— Kathryn Williams, Chicago

Routine nastiness, delays

We have lived in Oak Park for 25 years and use the Green Line for trips to and from the city. We are certainly grateful that the CTA's Blue and Green lines are available from Oak Park. But we are frustrated with the gradual, continuous decline in our riding experience.

Most of my past 25 years on the CTA have been for trips as a commuter during busy commuter hours in the morning and evening. For the most part, all reliable and good, though occasionally, particularly during trips off-hours when ridership would fall off, the experience could be dicey with the train car almost empty and a rider shouting, swearing, smoking or even being threatening. But at least my wife and I did not think twice about getting on any car or riding any hour up to 10 p.m.

That has changed. Now that we're retired, most of our trips are during off-peak hours, and the experience is too often very unpleasant either because of nastiness of one kind or another or delays. There is a definite increase in riders who camp out, play loud music, are menacing, smoke, or walk back and forth selling products or asking for handouts and riders who shout, swear and intimidate.

In the past few weeks alone, we've witnessed a rider sound asleep with pants pulled down taking up virtually an entire row of seats, a rider walking back and forth muttering while covered in mucus, a rider sleeping on the floor, riders apparently on drugs falling over, loud music and smoking, and cars that smell awful for one reason or another.

This is routine stuff. Yes, routine. So we typically will board the first car of a train because we hope the presence of the driver of the train will deter bad behavior.

Then there are the constant delays due to ongoing track maintenance, switching problems and inexplicable "momentary" stops between stations that often exceed five minutes.

We are not naive enough to think these problems can be completely solved. But the situation needs to improve. Bad behavior has been normalized. Why don't security personnel patrol cars in pairs to address bad behavior?

Having a safe and reliable public transportation system is, of course, absolutely essential to maintain ridership and to ensure that Chicago thrives. So please, CTA, let's focus on making ridership a more consistent, pleasurable experience.

— Steven Gillman, Oak Park

Quick starts, hard stops

I take two buses to my job on Taylor Street four days a week. My biggest frustration is the way the operators literally jerk us around with the sudden hard stops. I don't dare get up to exit the bus until the bus has come to a complete stop.

I use a cane, and I am grateful for the operators who make sure I am seated before they start moving, but I sometimes feel like I am on a fast ride at an amusement park at each stop or red light.

— Maryann Cushing, Chicago

Embarrassed and seething

In considering my own frustrations with riding the CTA, I consistently come back to the incessant lack of basic manners evident on buses and trains. I have traveled around the world and am usually far more impressed with other countries' transit. Clean and efficient, with respectful riders. Whereas in my great city, I am often squirming with embarrassment or real frustration listening to people talking loudly on their phones. Eating their finger-staining orange snacks. Feet on seats. Young and able-bodied riders avoiding eye contact with seniors or pregnant moms rather than give up their seats. Streaming

social media with the volume turned up for all within 20 feet to hear.

The more one doesn't tune out, the more one can end up seething by the time they depart the offending bus or train. For the most part, CTA personnel act with grace and politeness, although the sour drivers can influence the riders' experiences as well. People, it's called respect. Lose the chip on your shoulder to make for a better trip. For all, including yourself. The quality of your trip can set a tone for the next part of your day and can shift the experience of commuting to something of which to be proud in our city.

— Jacqueline Roig, Chicago

Action on nuisance issues

As a senior, I stopped driving a few years ago. Since then, I have relied almost exclusively on the CTA or Metra for my transportation. Fortunately in my neighborhood (East Lakeview), CTA service is varied and frequent. I praise the CTA for the frequency of service (although it's frustrating when several buses in a row are no-shows). Also, the buses and trains are generally clean and comfortable.

Metra is more difficult, because I have to include additional time for most rides, to travel to Union Station (or Ogilvie) to take a train to the suburbs. Although my choices are more restricted, there is the possibility of travel. Public transportation in Chicago is very good.

My only real complaint, other than no-show buses, is smoking on trains. Frankly, a single smoker will stink up an entire car. Although the CTA is working to stop it, there is no real way for passengers to do anything except complain afterward. Some weeks ago, when my wife and I returned from the theater late one evening, we entered a CTA car that reeked of smoke. A person at the other end of the car was puffing away. At the next station, we changed cars. But it bothered me that there did not seem to be any way to notify authorities to stop the smoker and remove him from the train.

I called the CTA to ask what to do in that situation. The person responded that I could call the motorman on the train. But, as I noted, that might involve personal safety if someone in that car heard and then attacked me or my wife. The CTA person sympathized but was unable to offer any other suggestions.

A week or two later, I took Metra to a northern suburb. In the car was a bright yellow placard notifying passengers of telephone numbers to call in case of danger or violations. The placard included the telephone for Metra security. I immediately thought of my CTA experience. Wouldn't it be good to catch violators in the act and remove and/or arrest them? The threat of removal and/or arrest would at least make them more careful and might even stop them from smoking on the train. It's a change worth doing.

I hope CTA personnel will continue to be receptive to praise and criticism of its service, which as noted previously is generally very good.

— Frank L. Schneider, Chicago

Courteous workers, dirty buses

I give kudos to the CTA for its extensive network of buses and trains that allow users to get nearly anywhere in Chicago. And I have found CTA employees uniformly courteous. On the other hand, the cloth seats in many buses are filthy. Since I wear clean clothes, I have to search for the cleanest seat.

The CTA needs to do more to clean its buses.

— Jim Halas, Norridge

Bus arrival times on signs

A major frustration is the unreliability of bus arrival times on electronic signs on bus shelters. Often, a sign says a bus will arrive in 15 minutes; I get ready to hail a taxi, then

the bus arrives in five minutes. Or it says a bus is arriving in five minutes, and that suddenly jumps to 15 minutes.

Arrival times should be based on the bus's actual location and speed, not its scheduled time. Also, too often, signs announce, "Arrival times temporarily unavailable."

— Mike Wilensky, Chicago

Route a picture of neglect

I have always found CTA personnel to be courteous and helpful.

The Blue Line from the West Side to the medical district announces neglect. The CTA right-of-way is strewn with trash and litter. Discarded tires, auto parts and abandoned construction debris litter the route. There are piles of accumulated trash stashed underneath the road overpasses. Check out the pile of garbage at the northeast entrance to the Central Street tunnel.

— William Kinnaird, Oak Park

We need 'strolling' conductors

For many years, the CTA has provided wonderful elevated train service for countless commuters to and from downtown Chicago, for which I've been grateful during my working years. Now that I'm retired, I wish I could still ride the "L" occasionally, but I won't. Ever since COVID-19, the violent crime rate has escalated on the "L." I would like to see the CTA reinstate the "strolling" conductors they used for safe transportation many, many years ago; crime then was low. The conductors would continuously walk back and forth through each car from one end of the train to the other throughout the entire ride.

I believe knowing that a transit official (having a direct line to law enforcement) may show up in your train car at any moment would discourage much of the criminal activity now taking place on the train.

— Laurie Winkelman, Chicago

Make sure everyone pays

I'm an avid rider of our region's transit network. I think the CTA, Metra and Pace are assets that set us apart from so many other American cities. Of course, there's always room for improvement. We also each have a responsibility to be good stewards of our public assets, transit prime among them. That includes paying your fair share to cover the costs of a system that benefits us all.

I boil every time I ride the bus and see young people mumble something to the driver then walk past the farebox paying nothing. We're failing if we can't impress upon our young people that benefits come with responsibility, including paying your reduced fare to ride the bus.

— Derrick James, Chicago

Run in mind-boggling way

At 8:23 p.m. one evening, I walked to wait for the No. 49 bus on Western Avenue at North Avenue, after watching the last one drive by Western and Hirsch Street at 8:03 six minutes early as I was approaching, hoping to have a better chance at a major intersection.

Here's what I encountered at this corner: On the digital sign, "Arrival information temporarily unavailable." And on the metal sign, the location to text 4141 for information — with it scratched out on both sides.

Finally, two buses show up at 8:30 p.m. How does anyone get to where they're going on time, if at all? It's truly mind-boggling that someone is getting paid to run this bonedoggle of a transportation system.

— Avis Crasko, Chicago

Notes to readers

The Obama Presidential Center is opening on June 19. Do you have memories of former President Barack Obama you'd like to share? (Sincere thoughts only.) Send a letter of no more than 400 words by Thursday, June 11 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name and city/town.

COMMENT & FEATURES

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Mafia politics

The election of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's personal attorney, Michael Rabello, by the Knesset as Israel's new state comptroller represents everything wrong with Israeli politics today.

And that is not because of Rabello. Netanyahu's attorney has been described by others as a pleasant man and a talented lawyer who has earned the respect of many within Israel's legal system.

Whether he is qualified for the role is ultimately beside the point – the problem is not necessarily the man who won the position, but the manner in which he was elected.

The state comptroller is one of the most important watchdogs in Israeli public life. The State Comptroller's Office oversees the integrity and functioning of government institutions, audits ministries and public bodies, investigates failures, and publishes reports that can shape public debate and drive reforms.

The comptroller is entrusted with broad access to documents and information precisely because the office serves as an independent check on those in power. That independence is crucial to the comptroller's ability to carry out their job.

Recognizing the importance of the position, Israeli law requires the comptroller to be elected through a secret ballot in the Knesset. This is done to preserve the integrity of the vote, protect lawmakers from coercion, and allow them to exercise independent judgment free from political pressure.

Yet, reports that coalition lawmakers were required to film themselves voting for Netanyahu's preferred candidate effectively turned a secret ballot into a loyalty test.

The argument heard in defense of the fiasco was that lawmakers have the right to document their own vote, even if doing so compromises the secrecy of the ballot.

The real challenge, supporters argue, would be proving that such documentation was done at the demand of Likud, a claim denied by the coalition.

However, it is difficult to imagine any other scenario in which so many coalition MKs would independently decide to record themselves casting their ballots.

Among some of the coalition's supporters, this has largely been dismissed as a clever work-around, or a "creative solution," to ensure Netanyahu's preferred outcome. But the logic is dangerous.

If the principle of ballot secrecy can be so casually discarded when it becomes politically inconvenient, what other democratic safeguards might someday be treated as obstacles to be circumvented rather than protections to be preserved?

This episode reflects a culture that has increasingly taken hold in Israeli politics, particularly within Netanyahu's coalition.

The expectation is not that lawmakers think for themselves, but that they fall in line – making the Knesset no more than a rubber stamp for the prime minister.

And while coalition discipline is a normal feature of parliamentary politics, there is a vast difference between party discipline and demanding proof of loyalty in a vote specifically designed to be shielded from pressure.

The comparison many Israelis have made is uncomfortable, but understandable. A coalition run like a mafia – based on fear, personal loyalty, and proof of allegiance – cannot properly serve the public interest because its first priority is protecting the leader, not the country.

In the aftermath of the vote, Yashar! head MK Gadi Eisenkot penned an open letter to Rabello, calling on him to refuse the role due to the nature of the election process.

"You were chosen through a dictatorial process that challenged Israeli democracy and was led by a prime minister who does not enjoy the public's trust and sees himself as above the rule of law," Eisenkot wrote on X/Twitter. "If you have even a shred of morality and values, you should immediately announce that you are unwilling to accept the position."

Whether Rabello accepts the position or not is ultimately secondary. The real scandal is that a secret became an exercise in proving loyalty to the prime minister.

The degradation of Israeli politics is rarely captured in a single image.

This time, it may have been captured in dozens of videos recorded behind the curtain of a voting booth that was supposed to guarantee freedom of choice.

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A DEMONSTRATOR is detained during a protest held by haredi Jews against pressure to conscript their community into the IDF, last week. (Ammar Awad/Reuters)

Serving is not equal

Israel's two-tiered war economy

• By MENACHEM MENDLE REINITZ

Last March, the Israeli government passed its largest budget in history. Buried in the fine print, approved at midnight, through a parliamentary trick so effective that opposition lawmakers accidentally voted for it, was NIS 800 million in fresh funding for yeshivas and ultra-Orthodox institutions. For those who have not served a single day in the IDF or Reserves, and whose communities received NIS 2.2 billion in coalition funds in that same budget cycle.

The same week as that vote, a 23-year-old engineering student, returning from his fifth rotation in reserves, found himself falling behind as the classes had moved on without him. His reservist compensation? NIS 311 a day, the legal minimum. His tax benefit? Barely worth the form he filed to claim it. This is not just a moral failure. It is an economic one. And it deserves to be called what it is: a system that taxes the future to subsidize inaction.

Israel's hi-tech sector is the backbone of the state. It accounts for 17% of GDP and 57% of exports, and drives the country's global competitiveness. The government's own Inter-Ministerial Committee on High-Tech called technological education "Our Iron Dome." Without a continuous pipeline of engineers and scientists, the pipes can break, and what we see now is.

That pipeline is cracking. Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, which trains roughly a third of Israel's engineers, warned that hundreds of its students risk graduating a year late. From just their university. Multiply that across several major institutions and 70,000 student-reservists, and the scale becomes clear.

The Israel Innovation Authority found the hi-tech workforce shrank for the first time in a decade in

2025. Junior candidates now have a 5% chance of landing a tech job. Not because the sector is declining, but because the people who would want to get the job are exhausted from reserves, busy catching up with their studies, or gone abroad.

Between 2023 and 2024, roughly 90,000 Israelis left the country. And they're, for the most part, young, educated, and secular, the same demographic that is serving and fighting. Tel Aviv University researchers warned the trend could trigger a brain drain comparable to those that hollowed out Venezuela and South Africa. Nobel laureate Aaron Ciechanover called it an existential threat.

So what does the Israeli government offer? A compensation system that rewards the reservists with a tax credit, the headline benefit, is worth NIS 242 per credit point per month. For a senior tech employee earning NIS 30,000 a month, this is great. Yet for a student earning NIS 4,000 to 5,000 from a part-time job, which most student-reservists do, it barely registers. The State Comptroller confirmed that 57% of student-reservists received only minimum compensation.

The Finance Committee chairman admitted the original bill "discriminated against lower earners." The government's answer to years of interrupted studies and financial loss was a digital wallet capped at NIS 5,000, usable only for government fees or leisure.

The more you earned before the war, the more the state gives back. The younger and less established you are, the more you lose and the less you receive. In IPE terms, this is a misallocation of human capital at the national level. A state that draws its most productive future workers from the education system for years, undercompensates them, and then watches them leave is consuming its own foundations.

And while student-reservists filed for credits they

could barely use, the Knesset approved, in the same budget and session, NIS 1.56 billion for yeshivas whose students are legally required to serve but do not.

The Bank of Israel estimated that haredi non-enlistment costs the economy NIS 9 billion annually. Each month of reserve duty costs NIS 50,000 per soldier in lost output, NIS 660 million every single week. That burden falls almost entirely on the secular, working, tax-paying population already doing the serving.

FINANCE MINISTER Minister Bezalel Smotrich said of the reservist benefits law: "Those who contribute more, receive more." He signed both bills.

This contradiction is not subtle. It is a political economy that extracts sacrifice from one group, rewards another for its absence, and counts on patriotism to keep this injustice quiet.

With elections due by October 2026, this should be the defining issue. Polls show that 60% of voters, including former coalition supporters, say the draft exemption is a dealbreaker. The people being failed most – young, overemployed – are the same people being asked to vote for another term of the same government.

Every reservist who leaves Israel to work abroad takes years of state investment with them.

Every yeshiva funded by young reservists and students is a bet against Israel's future.

The government likes to say that Israel's strength is its people. It is time to govern like that is actually true. Go out and vote!

The writer is a lone soldier and *oleh* who moved to Israel 8 years ago. He is an active Israeli special forces reservist, having served nearly 400 days of reserve duty since October 7, and a 3rd-year Government student in the Argov Fellows program in Leadership and Diplomacy at Reichman University's International School.

Haredim and antisemitism

• By ARI TATARKA

There is antisemitism for its own sake and a huge lie in the story of the ultra-Orthodox," declared Dudi Amsalem, the Likud minister for Regional Cooperation, at a conference in May.

It is hardly an original take when the head of the United Torah Judaism party accuses a political rival of antisemitism; most Israelis hardly bat an eye. Perhaps if Likud ministers are leveling the accusation, it warrants a serious assessment.

It is undeniable that political depictions of the haredim (ultra-Orthodox) occasionally dip into the bucket of antisemitic tropes. Haredim contributors have referred to specific sects as "parasites," and TV personality Galit Gutman notoriously labeled them "bloodsuckers" on live TV.

As the most visibly Jewish community in Israel, haredim face a reality mirrored on the streets of Brooklyn and London: those who look the "most Jewish" are often the most targeted. Haredim have even been victims of hate crimes. In one infamous case last year, a haredi couple near an anti-government demonstration in Tel Aviv were physically assaulted due to their appearance.

The defense that Israel is a Jewish state provides no immunity. There is a plethora of historical evidence to testify that Jews have never been immune from Jew-hatred by dint of heritage.

Yet, despite these flashes of bigotry, anti-haredi rhetoric is fundamentally distinct from antisemitism, and treating it as such concedes haredim much more than a narrative of victimhood.

Antisemitism generally operates through two lenses: the conspiracy, which frames Jews as disproportionately powerful; and the bigotry, which asserts they are inherently inferior or biologically

inferior. Few in Israel believe in the existence of a cabal like the Elders of Zion, and fewer still believe that if it existed, it would manipulate the country from using kosher phones.

The accusation is firmly of the second type that Israelis harbor antisemitic bigotry, what Isaiah Berlin described as "hating Jews more than is necessary."

Therefore, the question must be asked: What is it, inherently, about haredi Jewishness that so infuriates their critics?

Take what is perhaps the most cited statistic in Israeli public discourse: the NIS 15,000 gap between the average haredi and non-haredi family's contribution to the state. Or consider the widespread fury over the refusal to serve in the IDF. Notice what is absent from both of these grievances? Any inherently Jewish element.

To test this, let's substitute the haredim with an entirely different demographic group. Suppose secular Ashkenazi Jews occupied this exact socio-economic position, maintaining this same rejection of civic duty as a conscious, collective lifestyle choice.

What would society call them? I imagine "parasites" would be one of the milder labels used, their devout commitment to secularism and heritage notwithstanding.

While there may very well be some anti-religious sentiment mixed into the public outrage, that does not equate to antisemitism. The hostility has nothing to do with the particularities of Jewish practice itself; it is a reaction to a civic imbalance. The ultimate proof? Neither this intensity of opposition, nor these supposedly antisemitic tropes, are ever weaponized against Religious Zionists.

Ultimately, labeling mainstream Israeli criticism as "antisemitism" betrays a much deeper

ideological pathology within the haredi worldview.

First, it assumes their specific lifestyle is completely synonymous with Judaism itself, granting them an absolute monopoly on authentic Jewish expression. This monopoly warps their understanding of the draft and of Israeli society.

In their worldview, the state isn't demanding they serve out of a basic need for civic equality. Rather, as Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch of the hardline Badatz (Edu Haredit Rabbinical Court) recently claimed, secular Israelis see the haredi brand of authentic Judaism and are "fiercely jealous of us."

Second, and more profoundly, weaponizing the charge of antisemitism fundamentally denies the nature of the Jewish state. By branding their tax-paying, military-serving Jewish neighbors as antisemites, haredi leadership rhetorically excommunicates the rest of the country.

It signals a refusal to accept the reality of a sovereign Jewish society, choosing instead to operate as if they are living in an alien, hostile diaspora where the "outside world" and "antisemitic persecutor" are one and the same.

Policing the language of secular critics will not solve the underlying friction. This tension is not born of an irrational pathology or anti-Jewish bigotry; it is the unavoidable result of mathematically unsustainable socio-economic realities.

Coddling the haredi narrative of victimhood does nothing to fix the problem – it only legitimizes the distorted worldview that is driving the crisis in the first place.

The writer serves as the English director of the Ribco Center and the editor of Amit Segal's newsletter, It's Noon in Israel.

We get the society we are willing to tolerate

• By COOKIE SCHWAEBER-ISSAN

The well-known expression, "You get the government you deserve," can also be applied to the type of atmosphere allowed by a society.

When people voted into office fail to take immediate action as protests spill into anarchy, disrupting even emergency services from operating, or when law enforcement is stoned, that's the time to realize that a normal society has been hijacked and replaced by anarchy.

This is the madness that's taken over the country, whose destiny is supposed to be a "light to the nations." And who is creating all of this chaos? None other than those who believe they possess a superior moral character, by virtue of their religiously observant lifestyle.

Sadly, their claim does not back up their actions. As they disrupt the peace that orders our everyday lives by blocking traffic and rioting, there is nothing even close to resembling exemplary behavior, of which they are so fond of assuming ownership.

When police officers and innocent citizens end up being injured by stone-throwing, enraged, and rebellious hoodlums who disavow the laws of our land, it's time to acknowledge that the authority, meant to be held by our law enforcement, has been forcibly seized.

But it's not just stone throwing. How can any Jew utter the words, "kill the Jews," no matter how frustrated they are by the moral obligation, enacted as law, prioritizing saving the lives of our citizens over religious duty, which will only be temporarily placed on hold?

Are we to believe that serving for three years precludes Torah study for a lifetime?

Have these rioting haredim (ultra-Orthodox), who claim to love their holiest book,



HAREDI PROTESTERS arrested during an overnight demonstration outside a police station in the city of Beit Shmesh arrive for a remand hearing at the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court, last week. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)

containing the words of Moses, decided that portions such as Deuteronomy 20:1-4, which say, "The Lord your God is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies to save you and bring you victory," should be excised?

Or do we simply think that what was written 4,000 years ago is no longer applicable?

What occurred last week in Jerusalem, at the Bar Ilan intersection, classified as a riot rather than a lawful protest, is a disgusting display of perversion, both as it relates to the lack of moral character by so-called men of faith, whose rage physically injured others, as well as an affront to

God Himself.

Have these Torah students not yet read the Sanhedrin 85a portion of the Talmud, which gives a universal prohibition against hitting or physically injuring any person? What about Leviticus 25:17, which states, "You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God."

What exactly are these religious institutions teaching the young men who have enough boundless energy to fight the laws that govern a country that is fraught with existential threats, to the point of total destruction? Where would those studies be held if yeshivas are no more?

While police responded by saying, "We

will not allow a blatant violation of public order while harming freedom of movement, and we will act resolutely to restore order," why are they not confronting the ringleaders of such riots?

Why are they not insisting that the prime minister and his coalition do something about this, reminding them that this is a disgraceful stain upon a country meant to be the vehicle for world redemption?

None of this is fitting in any way and is tantamount to airing one's dirty laundry in public. Nevertheless, our leaders continue to vote for funding the study of these young men, all on the financial back of Israel's citizens and at the expense of the real heroes, some of whom selflessly spend more than a year in reserve duty to make up for the obvious lack.

SADLY, OUR leaders are actually the ones facilitating the chaos and moral bankruptcy to which our society is being subjected. Coalition members, who ignore all of this anarchy, are complicit in any physical injuries that ensue, as well as any who might inadvertently die for lack of being able to access timely medical attention, due to blocked highways.

Any prime minister who professes to be the captain of this ship, hoping to steer it into calm waters, in order to protect its boarded passengers, would not, for one moment, endanger the lives of those under his care by setting sail in the midst of a raging storm.

But that is exactly what is happening. The people of Israel, already experiencing the ferocity of countless outside enemies, are in desperate need of standing together as a unified cluster, able to take on whatever comes their way.

What they especially do not need now is a devastating internal whirlwind that will endanger the country, unable to with-

stand the fractures and divisions that tear apart populations, rendering them crippled and wounded.

Yet this is our destined trajectory if a segment of society continues to disregard the law while still receiving financial support, due to the inaction of its leaders who, for political considerations, will not do the right thing.

There is no way that an ethical and just society can survive this kind of abuse by scoffers of God and man's law. Also implicit within their refusal to do as commanded in the Torah – to fight our enemies, is the tacit admission that God will truly not hand over the victory as He promised!

What does that say for those who claim to be the most pious among us, that they have no faith in God's words or rely upon Him as their protector? Those young men and women who put their lives on the line daily for all of us, including the yeshiva *bochurs* (students), actually display more courage and conviction by realizing that a nation that will not defend itself is not worth saving.

They, consequently, choose to pay the price of temporarily putting their lives on hold for a few years, so that the Zionist dream can continue – the one for which we waited 2,000 years to achieve.

At a time when the Jewish homeland is being attacked on seven fronts, not to mention the growing worldwide antisemitism that is metastasizing at a fast and furious pace, this is not the time for Israeli leaders to allow its society to rot from the inside.

If they do, then aren't we all guilty of tolerating the intolerable?

The writer is a former Jerusalem elementary and middle school principal. She is the author of *Mistake-Proof Parenting*, available on Amazon, based on the time-tested wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs.

From my watchtower in Jerusalem, I am still watching New York

• By SHMUEL LEGESSE

As I wrote before, when I first arrived in New York from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, democracy smelled like roasted nuts and subway dust. It was loud, imperfect, argumentative, and gloriously alive. For a young Ethiopian Jew who had grown up under dictatorship, New York represented something sacred: the belief that people from every background could belong.

That is why, from my watchtower in Jerusalem, I watched this year's Israel Day Parade with both pride and disappointment. Pride because more than 100,000 people gathered to celebrate their connection to Israel, its people, its culture, and its enduring place in Jewish life.

Disappointment because New York's mayor, Zohran Mamdani, chose not to be there. His absence was not merely a scheduling decision. It was a statement. For the first time since the parade's founding in 1964, New York's mayor chose not to attend one of the most significant public celebrations of the Jewish community in America's largest city. That matters.

The issue is not whether one supports the current Israeli government. Israelis themselves disagree passionately about their government. Jews around the world disagree passionately about Israeli politics. Criticizing the government of Israel is not only legitimate; it is practically a national sport among Israelis.

But the Israel Day Parade has never been primarily about a government. It is about a people. It is about a homeland. It is about the connection between the Jewish people and the State of Israel. There is a profound difference between opposing a government's policies and refusing to stand with a community celebrating its identity. That distinction appears to have been lost.

At a moment when antisemitism is rising across America, Jewish communities are looking to public officials for reassurance. They want to know that their leaders stand with them, that their fears are taken seriously, and that they are not alone.

Instead, many Jewish New Yorkers watched their mayor stay away from an event that generations of city leaders considered important enough to attend regardless of political differences. The message received by many Jews was simple: When your community gathers in celebration, your mayor is absent.

Leadership is not only about showing up for communities when it is politically convenient. Leadership is about showing up when it is politically difficult.

Mamdani's supporters will argue that his absence reflects disagreement with the policies of the Israeli government. That explanation misses the point. The parade was not a vote on a coalition government in Jerusalem. It was not a referendum on military policy. It was not a campaign rally. It was a celebration of Israel and the Jewish people's connection to it.

Many of the people marching likely disagree with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Many likely voted differently in Israeli elections. Many hold sharply different political views. Yet they marched together with their local neighbors because their connection to Israel transcends political parties. The mayor's

absence demonstrated a failure to understand this distinction. There are moments when symbolism matters. This was one of them.

When a mayor attends a Puerto Rican Day Parade, he is not endorsing every decision made by the government of Puerto Rico. When a mayor attends an Irish parade, he is not endorsing every policy adopted in Dublin. He is standing with his constituents. That is what true leaders/mayors do.

THE QUESTION many Jewish New Yorkers are now asking is why their community was treated differently. The answer may be uncomfortable.

Too often, progressive leaders speak about diversity while excluding Jewish experiences from their understanding of diversity. Too often, they celebrate minority identities while treating Jewish identity as politically complicated. Jews are welcomed as long as Israel is not mentioned. The moment Israel enters the conversation, standards suddenly change.

The solution is not outrage. The solution is clarity. Public officials must understand that standing with Jewish communities is not the same thing as endorsing every policy of the Israeli government. One can criticize a government and still stand with a people. One can disagree with policies and still show solidarity. One can debate politics and still attend a parade.

In fact, that is what democratic leadership requires. The next generation of leaders must learn that distinction. If they cannot separate a government from a people, they will continue alienating communities they claim to represent. That is why Jews around the world come out to rallies and public gatherings in support of the people of Iran, not any government. Governments change; leaders come and go. But our bond with the people is permanent.

Ironically, Mamdani may have accomplished the opposite of what he intended. His absence reminded Jewish New Yorkers why solidarity matters and that support cannot be taken for granted. It reminded them that there are moments when communities must stand together regardless of their political disagreements – others refuse to stand with us, we stand closer to one another.

From Jerusalem, I watched New York celebrate Israel without its mayor. I saw families marching, children waving flags, Holocaust survivors walking proudly, and ordinary citizens expressing their connection to the Jewish homeland. The parade continued. The people showed up. The community endured. The mayor's absence may become a historical footnote, but the lesson remains. There is a difference between criticizing a government and distancing oneself from a people.

New York's mayor had an opportunity to demonstrate that he understood that distinction. By staying away, he demonstrated that many Jewish New Yorkers were right to question whether he does.

The author is a former NYC Supreme Court detective, an investigator and educator in conflict resolution and restorative peace, and a moral diplomacy expert. His upcoming book, *Moral Diplomacy for a Broken World*, is inspired by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

Should Zionist educators teach the Nakba?

LIVING THE DREAM

• By URI PILICHOWSKI

In the charged classrooms where young Zionists form their understanding of Israel, one question now demands courage: Should we teach the Nakba?

The answer is yes. Not because the Palestinian narrative is true, but precisely because it is not. When we confront the events of 1948 with honesty, acknowledging real pain while refusing to distort the moral record, we strengthen the next generation rather than shield it.

The Nakba, Arabic for "catastrophe," refers to the displacement of roughly 700,000 Arabs during Israel's War of Independence. Anti-Israel voices present this as the inevitable result of Zionist aggression: a premeditated ethnic cleansing that stains Israel's birth. That version is false. The truth is more complex, more human, and far more defensible.

In 1947, the Jewish leadership accepted the UN Partition Plan, despite its painful compromises. Arab leaders rejected it outright and launched a war of annihilation. If there had been no war, there would have been no displacement.

Once the fighting began, Arabs fled for three primary reasons. The majority left out of fear, as battle lines shifted; many departed on the explicit advice or orders of local Arab leaders, who cleared villages so their armies could operate freely; and in a smaller number of cases, Israeli forces expelled populations from strategic areas during active combat.

These were wartime decisions, not a systematic policy of expulsion. Historians who have examined the records closely, including Benny Morris in his early work, confirm that the overwhelming majority of departures occurred before major Israeli offensives, and often preceded them.

We must never flinch from the human cost. Hundreds of thousands lost homes, orchards, and the familiar rhythms of daily life. That grief is real. As Sandy Tolun captured in his book *The Lemon Tree*, for one Palestinian family, the dream of return became "what everyone talked about, all the time. In exile, there was little else worth dreaming of." Any educator worthy of the name will pause to let students feel that longing. Empathy is not weakness; it is the mark of moral seriousness. But empathy without context becomes surrender.

THE DEIR YASSIN episode illustrates the danger of narrative over fact. On April 9, 1948, Irgun and Lehi (the Stern Group) fighters attacked the village. What exactly happened remains disputed even today. Some accounts describe a brutal battle with civilians being killed in the crossfire; Arab leaders quickly inflated the story into tales of mass rape and mutilation.

Whatever the precise truth – and decades later, we cannot know every detail with certainty – the exaggerated horror stories were broadcast widely and deliberately. They terrified neighboring villages into flight, accelerating the exodus. Panic, once sown, proved more powerful than any Israeli order.

Broader context matters deeply. In 1948, there was no sovereign Palestinian state to "lose." The Arabs of the region did not see themselves as a separate Palestinian nation; their identity was largely pan-Arab, often oriented toward Damascus. "Palestine" was a geographic label, not a national one. Jews living under the British Mandate were also called Palestinians. Five Arab armies invaded the newborn Jewish state the day after its declaration. Israel, just three years after the Holocaust, lost nearly 6,400 lives, fully one percent of its Jewish population, in a fight for bare survival.

THE CONTRAST with Jewish refugees is instructive and rarely taught. Roughly 850,000 Jews were expelled from Arab lands in the years following 1948, their property seized, their communities destroyed. Israel absorbed them. They received

no UN agency dedicated to perpetuating their refugee status. There was no Jewish "Nakba" industry. These Jewish refugees built new lives.

The Palestinian experience diverged tragically, largely because of UNRWA (the UN Relief and Works Agency). Created in 1949 for temporary relief, UNRWA did something unprecedented: it passed refugee status to all descendants, swelling numbers into the millions.

Unlike the UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), which works to resettle and normalize refugees, UNRWA has kept Palestinians suspended in permanent grievance, nourished by the false promise of "return," which would mean the demographic destruction of Israel. That policy helped incubate the ideology that exploded during the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led massacre.

Some thoughtful voices in our community argue against teaching the Nakba. They worry, with reason, that even mentioning the term legitimizes a hostile framing designed to portray Israel's birth as an original sin. They rightly note that classroom time is precious; better to focus on the miracle of Jewish return, the heroism of 1948, and Israel's extraordinary achievements. Why dwell on Arab suffering when so much Jewish history goes untaught?

These concerns are serious. Yet silence carries greater risk. Today's students swim in a sea of anti-Israel content, from social media, university campuses, and parts of the international media. If we leave the Nakba untouched, the first time they encounter it will likely come wrapped in accusations of Israeli monstrosity. That initial, unchallenged

exposure can corrode trust in everything else we teach. Intellectual honesty demands we meet the question on our terms.

When we do teach it, the framework must be clear and unflinching. Acknowledge the Arab pain, present the three causes of Arab displacement, and contextualize Deir Yassin. It is important to stress that no Palestinian nation-state was lost. The Arab responsibility for launching the war must be highlighted.

Contrast the refugee outcomes between Arab refugees from Israel, and Jewish refugees from Arab lands. Educators must drive home the central truth: Had Arab leaders chosen peace and partition in 1947-48, there would have been no refugees and no catastrophe. Responsibility cannot be wished away by victimhood. Pro-Israel education has nothing to fear from the full story, when it is properly told. On the contrary, it emerges stronger.

Students who learn this version of 1948 develop both moral imagination and intellectual resilience. They learn to hold two truths at once: that displacement brought genuine suffering, and that suffering was the direct consequence of a war their side started and lost. They become equipped to defend Israel not with slogans, but with clarity, empathy, and unapologetic moral confidence.

In an age of propaganda, the greatest service we can offer Zionist students is not protection from difficult history, but preparation to face it. Teach the Nakba. Teach it truthfully. Our children, and Israel's future, will be better for it.

The writer is a Zionist educator at institutions around the world. He recently published the book *Zionism Today*.



ISRAELI RIGHT-WING activists demonstrate next to Arab Israeli and left-wing activist students during a rally marking the anniversary of the Nakba at Tel Aviv University, last month. (Jamal Awad/Flash90)

Robots are learning your job – in the kitchen

• By NILESH CHRISTOPHER

Fernando Flores can spend eight hours a day pouring the same cup of coffee. He is not a barista. He's a robot puppeteer, trying to train humanoid.

He manipulates mechanical controllers to make nearby robot arms pick up a pot of coffee, pour it into a mug, and put the pot back in the coffee maker. Flores checks for spills, then empties the mug back into the pot by hand and does it again – hundreds of times.

"The repetitiveness, it can cause some discomfort," said Flores, who has the title of senior robotic pilot at San Francisco start-up Encord. "It becomes second nature after a while."

This Sisyphus of Silicon Valley is on the front lines of a rapidly expanding industry of robot trainers, preparing to teach and operate the army of humanoid robots scheduled to march out of nearby factories in the coming year. Encord practices, records, and sells data about movement to the companies racing to bring humanoids to homes, offices, and factories.

If tech companies' optimistic plans are to be believed, a swarm of American-built robots is about to hit the market.

Tesla's Fremont factory stopped car production this year to make way for production lines for its Optimus robots, with unbelievable plans to ramp up capacity to 1 million units a year. Palo Alto-based 1X Technologies is already manufacturing its 30 kg, 168 cm humanoid named Neo at its factory in Hayward. The company received 10,000 preorders, and its first shipment is expected later this year. Figure AI's humanoid factory in San Jose has increased its manufacturing capacity to produce one Figure 03 robot an hour, to produce 12,000 a year.



A ROBOT makes coffee during the World Intelligence Expo in Tianjin in 2024. (Pedro Pardo/AFP via Getty Images)

Goldman Sachs projects the global market for humanoids could reach \$38 billion by 2035.

The AI of these humanoid robots needs an immense amount of data on human movement. How humans write, speak, code, and compose was easily scraped off the internet, but the bots need more information to master how to stand, step, lift, squeeze, pour, and perform other physical movements. That is where companies like Encord come in.

The \$10b. invested in robotics in 2026, according to CB Insights, have spawned an industry focused on training robots. Initially, that meant humans strapping iPhones to their foreheads, recording actions like cooking, cleaning, and performing household

chores. That, however, doesn't capture the exact torque, force and grip required for a robot hand to work flawlessly.

Now, humans are directly guiding robots through expensive rigs that let them control the robots' movements. Data collected using robot arms offers richer insights into motor skills and object manipulation. Encord charges clients up to \$1,000 per hour for training data.

The information gathered from trainers controlling robots is "super important to bridge the next level of learning," where robots will learn to correct mistakes and do the chores on their own, said Vineeth Velmurugan, head of robotics learning at Encord.

The company is already working with some of the top companies in robotics, but

said it couldn't share most names. Among the clients it could mention were Toyota Research Institute and Weave, which already has laundry-folding robots in a few homes.

Many of the new robotic data companies are focusing on industrial use cases. Robots can perform better in a structured, predictable environment, like a factory or warehouse.

Home tasks are tougher, as layouts and tasks are more varied and messy. While many bots have mastered walking, they still struggle to open doors, fridges, and washing machines smoothly. They don't know where or how to grasp a doorknob, handle, or door edge, or how much pulling, pushing, or twisting force to apply.

FLORES HAS mastered making the robot arms pour coffee, but he still often spills. When that happens, he deletes records of the attempt. "Typically, we don't want any mistakes," he said. "If we have more than three consecutive mistakes within a 15-second window, that's not going to be good data."

Inside Encord's test facility in Hayward, it has replicated a standard home with a fully furnished living room, kitchen and bathroom.

In the living room, a pilot rearranges an untidy study desk. She first scatters AA-size batteries, pens, and scissors on the table and walks back to the nearby control rig to make the robot arms place each one inside the tray of a desk organizer.

Depending on the day's

training, the pilots could be opening and closing refrigerator doors, whisking liquids in a bowl, sorting silverware or turning a water faucet on and off over and over until the robot arms get it right.

In another corner of the facility, people wearing smart glasses place and pick up playing cards and sort plastic plates by hand, collecting first-person videos.

One key skill for the coming bot invasion: plugging in cables.

Companies want robots that can crawl into duct spaces, identify ports and plug cables to help build the massive data centers needed for AI. Encord replicated a real data center server rack, where an operator inserts blue cables into penny-sized sockets all day.

Many companies have entered this business. Meta-backed Scale AI and Palo Alto-based Micro1 are major players in the space. China has more than 40 state-owned robot data-collection facilities where hundreds of on-site humans mimic train bots on how to move in the real world.

In Watertown, Massachusetts, Tutor Intelligence has set up a 100-robot facility dedicated to harvesting movement data. Its robot arms, which are being trained to do factory work, are controlled by a human team split across Mexico, the Philippines, and Boston. This is in part to train its robot, Sonny, which will hit the market later this year.

"We built the Data Factory to bootstrap the initial intelligence for the Sonny robot, so that we can begin to deploy Sonny into the field," said Josh Gruenstein, co-founder of Tutor. Ten of its remote operators are based in Boston, and the rest are international.

Remote operation is emerging as an integral part of the humanoid robot business. Employing teleoperators in countries where wages are

much lower than in the US could, in theory, mean a robot controlled by a human in another country could do a task at a fraction of the cost of having an American do it.

This month, a humanoid robot cleaning service in San Francisco called Gatsby completed a robot cleaning of a US home using a teleoperator in Mexico.

The technology is still evolving, said Aron Frishberg, co-founder of Gatsby, but being a first mover means Gatsby is getting more training.

"There's obviously stuff that goes wrong," he said. "It's really hard to get precise hand movements or arm movements and grab something."

Encord co-founder Ulrik Hansen said it will be setting up a teleoperations center in its Hayward facility in the next three months. Even as more robots are deployed and master increasingly sophisticated tasks, they will still need humans to occasionally take control remotely.

"They will need some exception handling when they get things wrong," he said.

Hundreds of teleoperators will learn where the system succeeds, where it breaks, and step in when needed. Once those patterns emerge, Hansen said, they can move teleoperations to cheaper locations abroad or to the Midwest.

Back in Hayward, Flores created new coffee-pouring challenges for his robot arms. He changed what was on the counter around the coffee maker and moved the mug to different spots. It takes a lot of know-how to puppet and train a robot, he said.

"A lot of people would [guess] this might be easy; this is dumb," Flores said. "There actually is thought here. There actually is critical thinking."

(Los Angeles Times/TNS)

Telling the story as it is



GRAPEVINE

• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

NOTED ITALIAN journalist Maurizio Molinari has joined the faculty of the Sammy Ofer School of Communication at Reichman University. A controversial editor and reporter, well-known throughout Europe with an impressive history of working for Italy's leading newspapers, he will teach a course in communications and democracy – a subject that cost him his position as editor of *La Repubblica*. After the October 7 massacre by Hamas, when so much of the world became anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian, Molinari examined the complexities of war and its effects on both sides and public opinion. He was violently criticized and was generally perceived as being a spokesman for Israel, as a result of which, he was deprived of his position.

Although his popularity has faded in the increasingly anti-Zionist Italian environment, Molinari is extremely welcome at Reichman, where a reception held in his honor was attended by Italian Ambassador Luca Ferrari, Reichman faculty members and students from the university's Raphael Recanati International School, including Italian students who are enrolled there.

Ferrari spoke of the long-standing relations between Italy and Israel and underscored the importance of academic cooperation in bolstering mutual understanding.

Molinari focused on the impact of artificial intelligence on media, politics, and society and emphasized the challenges of democratic societies in safeguarding basic values and freedoms.

UKRAINIAN-BORN billionaire philanthropist Sir Leonard Blavatnik, who shares a June 14 birthday with US President Donald Trump, supports numerous projects and initiatives in the US, UK, and Israel. Among his Israel projects is the Blavatnik Awards to Young Scientists, which were presented last week at a festive ceremony in Jaffa at the Peres Center for Peace and Innovation.

Three young scientists, Sergey N. Semenov, from the Weizmann Institute of Science in the category of Chemical Sciences; Uri Ben-David, from Tel Aviv University in Life Sciences; and Paz Beniamini, from the Open University of Israel in Physical Sciences & Engineering, were each awarded \$100,000 in recognition of their groundbreaking research.

In addition to British Ambassador Simon Walters, the awards ceremony was attended by prominent figures from Israel's sci-

entific, academic, and industrial communities, including Chairman of the board of directors of Clalit Health Services Yochanan Locker; Nvidia CTO Michael Kagan; Israeli businessman and founder of Melanox Technologies Eyal Waldman; President of The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities Prof. David Harel; former president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities Prof. Nili Cohen, President of The Open University of Israel Prof. Leo Corry; President and CEO of the New York Academy of Sciences Prof. Nicholas Dirks; President of Access Entertainment Danny Cohen; Founder and CEO of Clalit Industries Avi Fischer; CEO of Golf Co Eyal Greenberg; former CEO of the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center - Ichilov Prof. Gabi Barbash; CEO of ClalTech Daniel Shinar; and Director of the Blavatnik Interdisciplinary Cyber Research Center in Tel-Aviv University Isaac Ben-Israel.

AMONG THOSE attending the inauguration ceremony for the new and controversial Director of Mossad Roman Gofman were Moshe Weizman and Elishiv Mizrahi, two United Hatzalah volunteer medics who treated him and saved his life after he was wounded during the Hamas assault of October 7, 2023.

In an instant response to rocket sirens, Weizman and Mizrahi rushed toward the danger zone, knowing instinctively that they would be saving lives.

At approximately 8:30 a.m., near Bror Hayil Junction, a civilian vehicle flagged down their United Hatzalah ambulance. Inside the civilian vehicle lay Brig.-Gen. Roman Gofman, who was then commander of the Tze'elim military base. Gofman, who had sustained severe gunshot wounds, was transferred into the ambulance and urgently evacuated, while the medics maintained constant communication with him to ensure that he remained conscious throughout the journey to Barzilai Medical Center in Ashdod.

Last Tuesday, the two medics and Gofman came face to face for the first time since his rescue.

The medics had been invited by the Prime Minister's Office and Gofman himself as a gesture of appreciation.

The two medics said that they had no idea while evacuating the IDF officer that they were treating someone who would one day lead one of Israel's most sensitive and important organizations. To them, he was just a wounded individual whose life had to be saved.

Standing at Mossad headquarters and watching the inauguration of that wounded figure was for the two medics



FROM LEFT: Dr. Sergey Semenov, Prof. Uri Ben David, Sir Leonard Blavatnik, and Prof. Paz Beniamini. (Eran Beer)

an incredibly emotional experience.

THE VOLUME and variety of events supported by the Azrieli Foundation are nothing short of mind-boggling. Almost every week, foundation Chairwoman Danna Azrieli or someone else representing the board of the foundation attends a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the inauguration or completion of a medical, scientific, academic, educational, arts, or sports project in different areas of the country.

There are a number of philanthropists who support several different projects, but few can vie in number or in frequency with those supported by the Azrieli Foundation. Among the most recent events was a festival Olympic sports day held at the Alonim Sha'ar HaNegev School with the participation of approximately 400 boys and girls from the Sha'ar HaNegev community. The event was within the framework of the ongoing support and deep connection between the Olympic Committee of Israel (OCI), Olympic athletes, and the Sha'ar HaNegev community since the events of October 7.

The youngsters celebrated the conclusion of the first year of the Olympim program. The highlight of the day for many of them

was to meet OCI personalities and Olympic and Maccabiah champions such as CEO of the Olympic Committee of Israel and 2000 Sydney Olympics swimmer Adi Bichman; the visionary of the SSI (Sport for Social Impact) program Danny Hakim; and Olympic medalist Arik Ze'evi, who commended the students and emphasized the power of sports in building personal and community resilience.

The program is part of a collaboration between the Olympic Committee of Israel, the Azrieli Foundation Israel's SSI program, and the Foundation for Olympic Excellence in Sport.

The program, which runs twice a week, integrates physical activity with Olympic and educational values to strengthen each student's sense of personal capability, teamwork, leadership, perseverance, and respect for others through regular judo and basketball activities.

The students also got to try out some experiential sports stations featuring fencing, judo, Frisbee, athletics, baseball, archery, and goalball led by prominent athletes and coaches, including Yuval Freilich, Girmaw Amare, Ruti Sindel Ochman, Alon Azoulay, Aryeh Klein, Shamar Kleiner, Ori Mizrahi, and Gal Hanari.

The OCI sees sport not only as a vehicle for athletic prowess and developing champions to bring glory to Israel through international competition, but as a significant tool for connecting people and communities, beyond achievements and competitions. Promoting social and value-driven initiatives of this kind is part of the commitment to strengthen values of equality, belonging, and inclusion, and to give every boy and girl the opportunity to develop, connect, and believe in themselves through sports.

THE RIOTING by ultra-Orthodox protesters outside the home of Supreme Court Justice Noam Solberg, which was condemned by President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, MKs, and members of the judiciary, proved to what extent the males of the haredi communities are needed in the IDF. They are excellent fighters and organizers – even in the midst of chaos. Whatever their mission – they usually succeed, even though the goal is negative from a national and democratic perspective.

But reined in, these boys and men could make extremely significant contributions to the IDF and national security. It's just a pity that their leaders refuse to recognize what is called in Hebrew "pikuach nefesh", which, roughly translated, means life-threatening. In Jewish law and tradition, almost every rule in the book can be broken to save a life that is under threat. If the IDF is not strong enough to defend the nation, that is definitely a matter of pikuach nefesh.

The lives under threat are not only those of the Zionists, but also of the non-Zionist haredim. Let them have a Pikuach Nefesh Battalion, which swears allegiance to the Torah rather than to the state, and even have a different uniform (perhaps in black and white) to signify their difference, but meet them halfway in a manner that they can accept.

Some form of compromise is far better than continuing with the status quo. It should start with President Herzog visiting leading haredi spiritual leaders to talk to them about pikuach nefesh, and for those whom he can persuade, to call a meeting and to issue a statement on the conditions under which haredim will serve in the IDF. It takes only two or three respected haredi authorities to introduce a change of atmosphere – and then most of the others will follow.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Jerusalem Post or its affiliates.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Visit to further consolidate relations of good neighbors, good friends and good comrades

General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping is paying a state visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from Monday to Tuesday at the invitation of Kim Jong-un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the DPRK.

The visit marks Xi's first overseas trip this year and his first state visit to the DPRK in seven years. It is of great significance for advancing China-DPRK relations and will surely inject new impetus into the traditional friendship between the two countries, enabling it to stand the test of the times and weather all challenges.

The friendship between the two countries has deep roots. It was forged in the struggle against foreign aggression and for national independence, and has been continuously consolidated and developed throughout the course of socialist revolution and construction. China and the DPRK are good neighbors, good friends and good comrades who have shared weal and woe and helped each other in times of need.

In recent years, Xi and Kim have met on multiple occasions and maintained close communication. Xi has stressed that maintaining, consolidating and developing China-DPRK relations has always been an unwavering policy of the CPC and the Chinese government.

Under the strategic guidance of the top leaders of the two sides, China-DPRK relations have been advancing with a clear direction and strong momentum.

The two countries should be good neighbors that strengthen practical cooperation and maintain close, friendly exchanges.

China-DPRK cooperation is thriving, fueled by growing exchanges and collaboration at all levels and across various sectors.

The two countries maintain exchanges and cooperation in culture, education, science and technology, sports and other fields. The two sides have also concluded a range of agreements and treaties, including those on trade and navigation, air transport and consular affairs. Multiple provinces and cities in both countries have also established sister-city relationships, helping build bridges of friendship between their peoples.

The two countries should be good friends who continually deepen strategic coordination and strengthen mutual support.

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the China-DPRK Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. It also marks the first year of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30).

Pyeongyang has drawn up a blueprint for the DPRK's economic and social development over the next five years. Xi's visit is expected to further enrich and expand ties, propelling the vigorous deepening of strategic coordination and strengthening mutual support.

From the DPRK's active support for the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity and the four major global initiatives, to the two sides' close coordination within multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations and on regional and international issues, the two countries have worked together to safeguard their common interests, uphold international fairness and justice, and contribute to peace, stability and development in the region and beyond.

Both the regional and the broader geopolitical landscape have become increasingly complex and volatile. In this context, the two sides should uphold the spirit of the treaty of friendship to effectively safeguard their shared interests as well as regional peace and stability, thereby providing a solid guarantee for the steady development of China-DPRK relations and the stability of the region.

The two countries should be good comrades that forge ahead in their shared cause and contribute to each other's national rejuvenation.

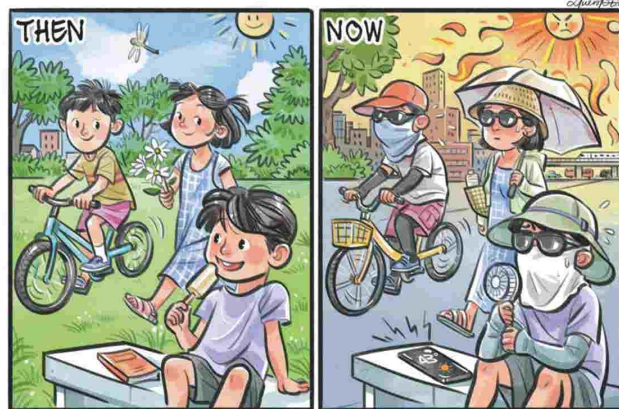
As socialist countries led by communist parties, both nations share common ideals, convictions and goals. They are committed to pursuing development paths suited to their respective national conditions and share the aspiration of achieving national prosperity and a happy, secure life for their peoples.

At present, China is comprehensively advancing the building of a strong nation and the great cause of national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization, while the DPRK is fully dedicated to growing its economy, improving people's livelihoods and pursuing comprehensive national development.

The two sides should remain steadfast in their shared ideals and convictions, continuously enhance exchanges on Party building and state governance, and open up new horizons for their respective socialist causes, thereby injecting lasting momentum into the development of China-DPRK relations.

No matter how the international landscape evolves, as long as the two countries adhere to the head-of-state strategic guidance and the two peoples remain committed to working together, the two neighbors will surely carry forward their traditional friendship and deepen cooperation for the benefit of their peoples and the cause of peace, stability and prosperity in the region and beyond.

Li Min



Opinion Line

Gaokao continues to evolve in line with changing times

Outside 7,981 examination centers across China on Sunday, the summer air shimmered under the relentless June sun as millions of students faced one of the most important tests of their lives. Beyond the school gates, anxious family members gathered in crowds. Shielding themselves with umbrellas and handheld fans, they waited patiently despite the heat.

When the 12.9 million students sit for the 2026 national college entrance examination, or *gaokao*, they are actually taking part in one of the most important merit-based exam systems in modern Chinese history — a system that has evolved alongside the country's development to be one of the world's largest economies. It is about how a society identifies talent, rewards effort and adapts to changing socioeconomic realities.

One of the enduring lessons of history is that societies prosper when advancement depends more on innovation and achievement. The restoration of the *gaokao* in 1977 was a decisive move in that direction. It replaced the previous selection mechanism with one in which performance in a common examination became the principal gateway to higher education.

For a country emerging from a decade of changes, this was not merely an educational reform; it was the improvement of procedural justice. Millions of ordinary families came to believe that efforts and abilities could change a person's future. The belief that knowledge changes one's destiny has become a firmly held conviction

among the Chinese people.

There is some truth in the assertion that examinations cannot fully judge an individual's creativity, character or perseverance. But the relevant question is not whether an exam is perfect, but whether a fairer realistic alternative exists.

What is particularly notable today is that with the country's development in recent decades, the *gaokao* assessment is itself undergoing change — from testing candidates' memorized knowledge to evaluating how they apply it. Of late, questions in the exams increasingly incorporate real-world situations, scientific developments, technological innovation and interdisciplinary problem-solving. The objective is no longer simply to identify students who can remember information, but those who can apply it in practice.

This evolution reflects a larger socioeconomic reality. For decades, China's growth benefited from abundant labor and expanding industrial capacity. Today, prosperity depends increasingly on innovation, productivity and human capital. The educational system therefore faces a different challenge: merely producing more graduates won't do, it should produce graduates capable of succeeding in an economy shaped by artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, biotechnology and other emerging technologies. The shift in examination design mirrors that national development.

Equally significant is the gradual change from a largely single-track

model of advancement. Along with the current *gaokao* and broader lifelong education systems, diversified admissions mechanisms, vocational education pathways and comprehensive evaluation systems have expanded opportunities for different kinds of talent. The system remains competitive, but it is increasingly capable of recognizing that excellence takes multiple forms.

This does not mean that the *gaokao* system has become less important. It has become a window into China's broader economic and social transformation. The evolution of examination content, subject selection, admissions policies and university programs provides a revealing measure of how the country is preparing for the future.

The value of the *gaokao* system lies not in the examination itself, but in the principle behind it: talent should be discovered, cultivated and rewarded. The details of implementation will continue to evolve, as they should.

But as China pursues high-quality development in an age increasingly defined by technological progress and global competition, the search for merit — and the institutions that make that search possible — will remain indispensable. The *gaokao* story is therefore not just a story about education and exams. It is a story about modernization, opportunity and the continuing effort of a nation to align individual aspiration with national development.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Tokyo-Manila collusion real threat to peace

China's Ministry of Transport announced on Saturday that it has launched a special maritime traffic law-enforcement operation in waters east of China's Taiwan island.

According to the ministry's statement, the operation aims to fully exercise China's maritime administrative jurisdiction, enhance deep-sea patrol and law enforcement capabilities, strengthen traffic management in key waters and safeguard national rights and interests. The operation serves as a justified response to the unilateral announcement by Japan and the Philippines of their so-called "maritime delimitation talks" regarding the area, as well as a warning to the secessionist-minded Lai Chung-wei authorities of Taiwan that openly "claimed" the collusion between Tokyo and Manila.

The plan of Japan and the Philippines to start the negotiations to "delimit the maritime boundary of an exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf" infringes on China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

It also contravenes the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as the basic norms governing international relations.

According to China's domestic law and international law, including UNCLOS, China has exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the area involved.

If Japan had truly learned the lessons of history, it would not be accelerating its re-militarization under the pretext of "safeguarding regional stability" while being a source of instability.

Notably, the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum reportedly plans to refer to the Nanjing Massacre as the "Nanjing Incident" — a shameless denial of history. The judgment of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East dedicated a special chapter to documenting the massacre. The massacre's chief perpetrator, Iwane Matsui, was sentenced to death by hanging as a Class-A war criminal.

The Asahi Shimbun has reported on the outline of the Japanese government's 2026 defense white paper, which once again frames the regional security environment as "increasingly severe" and makes unfounded claims hyping the so-called "China threat". At its core, the document is designed to deliberately amplify "external threat" in order to shape domestic public opinion and create international "justifications" for a significant military budget increase, looser arms export controls, revised security strategies, and ultimately, the dismantling of the postwar constraints.

For Japan, elevating its military ties with the Philippines serves to promote the advance of its neo-militarism in the region.

For the Philippines, its government seeks to use "external threat" to divert public attention from domestic problems such as struggling economy, unemployment, poor healthcare and corruption.

The defense chiefs of the two countries jointly staged an ugly spectacle at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore last month, turning a platform meant for communication into an opportunity to flatter the United States, divide the region, and stoke bloc confrontation. The whole region sees clearly they are the troublemakers and the real threat to regional peace and stability.

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr even brazenly claimed during the dialogue that although China has offered fertilizer and fuel to the Philippines, there is no demonstration of "good faith on a long-term basis", and it is actually "guileful".

This rhetoric shows his disregard for the welfare of the Philippine people and lack of appreciation for kindness. He only cares for selfish personal gains to the point that he is willing to perform political theater even when people's well-being is at stake.

Japan and the Philippines will only be increasingly isolated on the international stage if they continue down this wrong path of instigating confrontation.

What They Say

Employment crucial for 15th Five-Year Plan period

Editor's note: The 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) for implementing the employment-first strategy was approved at a State Council executive meeting on Friday. Senior officials of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, as well as experts, shared their insights on the country's employment and industrial upgrading with the media after the meeting. Below are excerpts of their remarks as reported by Securities Times and Xinhua News Agency. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Focusing on the job-hunting needs of graduates, the human resources and social security authorities will continue to introduce high-quality employment policies and services to expand employment channels and create jobs.

Throughout the 15th Five-Year Plan period, it is essential to follow the employment-first strategy and incorporate the goal of high-quality and full employment into national economic and social development initiatives. Coordination between industries and employment should be increased. Greater efforts should be made to improve and modernize the industrial system, and priority should be given to key sectors that are capable of generating a large number of jobs. Government authorities should guide the orderly relocation of industries, and foster new drivers for employment growth by developing the digital economy, green economy and silver economy.

The fundamental solution for employment challenges lies in development. According to the requirements put forward at the State Council executive meeting, local gov-

ernments should develop industries to stabilize employment, upgrade existing industries to create more jobs, and better protect employees' rights and interests to improve the quality of employment.

Carrying out vocational skills training is an important measure to resolve the structural imbalance between the needs of job seekers and employers. Improving the competence of the workforce is vital for achieving the goals of upgrading traditional industries and fostering emerging industries and industries of the future. Hence it is necessary to keep enhancing the quality of such training programs to help more workers acquire professional skills, secure jobs and increase their income.

New quality productive forces and the country's new industrialization drive are deeply related, and they contribute to each other's advancement. Scientific and technological innovation serves as the key to integrating the two.

New industrialization features high technology, sound economic returns, low resource consumption

and minimal environmental pollution. This is in line with the direction in which new quality productive forces are developing. Scientific and technological innovation provides concrete approaches for the two to interact better with one another.

Efforts to cultivate industries of the future will drive both the development of new quality productive forces and the upgrading of the modern industrial system. The development of industries of the future will help boost the high-quality development of the country, and strengthen the industrial foundation for building a modern socialist China in all respects.

China has seen steady progress in the development of industries of the future, and gained some first-mover advantages in key fields. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including insufficient capacity for original innovation, reliance on others for key and core technologies, an innovation ecosystem in need of further improvement, and institutional and mechanism barriers to be removed.

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VIEWS

Soukmitanh Keola

Good neighborly ties usher in sea changes

Landlocked countries, which account for half of the least developed countries in Asia and nearly 40 percent in Africa, face a formidable obstacle in their economic development: the lack of maritime connectivity. Access to the sea is crucial as many landlocked countries rely on overseas markets. Since they can access the ocean only through other countries, friendly relations with neighbors and efficient transportation routes to the sea are essential for economic progress.

Although the Lao People's Democratic Republic has maintained friendly relations with all its neighbors, the only maritime access route that provided tangible economic benefits until recently was the one through Thailand, thanks to its favorable geographic conditions.

Access to China and Vietnam is blocked by mountainous regions that stretch for hundreds of kilometers. The Mekong River route through Cambodia, which holds great promise, is blocked by an impassable 10-kilometer-long waterfall.

Even the European powers that colonized Laos found it difficult to overcome these natural obstacles.

Dependence on the Thailand route led to rapid urban development near the Thai border, while other regions of the country struggled, posing a persistent challenge for the Lao economy.

However, China's economic growth helped break through these major natural barriers to connectivity. Driven by China's rapidly growing economic power, trade across the mountainous regions gradually picked up in the 1990s.

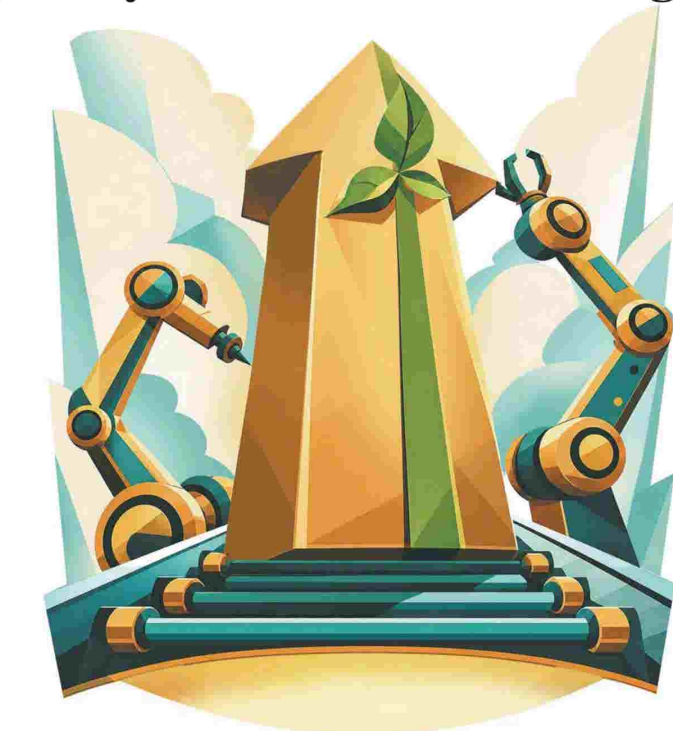
The China-Laos Railway, inaugurated in December 2021, was the gamechanger that ushered in a new phase in overcoming Laos's landlocked status.

Despite predictions by many experts that it would be of little use, the China-Laos Railway has achieved its targets for both passenger and freight trains well ahead of schedule.

For landlocked Laos, China's rise and improved connectivity with the country offer three major advantages. First, with a major global market now available next door, Laos can engage in trade without taking the maritime route.

Although it may be an upper-middle-income country in many people's eyes, China has become a major global market due to its sheer scale. If China becomes a high-income country in the near future, as widely predicted, it will present unprecedented opportunities for the Lao economy.

Second, improved connectivity with China, often referred to as the "world's factory," presents a significant opportunity for Laos to gain a foothold in global



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

supply chains. Laos' relationship with global supply chains till now has centered primarily on the "plus-one" model, which involves indirect participation through neighboring countries.

The transport costs of shipping semi-finished goods back and forth to landlocked Laos further diminished the country's appeal as an industrial location. But the China-Laos Railway network has changed the situation for the country.

Third, improved connectivity between China and Laos has implications that extend beyond bilateral relations. Laos is the only country among the five

Mekong countries that has land access to all of them as well as to China.

Improving connectivity with China and other neighboring countries will enhance Laos' position in connectivity networks between the Mekong region, ASEAN and China.

However, the "peer effect" — the idea that a landlocked country will grow faster if its transit neighbor experiences rapid growth — does not automatically apply.

Unless people communicate, exchange information, and make efforts to learn through the physical connections they have established, the peer effect is unlikely to occur.

In other words, people-to-people connectivity, such as cultural, educational, and professional exchanges, is essential.

Although evidence of peer effects has begun to emerge, with higher-than-average growth rates in many northern provinces closer to China or along the railway, greater efforts are necessary for these regions to fully capitalize on their potential.

The author is a senior economist at the Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Zhang Yi

The real story behind China's manufacturing might

China Shock 2.0 is a powerful phrase that offers a fake story. In this telling, Chinese electric vehicles, batteries, solar panels and advanced manufactured goods are the latest version of the low-cost imports that reshaped Western manufacturing after China joined the World Trade Organization.

The products may have changed, but the conclusion remains the same: China produces too much, sells too cheaply and threatens industrial workers elsewhere.

The vocabulary is also familiar. In the 1980s, Japan was described in nearly the same terms — subsidies, dumping, industrial targeting, unfair competition.

Some of those concerns were real, but the political framing pushed defensive policy rather than industrial renewal, and many of the predicted outcomes did not materialize.

The lesson is not to ignore competitive pressure. It is to distinguish unfair conduct from superior capability before choosing the response.

The "China Shock 2.0" argument leans on the work of David H. Autor, David Dorn and Gordon H. Hanson published in 2013, which argued that rising Chinese imports led to higher unemployment in the United States.

But that paper is treated as more definitive than it ever was.

The original finding — concentrated harm to specific US local labor markets between 2001 and 2010 — was a distributional effect inside an aggregate gain, not a verdict on trade with China, and the policy discourse has consistently over-read it.

The 2.0 case is structurally different. The sectors under scrutiny are not labor-intensive consumer goods, but capital goods, green technologies, complex assemblies and two-way supply chains dense with non-Chinese value. Price declines are at the center of the global energy transition.

Electric vehicles are the clearest example. The common assumption is that

China's EVs are cheap mainly because of government support. Yet Rhodium Group, an organization known for its close scrutiny of Chinese industrial policy, reaches a different conclusion.

Rhodium estimates that BYD enjoys a cost advantage of roughly \$4,700 per vehicle over Tesla China. Direct subsidies account for about \$292 per vehicle, and preferential financing for around \$12. By Rhodium's reckoning, subsidies add up to barely 5 percent of BYD's cost advantage.

The larger explanation lies in industrial organization. BYD produces around 80 percent of its tier-one components and 36 percent of its tier-two components in-house, avoiding an estimated \$2,369 per vehicle in supplier markups.

Lower R&D and administrative costs contribute another estimated \$1,719. So, the advantages stem not from cheap inputs but from vertical integration, dense local supply chains, rapid iteration and large-volume cost amortization.

If the gap were mainly because of subsidies, tariffs could plausibly close it. But tariffs cannot manufacture competitiveness. What Western automakers are facing are not lower prices but a different, and more efficient, production system.

China's manufacturing advantage can no longer be explained by cheap labor. Official data show average annual wages in urban non-private manufacturing reached 107,987 yuan (\$15,895) in 2024, up from around 72,088 yuan in 2018, while Chinese export prices have been flat or declined over the same period.

When wages rise while export prices remain steady, the cause is not currency movements but productivity, automation, scale and supply-chain clustering. Chinese firms have compressed the design-to-market cycle inside dense local ecosystems where suppliers, engineers and manufacturers sit close to one another.

China's rise is not just because of vol-

ume but also technological accumulation. R&D spending as a share of GDP rose from about 1.3 percent in the 10th Five-Year Plan (2001-05) to 2.7 percent in the 14th (2021-25).

OECD data place China's total R&D spending close to the US in purchasing power terms, and the World Intellectual Property Organization's Global Innovation Index ranks China in the world's top 10 innovation economies.

The benefits are broader than the "shock" narrative allows. Lower Chinese prices are disruptive for some producers, but they are very beneficial for consumers, developing economies and the energy transition. Cheaper solar panels, batteries and EVs lower the cost of decarbonization.

IRENA has found that most newly added utility-scale renewable power in 2024 was cheaper than the lowest-cost fossil-fuel alternative. The same price decline that pressures some incumbent firms also helps households, grids and governments deploy clean technology faster.

The reverse evidence is also striking. If China were simply "shocking" the world, developing economies would be pulling away; instead, many are deepening integration with China.

ASEAN is now China's largest trading partner, and the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 Upgrade Protocol covers the digital economy, green economy and supply-chain connectivity. Vietnam's export boom, Southeast Asia's electronics growth and Mexico's nearshoring expansion are closely related to Chinese intermediate goods, machinery and logistics.

The trade-in-value-added perspective reinforces this point. Gross export figures make China appear to be the sole source of the impact.

But final exports from China often embody value created elsewhere: Japanese and Korean components, German machinery, Dutch equipment, Australian minerals, ASEAN inputs, and global soft-

ware, design and services. A tariff aimed at "China" often strikes a production network much broader than China itself.

A fuller accounting must look beyond goods. China runs a large goods surplus, but it is also a major buyer of foreign services and a source of income for global firms.

Data show that in 2025 China recorded a \$1,029 billion goods surplus alongside a \$196 billion services deficit and a \$115 billion primary income deficit.

Tourism, education, intellectual property payments, digital services, brands and multinational profits all complicate the one-way story, making the picture look less like a one-directional shock and more like deep mutual dependence.

"China Shock 2.0" comprises three different issues into one alarm: efficiency read as unfairness, scale read as aggression, and diffusion read as threat. If the issue is efficiency, the answer is to lower energy and capital costs at home — not tariffs that shield higher-cost producers from a structural gap.

If the issue is scale, the answer is to invest in supply-chain depth and the ecosystems where suppliers, engineers and integrators sit close together — not barriers that fragment those networks further.

If the issue is diffusion, the answer is to accelerate domestic R&D and firm-building while participating in the supply chains that spread capability — not export controls premised on a single-source frontier.

The better question, then, is not how to stop China from making affordable advanced goods.

It is how other economies can build manufacturing systems capable of making complexity affordable.

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Haukur Hardarson

Rethinking energy security in a changing world

Energy security is being reshaped in a rapidly changing global landscape, but the policy conversation has yet to fully adjust. As geopolitical tensions intensify and traditional fuel supply chains face disruption, governments are rethinking how energy systems are built, powered and protected. Yet, the approach remains anchored in outdated assumptions about fuel supply, overlooking the resilience of the systems that deliver energy.

Nowhere is this more evident than in heating and cooling, which account for roughly half of global energy consumption.

More than 80 percent of this demand is met by fossil-fuel-based energy. For many countries, this implies continued dependence on imported fuels to meet essential needs, from maintaining habitable cities to sustaining industrial production.

Despite this, policy and investment remain heavily concentrated on electricity generation, leaving thermal systems — the largest source of energy usage — fragmented, underdeveloped and exposed to fuel price volatility. Addressing this imbalance requires a shift in perspective, from securing fuel supply to strengthening the infrastructure that delivers energy.

Geothermal energy offers a fundamentally different model of energy security, based on infrastructure rather than fuel.

In practical terms, this means replacing recurring fuel imports with long-life domestic assets that stabilize energy costs over time, reduce exposure to commodity volatility and anchor critical infrastructure in reliable, local energy resources.

Unlike fossil-based systems, geothermal requires no ongoing fuel supply, eliminating exposure to transport disruptions and import dependence. With one of the smallest land footprints of any renewable, it can also be deployed within dense urban environments, integrating seamlessly into existing buildings, districts and infrastructure systems.

Yet a key barrier to wider adoption is the persistent misconception that geothermal is limited to volcanic regions. In reality, low- to medium-temperature geothermal resources suitable for heating and cooling can be deployed in nearly every geography. Advances in drilling and subsurface engineering are further expanding geothermal's potential at greater depths.

International experience illustrates what is possible, with Iceland providing a well-established case.

Following the oil shocks of the 1970s, the country invested heavily in geothermal infrastructure to reduce dependence on imported fuels. Today, around 90 percent of Icelandic homes are heated with geothermal energy, contributing to both energy independence and long-term price stability.

Over many decades, Iceland has developed deep expertise in geothermal resource development, engineering, and system integration, creating a foundation that has informed projects well beyond its borders.

China is a more recent and large-scale example of how this expertise can be applied in practice.

Through Sinopec Green Energy — a joint venture between Sinopec Star and Arctic Green Energy — Iceland's technical expertise combines with China's industrial scale and execution capability to enable rapid deployment of geothermal district heating systems across northern China.

In China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), energy self-sufficiency and system stability are central priorities. As part of this broader strategy, the country has accelerated the development of geothermal systems, particularly in regions historically reliant on coal.

Today, geothermal systems developed through Sinopec Green Energy serve more than 120 million square meters across more than 70 cities, benefiting millions of people. This expansion is reducing emissions while strengthening domestic energy security through stable, locally sourced energy systems.

The impact extends beyond energy supply. In cities historically reliant on coal-based heating, the shift to geothermal energy has improved local air quality, supporting efforts to build cleaner, healthier urban environments.

As the global energy system evolves, maintaining reliability is becoming more complex.

Wind and solar are indispensable to decarbonization, but their variability requires complementary resources to ensure stability. Geothermal plays a critical role by offering continuous, weather-independent thermal energy, particularly in sectors where demand cannot be curtailed. In this sense, geothermal complements rather than competes with other renewables.

Policy frameworks around the world have not fully adapted to this reality. Energy strategies continue to prioritize electricity, while heating and cooling remain underdeveloped in both planning and financing. Closing this gap will require integrating geothermal into urban energy planning, expanding district heating and cooling networks, and adopting financing models that treat geothermal as long-term infrastructure rather than short-term energy supply.

Together, the experiences of Iceland and China offer a broader lesson: energy security improves when countries invest in domestic, infrastructure-based systems rather than relying on imported fuels. In a rapidly changing global landscape, long-term energy security will depend less on access to fuel and more on the resilience of energy systems.

Countries that succeed will be those that invest in infrastructure capable of delivering stable, reliable energy over decades.

And beneath our feet lies one of the most powerful and overlooked foundations of that future.

The author is the founder and chairman of Arctic Green Energy and vice chairman of Sinopec Green Energy. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

OPINION

Every day is Environment Day in Oman



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AS the world marks World Environment Day, the Sultanate of Oman reaffirms a principle that has guided its development journey for decades: economic growth and environmental stewardship are not competing priorities, but complementary pillars of sustainable prosperity.

Oman's commitment to protecting its natural environment is deeply rooted in its national development approach. As early as 1974, Oman established the Office of the Advisor for Conservation of the Environment, reflecting a national recognition that environmental stewardship must accompany development.

Over the decades, the country's environmental governance continued to evolve, with institutions expanding their mandates to include pollution control, water resource conservation, climate affairs and biodiversity protection.

Oman's environmental commitment is further demonstrated through its active participation in international climate action. The Sultanate of Oman joined the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and ratifying the Paris Agreement, reinforcing its determination to contribute to global efforts addressing climate change while advancing sustainable development at home.

At the heart of this commitment lies Oman Vision 2040, which recognises the environment and natural resources as strategic national assets, where environmental protection and natural resource management are essential enablers of economic diversification, competitiveness

and long-term prosperity. It emphasises the sustainable use of resources, environmental resilience and balanced economic growth as fundamental pillars to safeguard the wellbeing of current and future generations.

This year, building on Oman Vision 2040, Oman celebrated the launch of the 11th Five-Year Development Plan (2026-2030), which places environmental sustainability at the centre of economic planning. The plan demonstrates how climate action, natural resource management and economic diversification can work together to create long-term prosperity.

Under the priority of Economic Diversification and Fiscal Sustainability, the plan includes programmes to empower the renewable energy sector and support the development of green economic clusters. These initiatives will help accelerate the transition towards a low-carbon economy while creating new investment opportunities and quality jobs.

The priority of Governorate Development and Sustainable Cities promotes sustainable development across all governorates, strengthens integrated solid waste management systems and supports the establishment of future-ready cities designed around sustainability, efficiency and resilience.

Through the Sustainable Environment priority, Oman is advancing sustainable fisheries management, agricultural development, water security, food security, ecotourism, climate adaptation and the gradual transition towards a low-carbon economy. These programmes seek to protect natural resources while enhancing economic

At the heart of this commitment lies Oman Vision 2040, which recognises the environment and natural resources as strategic national assets, where environmental protection and natural resource management are essential enablers of economic diversification, competitiveness, and long-term prosperity.

productivity and community wellbeing.

The plan also recognises emerging opportunities through the Economy and Development priority, which includes initiatives to enable the blue economy and maximise the returns of the circular economy.

By promoting sustainable use of marine resources and extending the lifecycle of materials and products, Oman is creating new pathways for growth while reducing environmental pressures.

Meanwhile, under the Environment and Natural Resources priority, programmes focus on sustainable waste management, recycling, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting the ozone layer.

Together, these initiatives contribute to a cleaner environment and support national climate objectives. This integrated approach ensures a balance between environmental protection and economic development, strengthens economic diversification and generates sustainable employment opportunities for Omani citizens.

On World Environment Day, Oman celebrates not only its environmental achievements but also a development model that recognises the environment as an asset to be protected, invested in and preserved.

In Oman, environmental sustainability is not limited to a single day of recognition, but it is also a reminder of a national commitment that extends throughout the year. Environmental sustainability is a guiding principle embedded in national planning, economic policy and the vision for a prosperous and resilient future.

In Oman, every day is Environment Day.

A NEW GATEWAY: WHAT THE CEPA MEANS FOR OMAN



FARIS NASSER AL FARSI

The writer is an economic expert

This month, with little fanfare, Oman opened a new door onto the world's largest emerging economy. On June 1, the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between Oman and India came into force — the first bilateral trade pact the Sultanate of Oman has signed since its accord with the United States in 2006.

Concluded in Muscat last December before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it deserves more attention than it has received, for it speaks directly to the future the Sultanate of Oman is trying to build.

Much commentary has dwelt on what India gains — and the figures are real, with nearly 99 per cent of Indian goods now entering Oman duty-free. Yet the agreement is reciprocal and the openings for Oman are no less significant.

India has agreed to scrap the bulk of its tariffs, with immediate elimination on close to 98 per cent of tariff lines. The products that benefit most are the backbone of Omani industry: methanol, fertilisers, liquefied natural gas, crude oil and other industrial raw materials. A predictable, tariff-light route into India gives our producers fresh incentive to scale up and add value at home.

Equally important is investment. Indian firms may now hold full ownership in a wide range of Omani service sectors — some 127 sub-sectors in all. That provides inward capital, expertise and enterprise of precisely the kind Oman Vision 2040 envisions: new jobs, knowledge transfer and a deeper services economy.

Then there is geography. Oman's quiet advantage. Increasingly the Sultanate of Oman is seen as India's dependable gateway to West Asia and East Africa, a role made more valuable by tensions around the Strait of Hormuz.

As Indian exporters use our ports and free zones as a springboard to wider markets, Oman strengthens its standing as a regional logistics hub — a corridor, not merely a destination.

None of this is abstract. Bilateral trade has already climbed past \$11 billion and the bond beneath it is centuries old: nearly 700,000 Indians live here, including merchant families settled for generations. The gateway, then, is open. The harder work now falls to us — equipping exporters, free-zone operators and entrepreneurs to seize what the agreement offers. The opportunity is genuine. The question, as ever, is how widely Oman chooses to walk through it.

From oil dependence to hybrid energy systems

IN the last 100 years, economic growth and oil consumption have moved closely together. When economies grow, production increases, more people travel within and across countries and more goods are shipped across the ocean.

Over the years, oil has become the invisible driver behind every percentage point of GDP.

The US-Israel war with Iran has weakened the foundations of this rule. The Financial Times has recently described how the oil industry now faces a "gruesome demand shock" as traffic through the Strait of Hormuz is disrupted and oil prices swing wildly.

Now the question to ponder is: in an era of digital transformation and shifts in consumer behaviour, does every increase in output still require more barrels of oil?

Is this link weakening, or is this a temporary reaction? Does this structural shift mean that production, consumption and travel are going to become more dependent on electrons rather than liquid fuels?

The recent disruptions to the global oil supply and escalations around the Strait of Hormuz are widely viewed as another episode of energy price volatility. However, indications and experts suggest otherwise.

A closer look reveals an unfolding pattern with substantial global impact. The transport sector is the hardest hit by this crisis. Transport accounts for the largest share of global oil consumption at about 50-55 per cent, including road, aviation and shipping.

About 10 per cent of the global oil supply and nearly 20 per cent of seaborne crude flows have been disrupted.

Economists warn that a sustained move towards 150 dollars a barrel could push the world into recession. The impact of this crisis has gone beyond transport, spreading to



Today, one out of every five cars sold globally is electric.



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the food supply, affecting access to services and disrupting everyday life worldwide.

There are two major reasons the old link between oil and GDP is weakening. The first factor is electrification and efficiency. Global energy reports indicate that CO₂ emissions rose by only 0.8 per cent in 2024, while the global economy grew by 3.2 per cent, suggesting that more output now comes from non-fossil, more efficient energy sources.

Today, one out of every five cars sold globally is electric. Oil's share in the global energy mix has fallen to below 30 per cent. Around fifty years ago, it accounted for close to half of global energy use, even though the world economy has continued to grow since then.

The second factor is the decoupling trend in many advanced economies. In these countries, emissions and oil use have stabilised or fallen even as GDP has grown, showing that economic expansion no longer has to be tied as tightly to a barrel of oil. People are moving faster towards fuel-efficient options, teleworking and localised consumption due to rising prices.

Oil prices and the economic situation could lock in lower oil intensity per unit of GDP. Global oil

demand is expected to decline in 2026 due to the war.

Still, oil will continue to play a major role for decades, especially in sectors such as transport, petrochemicals and heavy industry. Yet the emerging trend is that the world is moving into a hybrid phase of energy consumption, with over 90 per cent of new power capacity added worldwide in 2024 coming from clean energy, mainly from solar and wind, not coal or gas.

Worries about climate targets are driving investment in renewable, non-fossil energy sources. Geopolitical escalations, technological disruptions and armed conflict are testing the fundamental historical link between oil and GDP.

These unexpected global shocks are slowly accelerating a hybrid phase of energy dependency, in which growth will be driven by electricity, mostly from non-fossil energy sources; oil demand may plateau and decline, but will not disappear and will have to share the spotlight with non-fossil energy sources.

This pattern, if sustained, will gradually weaken the historic link between oil consumption and economic growth and accelerate the adoption of cleaner energy sources.