



Editor's
TAKE

Wait and Watch Before Reciprocating Tariffs

The US President has slapped 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods, which might hit the Indian economy badly, but it is certainly not the end of the road

In an unprecedented move, the US President has done what he has been threatening all along. His decision to slap a 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods – coupled with threats of secondary sanctions – has triggered one of the sharpest escalations in bilateral trade relations in recent years. The move is indeed worrisome, as some 18 per cent of Indian goods reach US shores every year. Yet, in New Delhi, while the concern is genuine, the approach is pragmatic. The mood is less about desperation and more about calculation – a recognition that this move may be as much a negotiating tactic as an economic strike. The US move has achieved something missing so far in the Indian landscape: Unity. The whole Opposition is standing with the Government in taking on Trump. Prime Minister Narendra Modi now has a rare political advantage: The open backing of the Opposition to push back against Washington. This united domestic front could harden India's stance in ongoing trade negotiations, particularly on issues that directly affect politically sensitive sectors such as agriculture.

What the US wants is easy access to the Indian market, but that may be detrimental to Indian interests. The cost of access to the dairy industry, for instance, may alone be equal to the cost of tariffs. The cost of allowing US dairy imports into India could be as damaging as the tariffs themselves, estimated at around ₹1.8 lakh crore (\$20 billion).

Even the most pessimistic projections, such as Morgan Stanley's estimate of a 60-basis-point hit to GDP (around \$23 billion), suggest pain but not devastation. Foreign direct investment could also take a hit, with higher tariffs making India marginally less attractive for certain US – linked manufacturing investments. The weaker rupee could, over time, soften the blow for exporters. Much of India's services trade – accounting for about 40 per cent of its US trade – remains untouched.

The tariffs are explicitly tied to India's continued oil imports from Russia. Washington's stance has drawn accusations of hypocrisy from New Delhi, pointing to America's own continued trade with Moscow. Despite the provocation, India's response so far has been measured, yet firm in defending red lines.

Rushing into countermeasures risks foreclosing a negotiated solution, especially when the US may be using tariffs as a bargaining chip. India has already shown goodwill in other areas – from reducing duties on select American goods to inviting Tesla to set up operations in Mumbai, and even withdrawing the so-called "Google tax" on digital services. With the potential for geopolitical shifts in the coming weeks, New Delhi has every reason to watch developments closely before committing to major concessions. Until then, economic resilience and a diversified trade strategy may allow India to ride out the turbulence – and perhaps even turn the tariffs into a moment of leverage.

Harnessing People Power

The provisions of NCP-2025 are both revolutionary and progressive. They have the potential to transform community – based enterprises into sustainable and profitable ventures, fostering business hubs at the grassroots across India



K K
TRIPATHY

The Ministry of Cooperation (MoC) has kept its promise of introducing a comprehensive policy dedicated to the country's cooperative development by releasing an all – inclusive 'National Cooperation Policy 2025' (NCP-2025), following a prolonged wait of 23 years. NCP-2025 – drafted by a 48-member committee under the chairmanship of former Union Minister Shri Suresh Prabhu after extensive pan-India stakeholder consultations – is not merely a reform document. It is a strategy paper that envisages a developed India and outlines strategic actions to achieve the pre-defined targets.

NCP-2025 & Viksit Bharat @2047

NCP-2025 envisions contributing to India's collective ambition of Viksit Bharat @2047 by following the Hon'ble Prime Minister's mantra - *Sahkar se Samridhhi*. Realising this vision demands the promotion of an enabling environment for sustainable cooperative development by building an inclusive and equitable Bharat.

It proposes a targeted mission over the next 10 years to achieve 16 core policy objectives by strengthening the foundation of the cooperative movement, encouraging sectoral vibrancy, making cooperatives future-ready, promoting inclusivity, deepening the reach of cooperation, entering emerging sectors, and inspiring the youth to lead cooperative growth. Cooperatives can significantly contribute to realising the dream of Viksit Bharat@47, given their spread, outreach, and employment and wealth generation potential. Community-driven and member – owned cooperatives and collective enterprises are ideally suited to create an inclusive, resilient, tech-enabled, and innovation – driven economy – transforming India into a global manufacturing and services hub while ensuring that no one is left behind, especially at the grassroots. Within the overall architecture of governance, and by adopting a whole-of – Government approach, cooperatives are poised to become profitable business ventures and bolster the initiative of making India self-reliant. The NCP-2025 is expected to aid in achieving the outlined goals for comprehensive cooperative development.

Actions Are the New Policy

NCP-2025 aims to ensure a level playing field for cooperatives so that they may operate on the same footing as corporate sectors. It promises action on access to finance, ease of

doing business, and prioritising member-driven governance capable of facing competition. Furthermore, cooperatives are encouraged to function independently. The policy includes provisions for establishing supportive infrastructure, enabling legal frameworks, and arranging adequate and timely finance. Many of these enabling provisions, as reflected in NCP-2025, have already been implemented by the MoC.

Over the last four years, one of the MoC's significant initiatives has been the adoption of model bye-laws for PACS by 32 States/UTs – enabling the creation of a vibrant, multi-purpose, and multi-dimensional cooperative culture at the grassroots. In addition, integrating PACS businesses with Common Service Centres for delivering nearly 300 e-services; empowering them to function as *Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras* and *Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samridhhi Kendras*; incentivising the production of pulses (tur, masur, and urad) to reduce import dependency; and raising maize production to support the Ethanol Blending Programme through the National Cooperative Consumer Federation and the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India are particularly noteworthy.

The strategic initiative to integrate Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and Fishery Farmers' Producer Organisations within the cooperative framework marks a major leap in strengthening rural livelihoods and diversifying income sources.

Granting licences to PACS for petrol/diesel dealerships and LPG distributorships will support business diversification and employment generation. Similarly, handholding support for implementing renewable energy schemes of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy will aid PACS – linked farmers in adopting solar water pumps and installing photovoltaic modules.

The establishment of *Tribhuvan National Cooperative University* marks a transformative step in strengthening the cooperative movement through structured education and training. By institutionalising cooperative learning, India is paving the way for a more informed, skilled, and sustainable cooperative ecosystem – ensuring that the spirit of cooperation is not only preserved but empowered for future generations.

While the MoC has already consolidated the short-term cooperative credit structure, it has also contemplated adequate measures to strengthen the long-term cooperative credit framework. Planned, quality, and comprehensive computerisation of both short-term and long-term credit structures is expected to resolve existing inadequacies and inefficiencies in their operation. NCP-2025 emphasises cooperation among coop-

eratives through suitable networking, aiming to position the cooperative network as a key driver of sustainable, inclusive, and progressive economic growth. It reaffirms the role of cooperatives in the country's holistic development – including equitable income and wealth distribution and the reduction of both local and global economic disparities. The policy advances the concept of *Sabka Cooperative* to contribute towards the national vision of *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas, Sabka Vishwas*, and pays homage to India's philosophical ethos – *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (The world is one family) and *Ekam Eva Balam Yoge* (Unity is strength).

When States Align, Cooperatives Shine

States/UTs are crucial stakeholders and must play transformative roles in cooperative development. Since cooperation is a State subject, they need to adopt and implement the provisions of NCP-2025 in the right spirit. States/UTs must internalise these provisions while leveraging local demographic, physical, and financial opportunities, as well as relevant macro and micro-environmental factors.

Alongside infrastructure development and technological advancement, appropriate reforms in governance and leadership within the cooperative space are urgently needed. States/UTs should establish robust, sustainable, tech-enabled market infrastructure, logistics, and networks through clustering – supported by the cluster development fund; develop cooperative economic zones; promote youth-led start-ups through training, education, innovation, and incubation; facilitate ease of doing business and timely access to capital; and form cooperatives in emerging sectors.

The provisions of NCP-2025 are both revolutionary and progressive. They have the potential to transform community-based enterprises into sustainable and profitable ventures, fostering business hubs at the grassroots across India.

If adopted and implemented with the right intent, the policy would establish an Indian cooperative ecosystem where professionalism is encouraged – with guaranteed ease of doing business, comprehensive digitisation, and integration with national welfare programmes.

NCP-2025 is not merely a policy aspiration – it is a call to action for inclusive, people-centric economic transformation. By uniting efforts across all levels of governance, strengthening cooperative institutions, and empowering grassroots entrepreneurship, we can build a resilient and equitable cooperative ecosystem to realise the true Bharat by 2047.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

GRANTING
LICENSES TO
PACS FOR
PETROL/DIESEL
DEALERSHIPS
AND LPG
DISTRIBUTORSHIPS
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EMPLOYMENT

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The Spirit of Secular India



RAJYOGI BRAHMA
KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND THE PIONEER OPINION

India has a democratic set-up in which people elect the Government through adult franchise. Due to its pluralistic culture, every citizen has been given the right and freedom of religious belief without any kind of interference by the Government. The Indian polity is, therefore, known as secular. However, a few unpleasant incidents that took place recently across various Indian states have prompted much talk of a threat to the "secular" character of our nation. Most of the political parties, who see themselves as "secular", have strongly condemned those incidents as the local Government's alleged inability or unwillingness to control them. The political blame game has been going on for quite some time in our country, and it is not difficult to see why. India's Constitution declares that the

country is a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic". But how has secularism been practised by political parties in India? Today, secularism has been reduced to a vote-catching slogan by political parties who have deepened the religious divides in society by resorting to vote-bank politics. While they do not openly appeal to the voters' faith, political parties of all hues reinforce religious divisions by nominating candidates according to the religious composition of a constituency. Thus, candidates from minority communities are fielded in constituencies with a sizable minority population – obviously with the expectation that they will get the votes of their community regardless of their individual merit. Such concessions made to a vote bank are generally regarded as appeasement and breed resentment in other communities.

One reason such divisive politics succeeds is that our electoral system has been hijacked by vested interests, and the honest citizenry has either been reduced to an ineffectual minority or has opted out of it from sheer disillusionment. In an effective democracy, the elected representative is expected to enjoy the confidence of at least half of the electorate for it to qualify as rule of the majority. But take the voting figures for our elections over the years-on average, just about 61 to 55 per cent of the voters cast their vote in the general elections held so far. This problem has been compounded by the proliferation of political parties.

With numerous candidates contesting from one constituency, a candidate can now get elected with as little as five per cent of the votes.

Electoral reforms may remedy this situation and safeguard secularism to a certain extent, but they cannot promote the secular spirit among people. That can be achieved only through education and socio-cultural processes, because secularism is, in essence, a cultural concept wherein people, while cultivating their religion, have equal respect for other religions. Such an outlook requires moderation, tolerance, and compassion. These values cannot be imparted by statutes – they have to be cultivated as a way of life.

The call of the time is to consciously develop a culture of secularism, and the best means for achieving this is through education, particularly through spiritual education. Knowledge of our true selves as souls automatically lifts us above the superficial distinctions of religion, race, and sex and promotes true secular thinking. But why spirituality? Because it is impeccable – it implies universal love, non-violence, compassion, virtue, simplicity, honesty, detachment, and an attitude of humanity and service – all in one.

The writer is a spiritual educator and a popular columnist

PIC TALK



A purple heron catches a frog in shallow water, in Nadia. PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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TRUMP, PUTIN, NETANYAHU: DISRUPTING WORLD ORDER

The three leaders currently causing the greatest instability in the world are, ironically, the ones occupying the highest positions in their respective countries.

It is because of these three that hundreds are being killed every day in the 25th year of the 21st century.

At the top of the list is Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, under whose command Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are dying of hunger, disease, and military attacks.

Second is Russia's self-proclaimed dictator, President Vladimir Putin, who has extended his rule indefinitely. His justification lies in preventing Ukraine from joining the European Union and NATO. It was for similar reasons that several Soviet states, including

Ukraine, had earlier seceded. Now, Putin seeks to forcibly reintegrate them into a revived Soviet Union.

At number three is US President Donald Trump, who calls himself a nationalist. Judging from the last election and prior controversies, many believe he should have been behind bars. Today, if any foreign power is responsible for Israel's killing of 75,000 people in the name of the Gaza war, it is the White House and the Pentagon.

Netanyahu openly declares he wants to occupy the entire Gaza Strip – with Trump's support. Within a year, these two may wipe out its 2 million residents through starvation and bombing, while global institutions merely issue statements.

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

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Court slams incestuous violence

The Supreme Court has delivered a powerful message against incestuous sexual violence, asserting that such acts "tear through" the foundational fabric of familial trust. Upholding a man's conviction for the rape of his minor daughter, a bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and Sandeep Kumar declared the dignity of women as "non-negotiable."

They urged the legal system to prevent any intrusion into this dignity under the "guise of misplaced sympathy" or "procedural fairness." In their order on 4 August, the judges emphasised that justice extends beyond conviction to include restitution.

Consequently, the top court directed a compensation of ₹10.50 lakh to be paid to the survivor, in line with Himachal Pradesh state rules.

The court aims to send a clear signal that such offences will be met with an equally unsparing judicial response. This significant decision came as the top court addressed the man's appeal against a Himachal Pradesh High Court ruling.

The High Court had upheld his conviction and sentence under Section 6 (sexual assault) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, and Section 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Kartavya Bhavan: A costly affair?

The PM recently inaugurated Kartavya Bhavan in New Delhi, forming a key part of India's ambitious Central Vista redevelopment project. While the name (Kartavya, duty in Hindi) and intent are to do with moving away from India's colonial past, one really wonders if the lavish building will live up to its name.

Our bureaucracy is well known for its lethargy, corruption, red-tapism, and for being an impediment rather than a facilitator to the attainment of socio-political goals. India's bureaucracy lives up to this quote by Robert A Heinlein, US novelist and naval officer – "Government! Three-fourths parasitic and the other fourth stupid fumbling." It is no secret that our bureaucrats, like bureaucrats in other parts of the world, are more concerned with routine than results (Frank Herbert's quote).

One seriously doubts if the new building (Kartavya Bhavan) will, in any way, incentivise our bureaucrats to dedicate themselves to the nation? Is the humongous cost on this building, which is just the first of ten planned Kartavya Bhavan buildings, justified?

On the one hand, our PM keeps repeating ad nauseam that he wants to take India away from our colonial past.

AVINASH GODBOLEY | MADHYA PRADESH

Support breastfeeding

It has been established that a host of disorders and illnesses in infants can be prevented through proper breastfeeding. The antibiotic richness and immunity-boosting properties of breast milk are well documented. Moreover, mothers themselves benefit – breastfeeding offers protection against certain gynaecological cancers. Experts have consistently recommended exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months to ensure the infant's optimal health.

However, for mothers to follow this advice, they must feel comfortable and supported in public and professional settings. Recognising this, several governments have taken steps to support lactating women. Last year, the Odisha Government directed officials to establish "breastfeeding cabins" in offices and public areas, including private institutions, to allow women to feed their babies with dignity.

Building on this initiative, it has now proposed exclusive rooms for lactating mothers at bus stands and railway stations. These provisions not only affirm the rights and dignity of women but also contribute significantly to maternal and child health outcomes. Such efforts deserve appreciation and should be replicated across the country.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Shelters Are Not The Answer

FIRST
Column

Sheltering all of Delhi's 600,000 stray dogs is unfeasible and costly, requiring vast land and funds. Even if implemented, it won't solve the issue, as unsterilised dogs from neighbouring states would continue entering the city, making the effort unsustainable



HIRANMAY
KARLEKAR

The demand for herding all stray dogs in Delhi in shelters misses two points — it is impracticable and will not end their presence in streets and public places. The impracticability of it becomes clear on considering the number involved. The latter will determine the number of shelters needed, the built-up area of each, the land needed for building shelters, the cost and time of construction, and the number of administrators, veterinary doctors, paramedics and other staff needed to run them. It will also determine the recurring operating costs in terms of salaries, electricity and water charges, vaccines, medicines and food for dogs.

The last census of stray dogs covering the whole of Delhi, conducted in 2009 by the NGO Wildlife SOS, on behalf of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), put the stray-dog population across Delhi at 262,740-252,000 in areas under the MCD, and 7,630 and 3,110 respectively in areas under the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and the Delhi Cantonment.

At its third meeting on January 17, 2019, Delhi Legislative Assembly's "House Committee to Examine the Issue of Stray Dogs and Monkey Menace in Delhi (henceforth House Committee)," appointed a sub-committee tasked with making Delhi rabies free. The committee's report mentions that the sub-committee had estimated that Delhi had 800,000 stray dogs. The report does not provide any supporting evidence. Nevertheless, the actual number may well have been around that. A survey by the global NGO, Humane Society International (HIS), conducted on behalf of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) in 2016, found that there were 189,285 stray dogs in SDMC's four zones.

This was during the interlude when the MCD had been trifurcated into the SDMC, North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) and the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC). Stray dogs in areas under the NDMC, EDMC, New Delhi Municipal Council and the Cantonment Board — none of which had conducted a street canine census that year — had to be counted to arrive at the total number of stray dogs in 2016.



Hence, figure must have been quite high and might have risen to around 800,000 in 2019 — and even higher thereafter as few sterilisations were done during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2021.

Arbitrarily choosing a figure that is likely to be lower than the actual, one may assume that there are 600,000 stray dogs in Delhi. Six hundred shelters would be needed even if 1,000 of them are to be put in one.

What should be the principle determining the size of the land granted for each of them? One needs here to look at the Basic Management Guidelines for Dog and Cat Shelters (henceforth 'Guidelines'), prepared by Animal Asia and Humane Society International for the second Companion Animal Welfare Conference at Guangzhou, China, on November 10 and 11, 2007. It stated, "Most importantly, they [shelters] should be a place of safety and comfort for the animals....Stress reduction and disease control should be your goals when determining how to house animals."

According to the Guidelines, each dog "should have ample room to stand, lie

down, turn around and sit normally." This required a minimum area of 4 feet by 4 feet (16 square feet) for each dog. A shared 5-feet by 10-feet kennel (50 square feet) should hold no more than two large or medium, or three small dogs.

Assuming that in a shelter for 1,000 dogs, 600 lived in single, and 400 in shared, kennels, and three dogs lived in each shared kennel, one would require a floor area of 9,600 (600 x 16) square feet plus 6666.6 (50 divided by three and multiplied by 400) square feet = 16,266 square feet respectively. This would come to 1,511.1 square metres.

Space will also be required for administrative offices, reception centres, veterinary clinics, sick room for dogs, quarantine areas for dogs with infectious diseases, stores, staff quarters and parking space for vans and ambulances and other vehicles. All this would require a minimum of 1,000 square meters. Hence each shelter housing 1,000 dogs would require at least 2,511 square metres (1,511.1 + 1,000 square metres).

That this calculation is more or less correct is suggested by the House commit-

tee's report indicating that an estimated "1000-1200 sq. metres" would be needed for setting up a sterilisation centre. A shelter would require a much larger area as it would not only have to sterilise unsterilised dogs coming in but permanently house the dogs and accommodate the other requirements for space mentioned above.

Six-hundred dog shelters would need 1,506,660 square metres (2511.1 x 600). Where would the land come from? And the money to build and run them? The operating cost per month would have to include salaries for at least two veterinary doctors/surgeons (₹100,000 x 2 = ₹ 200,000), five para-vets (₹20,000 x five = ₹100,000), 10 helpers and cleaners (₹15,000 x 10 = ₹150,000), two cooks to prepare meals for the dogs (₹30,000 x 2 = ₹60,000) and two cooks' assistants (₹ 20,000 x 2 = ₹40,000). The total comes to ₹550,000.

Other salaries would have to include that of the shelter's administrative head (₹100,000 per month), an accountant (₹75,000 per month), a van/car driver (₹ 30,000) and his/her assistant. The total

comes to ₹345,000.

The total of all the above amounts would come to ₹895,000 per month. In addition, at the rate of ₹20 per head per day, the cost of feeding 1,000 dogs would come to ₹600,000 in a month of 30 days. Add to this the cost of medicines, vaccines, injection syringes, buying of mattresses for dogs to sleep on, electricity, water, fuel for van/cars, servicing and repairing charges for the latter, and one would get a total of at least another Rupees two lakh or so. This would make for a total monthly operating expenditure of ₹1,695, 000 or an annual expenditure of ₹20340000 or ₹2.034 crore. The estimated annual expenditure on 600 shelters would be ₹220.4 crore

The expenditure of even this astronomical amount will be fruitless. The reason is simple. According to the Guidelines for Dog Population Management, released by the WHO and World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) in May 1990, "Each habitat has a specific carrying capacity for each species.

This specific carrying capacity essentially depends on the availability, quality and distribution of the resources (shelter, food, water) for the species concerned. The density of the population for higher vertebrates (including dogs) is almost always near the carrying capacity of the environment."

Under the ABC programme, street dogs are picked up, sterilised, vaccinated against rabies, and returned to the area from which they had been taken. Being territorial, they keep unsterilised and unvaccinated dogs out of their areas, and the authorities can concentrate on sterilising and vaccinating in new areas until all stray dogs in a city or district are covered. Putting all dogs in an area in shelters would enable unsterilised, unvaccinated dogs from other areas to come in and the authorities will have to return again and again to the same area to remove the new arrivals. Until the promulgation of ABC Rules, the number of stray dogs continued to increase in India despite relentless mass killings.

With Delhi's stray dogs locked in shelters, those from Uttar Pradesh and Haryana will move into the national capital — unless, of course, Delhi Police sets up check posts, manned 24x7, in every road, lane and by-lane along the borders of its two neighbouring states, to keep stray dogs from these out.

One cannot see that happening.

Claiming the gaze: Rethinking Indigenous Day



PHIRMI
BODO

Every year on 9th August, the United Nations calls upon the world to observe the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. It is a day marked by panels, policy reports, cultural showcases, and social media hashtags. The intention is noble: to highlight the struggles, rights, and contributions of Indigenous peoples across the globe. But as the date approaches again, one cannot help but ask — what does this "international" day mean to the tribal communities of India? Does this commemoration speak from within their lived experiences, or does it impose an imported framework upon them? This is not a rhetorical question. In an age of increasing global convergence, such international observations have a way of becoming the dominant way of remembering. And yet, the very notion of indigeneity in India does not sit comfortably within the categories prescribed by the West.

The Indian Context:

India is home to over 700 recognised Scheduled Tribes. From the Gonds of Central India to the Dimasa Kacharis of Assam, from the Santhals of Jharkhand to the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh, these communities constitute a vast archive of indigenous knowledge and ecological wisdom. But unlike in settler colonial societies, Indian tribal societies were not completely displaced from their lands (though many have been pushed to the margins due to colonial imperialism). Nor were their cultures erased in the same way.

Instead, what we find in India is something unique: a continuity of Indigenous knowledge and cosmology that has persisted across centuries, resisting erasure even in the face of colonial disruption, modernist rationality, and global homogenisation. This cultural continuity is not merely about the survival of rituals or festivals, but the endurance of entire epistemic frameworks — ways of knowing, being, and relating to the natural and metaphysical worlds. They are not communities waiting to be remembered. They are communities that have always remembered themselves.

This is where the International Day, as currently framed, begins to feel inadequate. Its model of indigeneity is rooted in a binary of absence and recovery, trauma and representation. But in India — it is about presence, persistence and regeneration



Tribal communities have contributed to India's civilisational ethos not merely as peripheral or folkloric presences, but as foundational knowledge bearers whose ecological wisdom, cosmological insights, and ethical lifeways have informed agriculture, medicine, festivals, linguistic practices, and spiritual worldviews. This enduring presence calls for a re-writing of Indian history that centers Indigenous perspectives not as residues of the past, but as custodians of cultural continuity and sustainable futures.

Tribal Festivals as Memory:

In Western discourses on indigeneity, there is a heavy focus on recovering forgotten rituals and restoring lost languages. In contrast, many tribal communities in India continue to mark time through their own calendars, linked to the moon, the crops, the river, and the ancestors.

For eg the Dimasa Bushudima festival is a communion with ancestors through song and rhythm — a way of affirming belonging to a lineage and a land. The Sarhul festival of the Oraon, Munda and Ho community is a celebration of sacred groves and the flowering of Sal trees, tied to ideas of fertility and renewal. Kharchi Puja in Tripura has strong tribal roots in its worship of earth deities and the cleansing of ancestral sins. These are not cultural artefacts on display.

The Problem of External Recognition:

The roots of this distortion lie deep in colonial anthropology and missionary ethnography. These disciplines, under the guise of scientific inquiry or moral upliftment, often reduced Indigenous life worlds to data points, rituals to spectacles, and oral traditions to primitive folklore. Such categorisation robbed communities of their intellectual dignity. Colonial archives classified Indigenous people as 'subjects' to be governed and studied — not as thinkers, philosophers, or theorists in their own right. The

legacy of this objectification persists in modern academia and policy discourse, where tribal knowledge is often viewed as secondary, pre-modern, or quaint.

Towards Rooted Celebrations:

In this context, the observance of 9th August should be approached not merely as a symbolic act, but as an opportunity to decolonise our understanding of tribal life. Rather than mimic global formats, we must turn to our own cultural landscape and ask: How do Indian tribal communities remember themselves? What are their modes of archiving memory, history, and resistance?

For tribal communities in India, Janajati Gaurav Diwas — commemorated on 15th November — is not merely a calendar event. It is a day born of memory, resistance, and reverence. Marked on the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, a legendary tribal freedom fighter and spiritual leader, the day offers an opportunity to move beyond symbolic recognition towards self-defined celebration.

It is declaration of civilisational continuity and Indigenous ethics.

Let us reflect not just on what is remembered, but how and why it is remembered. For many tribal communities in India, the deepest forms of memory are not marked by declarations or dates. They are marked in the grain of rice offered to ancestors, the first song taught to a child, the sacred grove that is never cut, and the ritual that welcomes the monsoon. The real work of honouring Indigenous life is not performed on stage. It is carried in nature, forests, in courtyards, in prayer, and in the quiet dignity of communities that have never needed a reminder to remember who they are.

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Inland fisheries: India's silent revolution in the blue economy



MALIKA
PANDEY

Beyond the plate, fish in India have long embodied stories, symbols, and the silent memory of a civilisation. From Harappan pottery evoking water deities to *Vishnu's* fish avatar in the *Matsya Purana*, from *Kalidasa's* royal imagery to matrimonial rituals in Bengal, fish have shaped our culture and identity. In art forms like Madhubani paintings and films such as *Chemmeen*, the 1965 Malayalam classic, they evoke abundance, longing, and the fragile rhythms of life by water.

Yet for decades, fisheries remained peripheral to public policy. That began to change after 2014 as India positioned freshwater aquaculture not merely as a source of nutrition but as a strategic driver of rural livelihoods and economic renewal. A turning point arrived with the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana in 2020, backed by a ₹20,050 crore outlay. Moving beyond input-centric support, the scheme sought to modernise the entire fisheries value chain from hatcheries and feed units to cold storage, transport infrastructure, and market linkages, laying the groundwork for a more resilient and integrated sector. Most of this growth has come in the past decade with total fish production nearly doubling, and inland fisheries now contributing over 75 per cent.

A landmark reform in February 2024 extended crop insurance to fish farming under the PM Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah Yojana, classifying fish stock as insurable. This mitigated risks for marginal farmers and catalysed private investment, accelerating inland aquaculture's rise. With an 8.58 per cent average annual growth rate, the sector now outpaces all other agri-allied domains. Institutional support has followed with disease surveillance programmes and biosecurity protocols strengthening trust among farmers. Yet potential remains unlocked. A majority of inland fish farming continues to rely on traditional practices, with limited adoption of scientific feed formulations or species diversification. Post-harvest infrastructure is weak. Value addition through fish processing remains negligible. Despite India's seafood exports reaching ₹60,524 crore in 2023 to 2024 across 132 countries, inland aquaculture contributes little to this success, which is still dominated by marine production. Without a strong retail and export supply chain tailored to inland fish, the sector remains an untapped frontier of India's blue economy. Disparities persist.



While states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have surged ahead, others like Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh lag due to underinvestment, poor infrastructure, and limited extension services. Climate variability further constrains progress. Nearly three crore livelihoods depend on the sector, with women comprising 30 per cent of the workforce. Despite their roles in hatcheries, processing, and marketing, access to training, credit, and ownership remains limited. This is the moment for consolidation, not reinvention. India must create Inland Fisheries Infrastructure Corridors in key aquaculture districts with mobile cold storage and mini-processing hubs. States should launch Aquaculture Acceleration Missions bundling credit, insurance, and technical support to scale innovations like RAS and cage culture. A Digital Blue India platform powered by IoT and blockchain can revolutionise pond monitoring and traceability. Disease surveillance must go real time linking state labs to a national dashboard. With two decades to capture our demographic dividend, inland fisheries must be central to India's growth strategy. Their integration into the national economic narrative represents more than reform. It signals transformation. India's blue economy must not remain confined to its oceans. It must rise from ponds, tanks, and reservoirs flowing through the rural heartlands that have long remained on the margins. Inland fisheries, once overlooked, now stand at the forefront of food security, livelihood creation, and export growth. They are no longer silent. Awakened and surging forward, they carry with them the quiet momentum of rural economic resurgence.

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Tariffs and Trust

Just six months after pledging to double bilateral trade by 2030, US President Donald Trump has slapped India with a combined 50 per cent tariff on all imports ~ 25 per cent as part of his broad trade overhaul, and a fresh 25 per cent penalty targeting Indian purchases of Russian oil. The announcement came via a formal executive order citing national security threats arising from India's continued energy dealings with Moscow. The language of the order leaves little room for ambiguity. India's direct or indirect imports of Russian oil, it claims, "undermine US foreign policy" in Ukraine. But the unprecedented move goes well beyond economic recalibration. It exposes a new era of transactional foreign policy ~ where punitive tariffs are not just about deficits or reciprocity but about compelling alignment with Washington's broader geopolitical objectives. The Indian government has rightly called the measure "unjustified and unreasonable." After all, it was the redirection of Russian energy to Asian buyers like India that helped stabilise global oil prices following Western sanctions in 2022. US officials at the time tacitly encouraged this shift to prevent a global shock. New Delhi's energy strategy, driven by commercial and logistical realities, helped fill a supply vacuum created by Europe's sudden turn away from Russian crude. India's energy calculus is not ideological but pragmatic. With Europe crowding out traditional West Asian suppliers, and volatility in global markets, Russian oil offered both availability and affordability. Even private Indian refiners based their sourcing on price, not politics ~ something Western oil majors routinely claim as standard practice. To now weaponise those very actions is not just hypocritical, it is disingenuous. The justification ~ that Indian purchases of Russian oil threaten US interests in Ukraine ~ sounds less like strategy and more like selective morality. Washington had no qualms about conducting \$3.5 billion in trade with Russia under President Joe Biden just last year. Yet India, whose energy decisions were driven by commercial logic and global supply dislocations, is now being punished under the guise of principle. India has chosen not to retaliate ~ at least for now. But the tariffs will bite. The Delhi-based Global Trade Research Initiative estimates that Indian exports to the US could drop by nearly 50 per cent if these duties stay in place. This includes everything from textiles and pharmaceuticals to auto components and IT hardware. And the broader message being sent to India and others is chilling: foreign policy independence may carry a steep price tag. For all the rhetoric of friendship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump, the present state of bilateral ties points to a deeper divergence of interests. The shift from shared democratic values to hard-nosed economic coercion marks a turning point. India may eventually re-enter trade talks with Washington, but it will do so with caution and a sharpened sense of self-interest. Washington must ask itself what it ultimately wants from its allies: loyalty, leverage ~ or respect. It is losing all three.

Symbolism and Stakes

The United Kingdom's announcement that it will recognise a Palestinian state unless certain conditions are met by Israel signals not just a policy pivot, but a deep reckoning with history and principle. It is also a moment fraught with political consequence, as symbolism collides with the hard limits of power and diplomacy. For decades, Britain, like many of its Western allies, has spoken of Palestinian statehood as the inevitable outcome of a negotiated two-state solution. But negotiations have long stalled. Instead, the reality has shifted on the ground: Israeli settlements have steadily expanded across the West Bank, the Gaza Strip remains under siege, and Palestinian governance is fractured and largely powerless. The idea of a two-state solution has gone from diplomatic orthodoxy to political fiction. What then does recognition mean in such a context? It means, primarily, the affirmation of a people's right to self-determination. More than 140 nations already recognise Palestine as a state, though many do so in name more than in consequence. For Britain to join them, especially as a former colonial power in the region, is to acknowledge that moral responsibility lingers long after the empire. The Balfour Declaration promised a home for Jews but also warned against prejudicing the rights of non-Jewish communities. The failure to uphold both ends of that promise is a wound that remains unhealed. Yet recognition is not just an act of atonement or a symbolic gesture of solidarity with Palestinians under siege. It is also a political lever aimed squarely at a government in Israel that has made no secret of its disdain for Palestinian sovereignty. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's refusal to entertain a two-state solution, combined with Israel's on-going military campaign in Gaza and recent threats of West Bank annexation, has effectively closed the door to a credible peace process. In that light, Britain's recognition pledge becomes a conditional ultimatum. It gives Israel a diplomatic off-ramp ~ ceasefire, no annexation, return to negotiations ~ but it also sets a deadline. Few expect Israel to yield, but the move forces a stark choice into the open: either uphold the viability of two states or acknowledge that the alternative is indefinite occupation, and the erosion of both Palestinian rights and Israeli democracy. Critics may argue that recognition, without a functioning state apparatus or defined borders, is a hollow act.

But hollow acts can still echo. They can redraw the moral map of international diplomacy. They can signal to the Palestinians that their cause is not forgotten; and to Israel that unchallenged impunity is no longer guaranteed. France and Canada's recent decision to recognise Palestine, alongside earlier moves by Ireland, Spain, and Norway, signals a broader Western shift. With Britain poised to follow, the moral and diplomatic isolation of Israel deepens and the demand for justice, even if symbolic for now, becomes impossible to ignore.

Census challenge

At the time of the launch of the reservation policy, the concept of other backward classes was not in place, and therefore job reservation for them as a group was also not on the agenda. The demands for job reservation came up strongly only after the submission of the reports of the Mandal Commission on 31 December 1980. The commission in its report recommended, inter alia, 27 per cent reservation for jobs under Central government for the members of OBCs.



The notification for Census 2027 was finally issued by the Government on 16 June 2025. This represents a delay of more than six years as the notice for Census 2021 was issued on 26 March 2019. That notification has now been cancelled, and the government has named the present census "Census 2027." This also indicates that the government has finally admitted that the nation has broken its chain of 150 years' history of uninterrupted census-taking.

Now the government will have to decide whether it will continue the previous tradition of taking a census in the first year of each decade, or a ten-year interval from the present census, to take the next one in 2037. Section 3 of the Census Act 1948 provides the government with the power to notify its decision to take a census and its time. The best course of action in this context will be to continue the present convention of taking census at the beginning of each decade, as this will require only minor readjustment of the data.

The notification dated 16 June has not given any further information regarding the much-talked-about proposal of updating the National Population Registrars (NPR). The NPRs are prepared and updated under the provisions of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, framed under the Citizenship Act 1955. Under Rule 3 (4) of these rules, the Union Government is to issue an order stating the dates for preparation of NPRs.

Similarly, rule 4 of these rules empowers the Central government to carry out house-to-house enumeration for the collection of specified particulars from the persons, including their citizenship status. Thus, it is for the Central government to issue a notification much prior to the beginning of house-to-house enumeration for census 2027. It may be noted that NPR was first prepared in the year 2010, and thereafter these were last updated in the year 2015.

Another notable absence visible in the context of the "Census 2027" notification is the information about the government's decision to headcount the caste population. The caste populace was enthusiastic about the announcement made by the government on 30 April 2025. But thereafter, nothing came out. The government issued the notification under Section 3 of the Census of India Act 1948. The provision is that

the government must announce publicly their decision to go for a census. Nowhere in the Act of 1948 has the word 'census' been defined.

So, the provision of Section 3 is very broad, and the Union Government could have elaborated on their decision to take a census along with their intention to capture caste data. But this government avoided this perhaps thinking it to be too early. In this context, the government has to decide first about the modalities to be adopted for capturing caste data. At present, there are two lists of caste groups/communities, viz., 1) the Central list showing State-wise caste groups containing a total of 2,633 caste groups and 2) the list of each State. The present State lists together contain names of more caste groups than the existing Central list.

In view of this, the Central Government would have limited scope to choose the Central list for the present census, because this would mean leaving out some of the caste groups/communities from enumeration that are already on the list and getting the admissible benefits from States. This would open up a wide scope for litigation, defeating the purpose of conducting a census. On the other hand, accepting the State list for the census would mean more State compliance in the census process, especially concerning those caste groups/communities which are not in the Central list.

The government, although it has not come up with any information about the caste census, will soon have to comply with the provisions of Section 8(1) of the 1948 Act read with Rule 5(1) (c), when they will be required to notify the census schedules for public information. These schedules must also comprise the schedule prepared for capturing data of caste population.

The basic purpose of enumeration of backward castes such as Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes, and OBCs, is to bring them up from the level of backwardness. For this, the Constitution has provided various benefits and concessions to the communities belonging to SC, ST, and OBCs, including reservations in government jobs and reserved seats in government educational institutions, etc. So far, the quota system in

both jobs and educational institutions is working effectively.

Fixation of the size of the quota for job reservation, etc., for SC and ST communities is a matter that falls within the purview of the States. Almost every State in India has its legislation dealing with the size of the reservation quota for SC & ST populations. This is mainly done depending on the size of their population. In most cases, these State enactments were made during the 1970s and 80s, and therefore the size of the quotas is proportionate to the populations of the SCs and STs as recorded in the censuses of 1971 and 1981.

For example, in Andhra Pradesh the strength of the SC and ST populations was 16.41 per cent and 7.0 per cent, respectively, as per the 2011 census. Against this, the quota for SC and ST was fixed at 16.0 and 7 per cent, respectively, of the total vacant jobs. Similarly, the proportions of SC and ST populations in Gujarat were 6.74 per cent and 14.75 per cent,

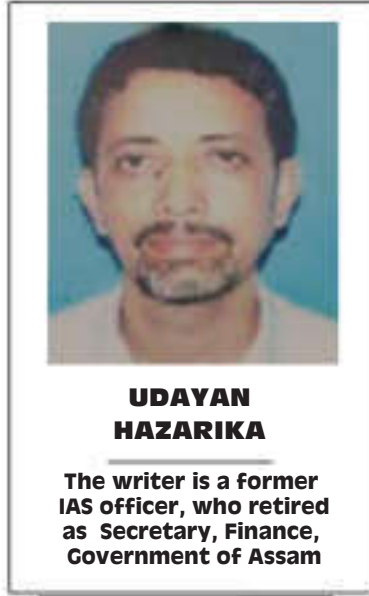
and the government decided to implement the recommendations and accordingly made an announcement in Parliament.

Immediately after the announcement, the Government issued an office memorandum declaring 27 per cent reservation of jobs for the people belonging to OBCs. However, this was challenged in the Supreme Court by a senior advocate, Indra Sawhney.

A nine-judge Constitution bench had taken up the case of Indra Sawhney vs. Union of India. The judgment was pronounced on 16 November 1992, which elaborately explains the constitutional provisions inherent under Articles 14, 15, and 16. It opened up a new vista in the matter of reservation of jobs for backward classes in India. Of the several critical aspects that were covered in the judgment, one important one was the fixation of the ceiling limit for reservation at 50 per cent.

Now the real issues concerning the other backward classes will emerge once the census data pertaining to the caste are available. The government has already made adequate publicity about the electronic mode of data collection in this census. This would help in processing the data quickly and thus it can be expected to be available for the public online soon. In this context, one thing that is very sure is that the census will record more caste population than what is expected and that will undoubtedly exceed the present limit of 27 per cent. The Mandal Commission recorded 3,743 caste groups comprising 52 per cent of India's population, and the Supreme Court subsequently ordered that the Government move to reserve 27 per cent reservation in government for OBCs, but it should be in exclusion of the creamy layer, i.e., the socially advanced section among them.

The NSSO 55th Round (1999-2000) estimated the proportion of OBC population in the total population of India at 35.8 per cent. This estimate was revised upward during their 61st Round (2004-05) to 41 per cent, and in their 68th Round (2011-12), the estimate was further revised upward to 43.1 per cent. Although these estimates are based on tiny samples, at present this is the only baseline data available to us. If we go by the rising trend as presented by these estimates, the coming census can be expected to record a population of the size of not less than 47 per cent of the nation's total population.



respectively. As against this, the job reservation quota was fixed at 7.0 and 15 per cent, respectively. Likewise in Karnataka, as against 17.15 per cent SC and 6.95 per cent ST populations, quotas were 16.0 and 7 per cent, respectively. This makes it amply clear that the exercise of fixation of quotas for reservation of jobs, etc., for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was not much of a difficulty, as the population for both the categories is enumerated in successive censuses. Quotas were fixed, keeping some room for accommodating future increments in the populations of both categories.

At the time of the launch of the reservation policy, the concept of other backward classes was not in place, and therefore job reservation for them as a group was also not on the agenda. The demands for job reservation came up strongly only after the submission of the reports of the Mandal Commission on 31 December 1980. The commission in its report recommended, inter alia, 27 per cent reservation for jobs under Central government for the members of OBCs.

The recommendations of the report, however, were not implemented till 1990, the year in which the VP Singh-led gov-

Theatres merged to strengthen cultural identity

The Viet Nam Cai Luong Theatre, the Viet Nam Chèo Theatre and Viet-nam Tuong Theatre will be merged into the National Traditional Performing Arts Theatre. In addition to staging traditional performances, this new theatre will also be tasked with preserving and promoting Viet Nam's traditional art forms.

The Viet Bac Folk Song and Dance Theatre will be combined with the Viet Nam Song, Dance and Music Theatre to form the National Song, Dance and Music Theatre. Its mission includes performing folk and contemporary music, as well as collecting, preserving and developing the folk music and dance traditions of Viet Nam's ethnic minority groups.

Following the Prime Minister's directive, the ministry is implementing the merger cautiously and scientifically. We've conducted a thorough review of each theatre's organisational structure, human resources, creative capacity and production scale. The aim is to preserve artistic identities while fostering collaboration among different art forms.

This merger aligns with broader efforts to reform public agencies in the cultural sector ~ not to erase identities, but to unify and revitalise Viet Nam's traditional



arts. It seeks ways to streamline operations, reduce redundancy and increase management efficiency.

Ultimately, the goal is to build modern, versatile and autonomous theatres capable of producing large-scale performances for regional and international audiences, while preserving heritage through innovation, audience engagement and cultural tourism. The reform also encourages financial autonomy, professional communication and reduced dependency on state funding. One key advantage is the strong backing from the Government. The current drive to streamline public agencies, guided by the Viet Nam Communist Party's resolutions and the Prime Minister's decisions, has created clear legal and strategic frameworks for the merger.

National cultural and sports planning for this decade and beyond provides solid direction, paving the way for unified implementation and long-term development of these theatres into influential cultural institutions.

The merger enhances organisational efficiency by reducing redundancy, streamlining staffing and management, and optimising shared finances and personnel. A larger, unified theatre makes it easier to attract socialised funding.

It also opens artistic opportunities ~ combining strengths from each theatre, sharing facilities, staff and experience, and enabling large-scale productions with both national and international reach. The merger encourages a shift in mindset, from administrative to creative and market-oriented thinking, and promotes collaboration between artists of different styles.

However, this is no easy task. It requires careful, step-by-step implementation with coordinated solutions in policy, staffing, finances and artistic development. Artists and performance quality remain central; the merger is not just about reducing numbers but restructuring and elevating State-funded theatres towards a more modern, professional model aligned with global standards.

enforcement. On the positive side, her brave stand brought her struggle for justice to light. But what kind of system forces a uniformed officer to seek justice on social media? Isn't that a failure of the very institutions meant to protect her? Public trust demands that justice be swift, impartial, and proactive reaching victims before they are forced to cry out.

Yours, etc.,
Mohammad Asad,
Mumbai, 6 August.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Cancer gains

Sir, When President Richard Nixon launched the "War on Cancer" in 1971, few could have imagined the strides we would make over the next five decades. Initiatives like the Cancer Moonshot have played a pivotal role in accelerating research, enhancing treatment modalities, and improving overall patient outcomes.

Today, we witness a

remarkable transformation: nearly two-thirds of people diagnosed with cancer survive at least five years, compared to only one in two in 1971.

This is not just a statistic ~ it is a testament to collective scientific effort, innovation, and human resilience.

On a personal note, my wife was diagnosed with colon cancer in early 2018. By God's grace and modern medicine, she is doing well so far.

Yet, like many cancer survivors and their families, we live with a quiet undercurrent of apprehension ~ the shadow that cancer often casts.

Back in the early 1970s, during our post-graduate ENT training, hospital wards were overwhelmed with advanced cases of throat cancer ~ patients with large secondary growths in the neck, gasping for air, struggling to swallow, torn between hunger and helplessness.

It was an era where euthanasia became a whispered word, born not from neglect but from desperation.

Thankfully, times have changed. With targeted therapies, immunotherapy, early detection, and compassionate care, cancer is no longer a death sentence. It has become, as some now say, "a word ~ not a sentence."

Yours, etc.,
Dr K C Dutta,
Nagaon, Assam, 5 August.

FAILURE

Sir, CRPF officer Kalavathi's emotional video appeal, after the theft of her wedding jewellery and the Tamil Nadu police's alleged inaction, stirred public sentiment and raised serious concerns about the responsiveness of state institutions.

Though the investigation was eventually launched, the initial apathy revealed a troubling pattern of delay and neglect in law



‘Queries on Op Sindoor pointless’

Kanwal Sibal, 77, is a career diplomat, who retired as Foreign Secretary of India. He was conferred with Padma Shri for his distinguished services in the field of Public Affairs in 2017. Sibal was appointed to the Indian Foreign Service in July 1966. He has been an ambassador to Turkey, Egypt, France and Russia. He served as Foreign Secretary from July 2002 to November 2003. In an exclusive interaction with Sushil Kumar of The Statesman, he talked about the Opposition questioning the government on Operation Sindoor, Pakistan once again offering talks; China, Pakistan coming together against India, and the US President, Donald Trump, announcing from the roof-top time and again that he is the one who secured a ceasefire between India and Pakistan.

Q. Does the Opposition asking questions about Operation Sindoor give any kind of leverage to Pakistan?

A. There is no point in the Opposition asking questions about Operation Sindoor as one can talk about it only after 10-15 years and not now.

You must understand despite the world having images of destruction in Pakistan caused by the Indian strikes, it's not revealing any losses officially. They have not uttered even a word on it, then why are the political parties in India asking to reveal anything about India's loss or anything else in connection with the military operation that we launched against them.

Pakistan is not accepting any claim regarding the attacks and subsequent damage simply because it would be demoralising for them.

I do not see a point in India disclosing anything about it, especially when it's still going on. Also, the Indian armed forces have made official statements on the entire issue, published papers on it, what else do you want to know?

Raising questions on it is like providing Pakistan an opportunity against India. It will pick it up and make you look weak. The Opposition by doing so is taking up the Pakistani line.

Q. A few days ago, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister, who also holds the portfolio of Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar reiterated Islamabad's willingness to engage in dialogue with New Delhi on a range of issues -- from trade and economic cooperation to counter-terrorism, do you think India should accept the talk offer?

A. No point in it. It's their agenda of putting the ball into India's court as they have mentioned it also. India, as we all know, has made it clear several times that there would be no talks unless Pakistan stops supporting terrorism, and removes all terror facilities from its soil.

Offering talks on all issues is their effort to make Kashmir a central point of talks. It's their usual ploy, and India would not fall for it. There is no ground for holding any dialogue with them unless they do what is expected of them. India's position on having any kind of talks with them is crystal clear – stop terrorism and talk.

They want to falsely show to the world how willing they are to resolve issues with India but their idea of talks is hollow. I believe they cannot befooled the world, and far as India is concerned, it knows their game plan.

Q. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has charged the Central government with what he calls 'bringing China and Pakistan together as a force against India – the biggest mistake that the government has made', do you agree with him?

A. It's complete nonsense. China and Pakistan have been together for a long time now. They

joined hands against India in 1962, much before the BJP came to power. Pakistan has been buying arms from China. China has also been providing all sorts of help to it for decades to contain India, and now someone saying that the BJP contributed in uniting the two against the country does not make sense at all.

The whole world knows the truth, and statements such as this do not hold water. It was unnecessary and uncalled for, Rahul Gandhi should not have made it.

This confuses the masses. It's understandable that it was political but one should avoid making such claims as it looks foolish.

Q. How do you look at US President Donald Trump's repeated claims of brokering a ceasefire between India and Pakistan?

A. US President Donald Trump is doing it for his domestic audience. Even before he got elected to the office, he would make all sorts of claims, and that is exactly what he is doing.

He, right after assuming the office for the second term, tried to do it with Ukraine and Russia. He would call up the President of Russia, speak to him on the phone for hours but nothing would happen. Similarly, he met Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House, and the whole world saw how frustrated he was with him in order to make him accept what he was offering to him in terms of a so-called peace deal.

President Trump is desperately trying to display himself as a peace-maker, and he is trying it in several parts of the world, be it Israel and Hamas, India and Pakistan, and other regions where countries are confronting each other.

Several diplomatic channels were active during the Indo-Pak conflict but that does not mean that Trump got it done. Donald Trump is doing what no US president has ever done.



He is totally self-centered and very unpredictable, and indulging in such acts for his domestic audience.

Q. Should India continue to have relations with countries that supported Pakistan during Operation Sindoor?

A. It does not work that way. It would be disastrous, no country can afford to do that. Many countries, including China and the US, supported Pakistan directly or indirectly but relations can't be put on hold just like this. You have to deal with the issue diplomatically, be it the US, China or any other country. There are several countries that offered support to Pakistan during our military confrontation with it.

Q. Are you satisfied with the government's response to the Pahalgam attack or do you think something more should have been done?

A. This is for the first time that such a response was given to Pakistan for its terror acts against India. India attacked its terror bases earlier also but this time it was far bigger. Our defence forces attacked them right inside their country, and it was there to be seen by the world.

However, we do not encourage war or any confrontation with any country but in case of provocation, we would deal with it. India has made it clear to Pakistan that any terror attack would be met with a solid military response.

Blooper-prone Rahul must manage optics

RUHI TEWARI

It has been over two decades since Congress leader and Gandhi family scion Rahul Gandhi ventured into politics. In these years, he has served as the vice president of India's largest opposition party and then as its president. He has been elected Member of Parliament five times and has been the party's de-facto face against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He has been his party's star campaigner, addressed innumerable rallies across several elections, and led two pan-India yatras. As of today, he is the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha—a position of heft and meaning.

And yet, despite these decades of exposure and experience, Rahul Gandhi has yet to master the basic craft of managing public perception and continues to seem callow in politics. Yet another recent instance brings to light how Gandhi's lack of political maturity remains jarring. Earlier this week, the Supreme Court of India censured the Congress leader for his remarks against the Army in the wake of the 2020 Galwan clash with the Chinese, stating a "true Indian" would not say such things. The court, however, paused the defamation proceedings against him.

The Congress party has responded firmly, with Congress leader and Rahul Gandhi's sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra saying the court does not "decide who a true Indian is". To be fair, Vadra isn't wrong. It isn't quite the court's job to define a 'true Indian', and preaching and moral policing should hardly be its domain. This rebuke, as the opposition has rightly

pointed out, is indeed unwarranted and also highly questionable.

But that is beside the point here. Politics is nothing if not a game of optics and perception. And it is in that department that Rahul Gandhi consistently slips up. His remarks that earned him the court's rap on the wrist claimed that the Chinese Army was "thrashing" Indian soldiers in Arunachal Pradesh. It takes quite a degree of political juvenility to publicly make this claim against the armed forces - an emotive issue by any stretch. This seems particularly imprudent given how national security and an aggressive version of nationalism have been a key pillar in the rise and rise of Narendra Modi.

This, however, is hardly the first time Rahul Gandhi has displayed a complete inability to read the room, with his political career peppered with such faux pas.

The Congress leader has moulded his politics in what can only be described as a confused and often puerile, even if well-meaning, fashion. The starkest drawback of his politics has been his complete lack of self-awareness. Gandhi's biggest liability is his entitlement of birth and the tag of being a political dynast, and yet, the Congress leader has never had the wisdom to try and detach himself from this baggage.

His ill-timed and many, many vacations (which seem to have fortunately reduced now) created the perception of him being a 'non-serious' politician, particularly in the face of the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah duo that has made being '24x7 politicians' fashionable.

Ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, when Modi was seeking his first

re-election, Gandhi mounted a campaign that was bound to be a self-goal. He pushed ahead with the slogan of 'chowkidaar chor hai' as a reference to corruption allegations in the Rafale deal, essentially accusing the prime minister of being a 'thief'. With this, he gave Modi the perfect weapon against himself: The chance to launch a combative campaign that brought out the distinction between the 'entitled, rich dynast' who was trying to bring down a 'self-made' prime minister who had risen through the ranks. Needless to say, Modi's 'naamdaar versus kaamdaar' (the dynast versus hard-worker) campaign hit the bull's eye while Rahul's chowkidaar jibe flopped.

Then there have been his on-off flirtations with soft Hindutva and claims of being a 'janeudhaari Brahmin' (one who wears the sacred thread), which have landed his party and him in the confused space of being neither truly secular nor showing absolute commitment to Hindutva.

More recently, Rahul Gandhi led the campaign demanding a Caste Census, which it perhaps even found to be working on the ground. The Congress made it a single-point agenda. However, Modi-Shah's BJP isn't one to be outsmarted, and with its sudden announcement of conducting such a census, it left the Congress agenda-less. Even though the Congress has been touting this as its victory, the BJP is bound to run with the narrative on this, given its crafty messaging.

These are merely a handful of examples from a career generously sprinkled with poor decisions and even more poorly implemented ones, combined with a slew of flawed optics.



Politics is about the right optics and the ability to manage public perception. This has further become accentuated in India in the Modi era, given his remarkable ability to manipulate perception and project an image that is palatable to his voters.

Unfortunately for the Congress, it is this very area in which Rahul Gandhi finds himself to be the weakest.

Take, for instance, the latest Supreme Court incident. While Gandhi has every right, much like every citizen of the country, to question the government and poke holes in its claims, what he needs to ponder upon is whether it is really sensible of the face of the main opposition party to be seen as criticising the armed forces, and belittling them by alleging they were being 'thrashed'. All that the BJP needs to do, and will in all likelihood do, is magnify the message of the top court of the country questioning Rahul Gandhi's commitment to India.

Again, the right or wrong, freedom of expression and the right of the opposition to attack the government are moot points here. It is about the right messaging in the right form, using suitable language and understanding the political implications of one's decisions and remarks.

The Bharatiya Janata Party under Modi and Shah has shown tremendous ability to fight back - its successive victories in state elections after what was considered to be a disappointing show in the Lok Sabha polls - is testimony to this. To counter an opponent like that - which has mastered the art of public perception and the science of elections - the Congress needs to be extra cautious and strategic in its messaging. To that end, Rahul Gandhi's palpable lack of astuteness is the albatross around its neck, and the Congress leader must reinvent his path to get rid of it.

The Kathmandu Post/ANN.

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE politicians of the Central Provinces have had another chance, and again failed. The Governor, anxious to work the Government of India Act, has been in negotiation with the Swarajist leaders, as representatives of the largest party in the Assembly, in the hope of enlisting their services in the work of administering the province, but with no result. Two of the three were unwilling to accept office, the third was not in policy opposed, but in the circumstances did not think a stable Ministry could be formed. The Ministry will therefore remain in suspense, and administration will be carried on by a system that was long ago found inadequate. The province will, we imagine, deplore this failure. We are moving towards 1929, and the contribution of the Central Provinces and of Bengal towards future developments will be largely negative. The satisfactory features in the situation are the anxiety of Sir Montagu Butler for co-operation and the candid attitude of the Swarajist leaders. Better a thousand times a candid "no" than an insincere or hesitating "yes."

NEWS ITEMS

FRENCH LOSSES IN SYRIA

REBELS THREATEN DAMASCUS

A French column intended for the relief of Suedia was attacked and scattered by the rebel Druses, who have captured Suedia and laid siege to the citadel.

The French lost 200 killed and 600 wounded in the engagement, and they are now said to be preparing to defend Damascus.

The rebellion is ascribed to foreign influences among the Druses.

HEAVY TASK FOR VICEROY

ISSUES FOR EARLY DECISION

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

SIMLA, AUG.

WITH the return of Lord and Lady Reading and the arrival of Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood, the permanent Civil and Military heads have assumed charge of their posts. Both looked well, after their holiday; but a strenuous time will be theirs in the immediate future.

Lord Reading has hardly a fortnight to make up his mind on a large number of important outstanding issues on which he has to give his final decision. There is the Muddiman Report the personnel for the Currency Commission, and the Public Service Commission. It is expected that Lord Reading will now devote his time to important issues, so that his speech on August 20 (which is keenly looked forward to) may be as full of as interest and as many announcements as he can sandwich in the usual administrative review of the year's activities. Lord Reading has a heavy task to accomplish in a short period.

Sir William Birdwood will have his hand's equally full. The report of General Shea's Committee on the Auxiliary and Territorial Force awaits disposal, and that of the Skeen Committee will shortly be ready.

AKABA OCCUPATION

HUSSEIN'S PROTEST: APPEAL TO BRITAIN

(* TIMES "SPECIAL SERVICE.") LONDON, AUG.

THE latest notable seeking publicity in the columns of The Times in order to appeal to the world is Hussein, ex-King of the Hedjaz.

In the course of a letter, he protests against the occupation of Akaba as contrary to Britain's promise to the Arabs, the result of which he says has been the interruption of communications with Medina "which will fall into the hands of the Wahabis and Bedouins, who will ruin it as they ruined Mecca."

"Remember us in our misfortunes. Knowing the nobility of the people of Britain I am sure they will never permit our enemy to ruin Medina which belongs to the Arabs and Moslems."

CRITICAL SITUATION

UNITED STATES & RUBBER INDUSTRY

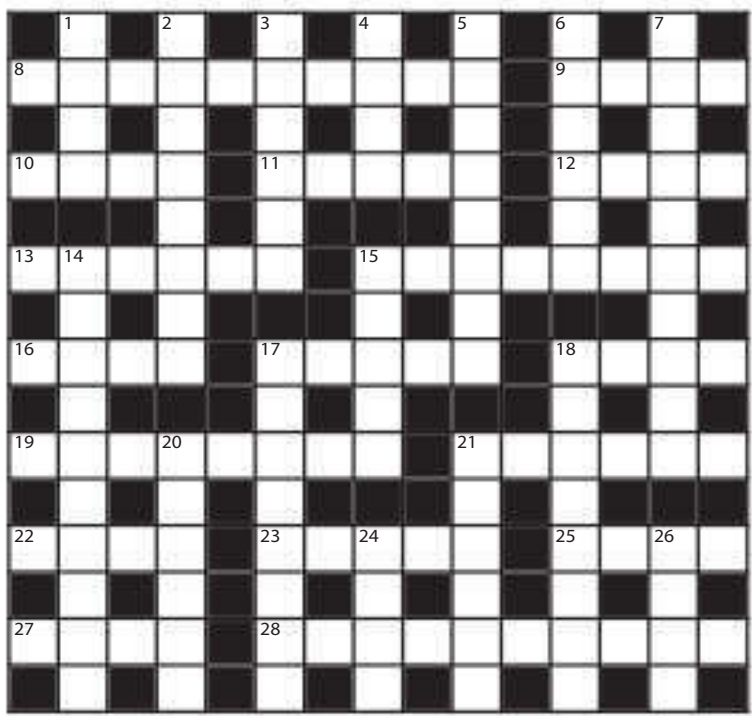
LONDON, AUG.

IN the House of Commons, replying to Mr. J. Duckworth (L. Blackburn), Mr. R. McNeill, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, stated that the United States Ambassador left with him on July 27 an aide-memoire stating that a critical situation had arisen in the United States rubber industry owing to the high prices of crude rubber and the smallness of stocks in London and the United States, said to be due to the working of the Stevenson scheme.

The aide-memoire quoted certain proposals of the Rubber Association of America for improving the situation and as likely to stabilize the price of rubber at a reasonable figure, and stated that such stabilization was essential for the continuance of the normal operations of United States manufacturers, and consequently for the encouragement of the rubber-growing industry.—Reuter's Special Service.

CROSSWORD

NO-293219



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

HEATHEN M S G C
Y T R MILKYWAY
BERGMAN M A Y P
C H D LISTENER
CAN'TH A E E E
N E COOPERATES
DUN A G G H S
Y SETTHEORY M
P A E A C ODE
AGGRESSIVE S R
L I X R NOESIS
TITMOUSE T M D
R A C C PRAIRIE
ONTHEDOT I T A
W E T T SCREENS

ACROSS

- 8 No dancer recalled mistake about line further down (10)
9 Type of sugar not popular for tooth (4)
10 Developer very much ahead (4)
11 Article in photo producing alarm (5)
12 Sandbank about to return and drift sideways (4)
13 Grant, perhaps, to import a new sweet wine (6)
15 Detectives are ditching English operations,

- backtracking on an irregular basis (8)
16 Immoral gamble absorbing number (4)
17 Informer comprehends losing power (5)
18 Opening without latest lead actor (4)
19 A lot of point in blocking attractive bargain (3-5)
21 Peevishly complain French article about wine is regressive (6)
22 No repetition in expensive part of programme (4)
23 Revolutionary piano melodies bearing fruit (5)

- 25 Hot gas is subject of clip (4)
27 University lecturer recalled in live university award (4)
28 Insect repellent dispersed into cellar (10)

DOWN

- 1 Give way over cereal (4)
2 Hannibal's introduction into European battle, nothing less? (8)
3 Incompetent work on piano – tricky getting round that (6)

- 4 Main role in ballet is lover I neglected (4)
5 Becoming mostly bitter, tucking into a lot of beef (8)
6 Plant account penned by American spies (6)
7 Make useless vain flapping over Liberal, I see (10)
14 Dreadful delay involving Queen worried sufficiently (10)
15 Head of serpent mostly emulating Adam and Eve in Eden? Willy thing (5)

- 17 Hard work removing new bit of hair in jam (8)
18 Possibly overlooked source of smoke – burning? (8)
20 Quantity of energy given by a component of salad? (6)
21 No restricting one in series from an older time (6)
24 Some cloth to munch? That'll show me up (4)
26 Injured lady heartlessly, without much thought (4)

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

Opportunity in crisis

Trump’s tariff shocker should prompt India to push ahead on big-ticket reforms

There is a massive churn underway in the global economic environment as the rules-based trading order is being upended by the US President Donald Trump’s tariff disruption. Coercive diplomacy is in play against all countries, including India which has just been slapped with additional duties of 25%—besides the 25% on India’s goods to the US—for importing Russian oil as sanctions on Moscow are imminent for its continued war with Ukraine. The big question is whether India should yield to Trump’s bullying or face the consequences being tariffed at 50%. India has rightly responded that the additional levy of 25% is “unfair, unjustified, and unreasonable” and that it would take all actions necessary to protect its national interests. There is no doubt that 50% tariffs would adversely impact more than half of India’s exports to the US. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has firmly stated that the country is willing to pay a heavy price for protecting the interests of farmers and fishermen as shrimp farmers in Andhra Pradesh, diamond cutters from Gujarat, and textile and apparel exporters from Tiruppur will get hit by the 50% duty.

The additional 25% duty on India for buying Russian oil threatens India’s energy security interests as the availability of deeply discounted crude oil eased pressure on our external accounts. Since 2023, Moscow has provided 36% of our requirements of five million barrels of oil a day. Trump berates India for being the largest buyer when everyone wants Russia to stop the killing in Ukraine. Ironically, it was the previous Joseph Biden administration that encouraged India to source its requirements from Moscow as long as it remained below the cap of \$60 a barrel set by the Group of 7 nations. India has, again, forcefully questioned this change of US’s stance while highlighting that western nations who are criticising India are themselves indulging in such trade with Moscow. If India were to stop such purchases, where would it readily find two million barrels of oil a day? Although Trump is convinced that a lower price of oil will bring Russia’s war to an end, his tariffs on India will only result in a tightness of the global oil market and raise prices.

The global churn represents both a crisis and opportunity for India. While there is transitional pain ahead for us, it is also a good time to get our act together on the reforms front so that we engage with the world from a position of strength. Anand Mahindra, chairman of the Mahindra Group, has eloquently suggested that India should seize this moment like it did in 1991 so that today’s churn over tariffs yields some *amrit* or nectar for the country. For starters, India must improve the ease of doing business in the states to attract global capital. Secondly, the power of tourism must be unleashed not only as an engine of growth but also to earn foreign exchange and create more employment. Land and labour reforms must be implemented. To bolster its energy security, India must make determined efforts to boost domestic oil production that has been steadily declining. This has been falling for various reasons including low investment due to obstructive regulations, high taxation, and declining output from old and marginal fields. A more facilitative tax regime is necessary to promote exploration and drilling that will improve relative self-sufficiency over the medium term.

Tourist sites, flash floods are on a collision course

IT’S ONE OF the world’s fastest-growing tourist sites, attracting more visitors than the Statue of Liberty, the Tower of London, or Pompeii. It’s also one of the locations most at risk from devastating natural disasters as our planet warms. The Chota Char Dham, a circuit of four of the most sacred Hindu sites in the foothills of the Himalayas, has grown in recent years to become one of the biggest annual pilgrimages. With more than four million visitors every year, it attracts about 10 times as many religious tourists as Spain’s Camino de Santiago, and roughly twice as many as the Hajj in Mecca.

It’s also become the site of a grimmer spectacle: Flash flooding and landslides, as unchecked development in rapidly-thawing mountain valleys turns ever-intensifying rainstorms into avalanches of mud, rock, and water. In the state of Uttarakhand, at least four have died and dozens more are feared trapped or lost after one such cloud-burst this week swept away much of the village of Dharali.

There’s a horrible inevitability about the location. The Chota Char Dham is considered sacred because it takes pilgrims to shrines associated with the many tributaries of the Ganges, which rises in Gangotri, just upstream from this week’s disaster. Those waters in turn are fed by steep-sided river valleys, and ultimately by glaciers that have shrunk about 40% since pre-industrial times.

Those local conditions and the unchecked development from a soaring tourist trade are fast making the region synonymous with catastrophes.

Flash floods in 2013 killed more than 6,000 people after a glacier above the pilgrimage town of Kedarnath gawaway. In 2021, another flood near Badrinath, another town on the circuit, left more than 200 dead. Slow-moving subsidence in Joshimath, a gateway to Badrinath, has left about a fifth of buildings uninhabitable since ground fissures started opening in 2023.

More pilgrims were killed by a landslide on the Kedarnath route the same year, while a total of 246 died during pilgrimage in 2024, according to state government data. With less than 1% of India’s population, Uttarakhand consistently uses up about 10% of the country’s budget for natural disaster relief.

The pilgrimage only really exists in its current form thanks to concrete and asphalt. The isolated mountain shrines were little visited until the 1962 war between China and India, after which New Delhi started building more roads to improve military access to a disputed border just 30 kilometres (19 miles) or so from this week’s disaster site.

Visitor numbers have since soared as growing incomes and better transport links have improved access. That’s been turbocharged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s intensely personal and religious association with the pilgrimage. He’s visited the mountain shrines multiple times and thrown his weight behind ₹860 billion (\$9.8 billion) of road and railway projects linking the four towns.

All this work is damaging a desperately fragile mountain landscape. Building roads, railways, hotels, restaurants, and shops to serve the booming tourist trade results in deforestation and the dumping of excavated earth into river valleys. That speeds the path of rainfall from the clouds into the narrow channels that carry it away downstream, increasing the risk of damaging floods.

Uttarakhand lost about 0.8% of its forest cover in the decade through 2023. Cutting roadways into slopes without extensive engineering to stabilise the soil also leaves them vulnerable to landslides. Nearly a quarter of the state is at high to very high risk of natural disasters, according to a study in June by academics at Shiv Nadar University in Uttar Pradesh.

There are ways to limit this damage, but they’re not the paths the government is pursuing. The highway is being built in the interests of military planners, on a tight budget. Cutting corners, however, increases the chances of floods and landslides. Illegal construction work, which is rife as tourist rupees pour in, can be prevented by satellite monitoring—so long as officials aren’t getting kickbacks to turn a blind eye.

Most of all, though, India needs to limit visitor numbers, as is done at other environmentally fragile sites such as Machu Picchu and Mount Fuji. Pushing back against religious tourism isn’t a move Modi likes to make—as we saw in 2021, when he ignored the risks that the Kumbh Mela pilgrimage in the Uttarakhand city of Haridwar would turn into a Covid superspreader event. If New Delhi really cares about the lives of religious devotees, however, it’s going to have to start turning back pilgrims for their own safety.

THE ASPIRING GLOBAL POWER COULD HAVE PLAYED ITS CARDS BETTER WITH TRUMP'S AMERICA

Why India, US are at odds

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP is a bully, but India could have played its cards better with him—on Russia, Pakistan, and tariffs. Because it did not, in one fell swoop the Trump administration belied India’s claim to be a global player. The salvos fired by Washington in the form of 50% tariffs on Indian exports to America and as a penalty for India’s huge oil purchases from Russia are reminders that no foreign country believes either India’s claim to be a world actor or the Vishwaguru. If some Indians believed Delhi’s assertions they were poorly informed about international opinion.

With one of Asia’s lowest GDP per capita, high unemployment, many goods that are uncompetitive for exports, and with considerably less to offer developing and industrialised countries than its Asian arch-rival China, India has a long way to go, despite its \$4-trillion economy which cannot compete globally with China’s \$19-trillion one. Most developing countries, some members of the European Union (EU), and India’s South Asian neighbours are in any case on China’s Belt and Road Initiative which does give China a worldwide economic presence. Moreover, it is not just a question of high Indian tariffs: labyrinthine bureaucratic procedures stifle economic ties with trading partners and India’s own progress.

Relatively a weak economic player, India has dismayed even the EU, with whom it hopes to sign a free trade agreement, by its huge oil buys from Russia over the last three years. If geography makes it hard for India to buy more American oil from across the Atlantic Ocean, larger oil purchases from Iraq and Saudi Arabia—from whom it already buys some oil—would

ANITA INDER SINGH

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not have offended the US and EU. That might have helped India to avoid the penalties Trump wants to impose over and above the tariffs he intends to levy on India’s exports to America. But Delhi ignored diplomatic urging by a friendlier President Joe Biden and West European democracies to take a stronger stand against Russia’s attempted conquest of Ukraine in the name of India’s national interest. It is entitled to do that. However, now that national interest has come into open conflict with Trump’s wish to stop India from propping up Russia’s war economy and to prevent Moscow from extinguishing Ukraine’s statehood.

Furthermore, India’s weakness as an economic player is evidenced by its refusal to join Asia’s Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in 2019. India has also lost global ground by labelling Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as Europe’s war. Many countries, including Trump’s America, have not supported India’s stance on Pakistan’s terror attack in Pahalgam. The logic is that if Ukraine is Europe’s war, then the recent Indo-Pak air war, representing a territorial-cum-ideological feud which dates back to the partition of British India in 1947, is an

Indo-Pak problem. Unfortunately, this implies that Delhi has failed to overcome the international hyphenation of India and Pakistan despite its claim that India is a global actor.

Trump—and Delhi—have dealt with the Indo-Pak conflict in ways that are highly disadvantageous to India. His many assertions that he prevailed upon India and Pakistan to cease fire have been vociferously denied by Delhi. This implied Trump was lying, while Trump’s insistence that he persuaded Delhi and Islamabad usher in a ceasefire implied that India was lying.

In contrast, Pakistan’s army chief, Asim Munir, complimented Trump by offering to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize because of his “leadership and proactive role” in facilitating the ceasefire. Trump then invited Munir to the White House. He blasted the “dead-end economies” of Russia and India—and delivered the biggest blow to Delhi by announcing that America would help Pakistan to develop its oil reserves and adding that India would soon be buying oil from Pakistan. To Indians generally, the idea that they should be dependent on an economically weaker Pakistan, which India

Where India fits into Trump 2.0's calculations is a mystery. Delhi must clarify where it stands with the US—which is the largest single buyer (18%) of Indian exports

Red lines beyond agriculture



ABHIJIT DAS

The writer is an international trade expert

The govt must ensure access to affordable medicine, India’s digital future, and policy flexibility to boost manufacturing are not compromised through the India-US trade deal

AFTER US PRESIDENT Donald Trump’s announcement of imposing a 25% penalty tariff on India for its trade relations with Russia, India’s exports to the US will face a 50% illegal import duty over and above World Trade Organization (WTO)-consistent tariffs. Trump’s latest salvo comes at the time when negotiators from the two sides are scheduled to meet within a few days for resolving the negotiating deadlock.

India’s negotiators have their task cut out. While protecting India’s agriculture from subsidised imports coming from the US is clearly a red line in the trade negotiations, certain other issues of core national interest also deserve attention of the negotiators. What are these issues? What could be the implications of agreeing to the US’s demands for India?

Apart from agriculture, there are at least five other issues that should constitute India’s core national interest in the bilateral negotiations. First, in respect of intellectual property, India is likely to be under pressure to make changes to its domestic patent laws for facilitating evergreening patents on pharmaceutical products. This could destroy India’s generic medicine industry, thereby resulting in a sharp increase in the cost of healthcare among the sick and poor. It is reassuring that the government has clearly spelt out its opposition to concessions in trade agreements that could result in evergreening of patents. However, it is also important that the government does not fall prey to the narrative being spun by some think tanks that to

become an innovation-driven economy, India must make changes to its intellectual property and align its laws with those prevailing in the developed countries.

Second, in the digital arena, the US is likely to seek a commitment from India not to impose taxes on the exports of US digital products. In addition, India may be required to allow unrestricted cross-border data flows and implement mandatory sharing of government public data with US entities. These commitments would foreclose the possibility of generating revenue from the most vibrant economic sector and also compromise India’s ability to create domestic digital champions, especially in the artificial intelligence segment. Further, the government must not accept the simplistic opinion being promoted by some lobby groups and experts that accepting the US demand for a permanent moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions would boost India’s information technology (IT) and IT-enabled service exports. This is a technically complex and multi-dimensional issue. India’s negotiators must also remain mindful that bilateral concessions to the US would undermine our ability to protect patent legislation from legal challenges at the WTO.

Third, the US may demand that India provide a firm commitment to purchase

defence equipment, aircraft, and energy products from it. It may not be prudent to purchase some of these products from the US if India is able to secure better terms and conditions from reliable non-US sources. This would also reduce our dependence on the US. Reducing its trade surplus with the US must not become India’s priority in the bilateral trade negotiations.

Fourth, India could also be required to open up its government procurement market for US suppliers on terms more favourable than what India has finalised with the UK under the recently-concluded free trade agreement. Expansive commitment to provide non-discriminatory treatment to US suppliers in India’s government procurement market would erode the government’s ability to utilise this policy instrument for boosting domestic manufacturing, especially in the micro, small, and medium enterprise sector. This would also strike a debilitating blow to some of the government’s flagship schemes, including Make In India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

Fifth, the US may demand that India give a firm commitment to invest in the US—concessions that the US wrested from Japan and the European Union. When India is trying to attract domestic and foreign investment, it would be unreasonable on Trump’s part to expect the

country to commit to investing in the US.

In addition to the above, the “trade agreement” with the US may require India to provide concessions unrelated to international trade—the commitment not to purchase Russian oil being one such example. There is no mistaking the reality that even after an India-US trade deal, the US will continue to use the threat of tariffs to ensure that the Indian government’s policy decisions and other actions promote the economic and political interests of the US.

India’s red lines in respect of agriculture issues have been well-recognised by the government. However, it is not certain whether the risks arising from granting concessions to the US on other core issues mentioned above have been fully grasped by the trade negotiators, experts, and other stakeholders. Unlike agriculture, most of these core issues lack an organised and influential voice to advocate for their interests. It is for the government to ensure that access to affordable medicine, India’s digital future, and policy flexibility to give a boost to domestic manufacturing are not compromised through the India-US trade deal. India’s interests will be best served by being resolute and firm at the negotiating table, as has been demonstrated so far by the government, and keeping our long-term economic prospects in mind. The country must also be prepared to face the 50% tariffs in case the US’s demands prove to be too onerous. In the long term, this may be a small price to pay for protecting core national interests.

are all contributory factors to the man-made devastation. Until development is guided by science, sustainability, and respect for nature, the cycle of destruction will continue and worsen with climate change. While higher turnout of pilgrims would support the tourism economy, the associated construction activity is damaging the Himalayas beyond repair. —Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

●Write to us at fletters@expressindia.com

On land and in water, a shining summer of striving



GAME THEORY
ROHIT BRIJNATH

July sweats and bleeds and vomits into August.

In Toulouse, during the Tour de France, Jonas Abrahamson, who starts the race 10 days after fracturing his collarbone, wins a stage. In Singapore, in a draining heat, 10km open water swimmers at the world aquatics championships are handed mid-race feeds and then regurgitate part of this gruel into the water. “It’s not pretty,” says Australian swimmer Moesha Johnson.

Yet they go and on and on, just like Mohammed Siraj charging in at the Oval, cheeky, grinning, prickly, transparent, and finally everyone can see who he really is, a study in endeavour, a bearded foot soldier who gives weight to all those words you tried to teach your kid. Unswerving. Wholehearted. Unstinting.

Siraj, like the cyclist and the swimmer, must be always asking himself an ancient, elemental question.

What you got?
How much more?
What is tired?

Winning is wonderful, but it’s the striving to get there which seizes us, isn’t it? The bloody-mindedness, the vigorous application of skill, the aching tilting at limits in search of something more profound than medals chucked into cupboards. It’s one-armed Chris Woakes, like Anil Kumble with his strapped broken jaw, every wincing step an act of resoluteness. It’s Tour riders falling and then taking abraded bodies down slick slopes at filthy speeds. “You play with your life,” former rider Fabian Cancellara tells *The New York Times*.

The legendary climber George Mallory spoke of responding to the challenge of the mountain. The struggle, he said, “is the struggle of life itself, upward and forever upward”. Every athlete has their mountain. For high-divers in Singapore, it’s 144 steps up into the sky, 20m for the women, 27m for the men, more storeys than you can imagine from where they fall elegantly. Below, scuba divers wait.

Shohei Ohtani throws a baseball at roughly 160 kmph, these high-diving bodies can hit the water at 85 kmph.



GETTY IMAGES



AP PHOTO

“(The fear) just never goes away,” says Rhiannon Iffland, the multiple-time world high-diving champion. Her tribe is her echo and so their daily striving lies in managing fear, wearing it, overcoming it.

This striving by athletes is a search, a finding of all of themselves, not just on good days but bad ones, when the body feels unsure, unready, hurting, or their rival is flicking them aside, but still they push because it’s who they are or want to be.

Long before the Oval, this is who Siraj was, this was always his guarantee, his compensation for any perceived lack of skill, his promise to his shirt to bring effort and all its cousins—suffering, pride, desire—to every one of his 185.3 summer overs. Like the 3,338km Tour

rider and the 10km swimmer, he’s a long-form hero.

Striving isn’t as obviously sexy as hand-eye skill (for example, the sublime Jasprit Bumrah) and so it takes longer to appreciate, like a museum piece which requires considered study. But rivals recognise this quality faster, they respect it, for they know 100% is an easy quote but a hard life, and Ben Stokes perfectly encapsulated the nagging, harassing force that Siraj has been by saying he keeps “coming and coming”.

Athletes empty themselves, day after day, which is why there is a bin at the swimming world championships. A bin which an official takes me to see, just a few strides away from the mixed zone, and below some stairs, sitting on a chair,

Oleksii Sereda and Sofiia Lyskun of Ukraine at the World Aquatics Diving World Cup 2025 in Beijing; (right) Mohammed Siraj during the India-Australia Test in London, on 3 August.

Oleksii Sereda of Ukraine had to go to Hungary and Poland to train, ‘to prepare normally, physically and mentally to not hear rockets, shelters and stuff like this..’

plastic bag inside. A bin that acknowledges effort, salutes pain, reflects madness and invites release. A bin into which athletes can vomit.

I’m somewhat unfamiliar with water tribes and in Singapore I receive an overdue education. One Australian talks about her national trials where she vomits into a bag while still in the pool after the 1,500m. Her teammate, Johnson, competes in the 10km, 5km, 3km, 1,500m relay in open water, then the 1,500m heats and final in the pool, and in the end stands with hands on hips, proud, and says, “I’m absolutely ruined”.

These swimmers talk about headaches, ears ringing, hands shaking, with a shrug. As if pain is intoxication. On a car ride, an open water swimmer from Singapore tells me that leading up to the Tokyo Olympics her “periods were so irregular because my body was just under so much stress all the time”. The route to greatness wanders through suffering.

Striving is an attitude, a compulsion, a habit honed at practices. Like the 22x100m set Hungarian back-stroker Hubert Kos once used to do. It’s mostly hard to measure striving though, for there’s no gauge to establish percentage of effort given, but of all the things I heard in the late summer, it’s a diver I never met who put

everything in perspective.

Oleksii Sereda is Ukrainian and had to go to Hungary and Poland to train, somewhere, he said, “to prepare normally, physically and mentally to not hear rockets, shelters and stuff like this. To sleep normally, to just live normally”. And as he dived in Singapore, his father was on his mind, his father who is “almost on the front line”, his father who was the reason why he was “feeling stressed every single day... trying to call him as much as possible, because it’s really dangerous to be there”.

There’s pressure everywhere, on the cycling Tour, at the Oval as Siraj begins his run up, but also on this diving board where a 19-year-old Ukrainian stands wondering about his dad. Still these athletes march on, turning striving into a sweaty, shining hymn. Sereda won silver in the 10m platform and then his thoughts wandered to the man who could not be there.

“I think today he watched me,” said the teenager.

“I’m not sure.”

Rohit Brijnath is an assistant sports editor at The Straits Times, Singapore, and a co-author of Abhinav Bindra’s book A Shot At History: My Obsessive Journey To Olympic Gold. He posts @rohitdbrijnath.

Is Urdu the language of Indian Muslims alone?

Rakshanda Jalil has recently translated a collection of Urdu stories by non-Muslim writers into English

Somak Ghoshal
somak.ghoshal@partner.livemint.com

Urdu scholar and translator Rakshanda Jalil’s new collection *Whose Urdu is it Anyway?* is linked by one theme: to challenge the notion that Urdu is the language of Muslim writers alone, especially in a pluralist country like India. She brings together 16 stories by non-Muslim writers who wrote in Urdu, most of whom were born in the early years of the 20th century, and achieved varying degrees of fame during their lifetimes. From Krishan Chandar (1914-77), one of the key figures of the Progressive Writers’ Association, to the much-loved Gulzar (b. 1934), the volume features a range of styles and sensibilities to illustrate a powerful sentiment: “...as long as Urdu is yoked to religion—Islam—and a certain community—Muslims—it will never be understood in its entirety,” Jalil writes in the introduction.

Urdu, along with its spoken variant Hindustani, was ubiquitous in public life once upon a time, especially all over the north of the Vindhya. In the south, it still survives in the form of Dakhini, but in the last decade, the language is less visible and heard in the public domain. The written form of the language is no longer ubiquitous on signages, cinema titles and names of railway stations. Instead, Urdu has become politicised and framed as a language of appeasement.

Jalil’s selection defies the Islamic exclusivity of Urdu. While a substantial body of fiction written in the language deals with Partition and its aftermath, writers like Devendar Issar, in his story *Mortuary*, and Surendra Prakash in *Scarecrow* focus on the plight of the poor and downtrodden.



Renu Behl’s *Draupadi Has Woken Up* is a sharp indictment of female foeticide in Punjab, while Deepak Budki’s *The Rape of an Abandoned House* is a story of loot (most likely in the aftermath of a communal riot) that is at once original and disturbing.

By bringing attention to famous and less-known writers, Jalil shows that Urdu “belongs to whoever is willing to embrace it and in their capable hands, willing to be moulded like pliable clay.”

Edited excerpts from an interview.

What were some of the surprising or unexpected insights you discovered while researching this book?

That Urdu fiction is a faithful mirror of a writer’s times and draws from their milieu and circumstance. And that it steadfastly refuses to follow a formula, hence the output is so far removed from the stereotypical understanding of Urdu writers and by extension Urdu writings.

Tell us about your thoughts behind the selection. Why these authors and stories?

All collections are, by their very nature, selective. I make no claim to be objective nor do I claim to be comprehensive. There are many non-Muslim Urdu writers I have perforce not been able to include. I wish I had the space to include Fikr Taunsvi (whose real name was Ram Lal Bhatia), Kashmiri Lal Zakir, Zafar Payami (Diwan Birender Nath), Shamsher Singh Narula, Prakash Pandit, Balraj Menra, Balwant Singh, and several others. By the same token, I have omitted some of the best-known names of Urdu literature: Premchand, Upendranath Ashk and Ram Lal. None of these omissions are oversights; mindful of the immense variety before me, I have had to exercise editorial discretion and choose stories that pique the interest of modern readers. I wanted to present as comprehensive a range of concerns, topics and voices as possible.

Urdu is often perceived as a florid language due to its usage in poetry. But prose fiction and non-fiction in Urdu seem to have a spare, modernist style.



ISTOCKPHOTO

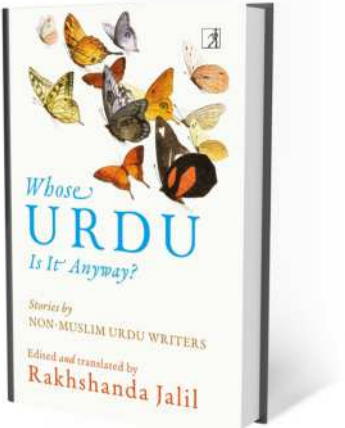
Urdu has had a ubiquitous presence in public life in India; and (left) Rakshanda Jalil..

Can you talk about these two faces of the language?

Yes. Urdu poetry and prose are like apples and oranges, though it is also true that Urdu prose can occasionally be very poetic and there is some excellent “prose poetry” being written by modern poets. But as I have said, much of modern Urdu short fiction draws from its time and circumstance, hence it is spare, spartan, sometimes staccato, given the circumstances. A dialogue between present-day characters cannot be in florid Urdu; that would take away from the realism that the modern Urdu writers are at pains to create. Renu Behl’s characters in rural Punjab cannot speak in courtly Lucknowi Urdu; it would be absurd. Similarly, Krishan Chandar’s footpath dwellers cannot speak in the same tone and tenor as Kanhaiyalal Kapur’s husband and wife—even though both writers are from Bombay.

Were there specific challenges involved in translating the texts?

I didn’t want to flatten out the variations



Whose Urdu is it Anyway?: Edited and translated by Rakshanda Jalil, Simon & Schuster, 208 pages, ₹499.

I found in the original Urdu into standard 21st-century English. I wanted to retain as much of the cadence of the original stories (as possible). For that I had to remain mindful of the context: Who is speaking? Are they rural or urban characters? Educated or illiterate?

Are there any stylistic or cultural differences in the way in which Muslim and Hindu writers use the language?

Not in the early years, no. I think both were well aware of the cultural contexts of the “other”, which explains why Muslim writers have written with so much authenticity about, say, Navratri celebration or about festivals such as Holi, Diwali, Shivratri, and so on. And it was the same with non-Muslim writers writing about Muslim festivals and religious figures; Premchand’s *Karbala* and *Eidgah* instantly spring to mind. Among women writers, I can see a difference but to be fair, my sample size is very small: Sarla Devi’s language is very different from all the other writers included here and yes it is

different from an Ismat Chughtai or a Khadija Mastoor.

I would like to know more about Sarla Devi.

I must confess I had to look very hard to find a non-Muslim woman Urdu writer. Knowing full well that boys in non-Muslim families were taught Urdu and Persian whereas the girls were mostly taught Hindi, I was still hoping to find at least a few names who might have bucked the trend and proved to be in the same league as a Chughtai or a Hajra Masroor or any of the other male writers in this collection; regrettably, it took a great deal of diligent digging to find a lone Sarla Devi. Having found her, I was hard pressed to make a choice from her work spread across two collections of short fiction and numerous stories scattered in the literary magazines of her time, some even edited by her, such as *Shahrāh*, along with Prakash Pandit. She was the sister of Krishan Chandar and Mahendar Nath, and wife of the Hindi writer Rewti Saran.

While the Hindi-Urdu binary is much spoken these days, does Hindustani survive in contemporary literature, if at all?

If a language is defined by vocabulary then yes there is a huge difference between the writers who have been active in the past 50 years than those who were active in the post-Partition years. The writings of Devender Issar, Surendra Prakash, Deepak Budki, Balraj Komal are very close to the spoken language. So the question we need to ask is: Are languages differentiated by script, grammar or vocabulary?

What are the most promising current efforts—institutional or grassroots—to reclaim Urdu as a shared cultural heritage in India today?

The single most promising thing in our times is content-driven programming. When it is intelligently done, it can truly open a window into a shared literary culture and sensibility. You may or may not know the script, you may not have read a lot in translation either but if you are willing to sit and listen to good literature being read or recited and allow yourself to be transported into another world, you can truly soar above the picket fences of language politics devised by petty minds.



The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE RIGHT TO READ

Book ban is a blunt instrument wielded by an insecure establishment, belies its claims of distance covered in the Valley

LESS THAN FIVE months after Union Home Minister Amit Shah posted on X that “under the Modi government, separatism is breathing its last, and the triumph of unity is echoing across Kashmir”, the Union Territory’s Home Department has issued a notification, by order of Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, banning 25 books. It claims that they propagate a “false narrative and secessionism in Jammu and Kashmir”. And a day later, the police launched a drive across Kashmir to seize copies of the banned books. These include the works of A G Noorani, Arundhati Roy, Victoria Schofield and Ather Zia. What changed between March and August that an establishment which was congratulating itself for the progress made in Kashmir should display such heightened insecurity five months later that it should seek to banish books? Even in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack — for which the Centre has held Pakistan responsible — the message of unity was underlined and emphasised by the politicians and people of the Valley. They stood with the rest of the country in a difficult moment, and shared the grief of the families who lost their loved ones in the terror strike. Kashmir has come far since the abrogation of Article 370 six years ago, and it now also has an elected government in place. That the Centre and its appointee, the L-G, still believe that banning books and curbing freedoms is an effective strategy against alienation and disaffection in the Valley, belies their claims of the distance covered. The ban on books is both disturbing and disheartening.

The banned books engage with the region’s complicated, and often tragic, history of conflict. That history cannot be wished away. Indeed, for peace to endure, it must be engaged with, and different perspectives must converse and even collide in an open space. Across the world, in societies moving towards a resolution of tangled histories, repressive acts like book bans have rarely contributed to lasting accommodation, or assimilation. By all accounts, the most effective tool to bring stability and combat disenchantment remains a deepening of democracy and institutionalisation of people’s participation in decision-making. The only way to combat a “narrative” the government disagrees with is to build its own in a manner that is inclusive and persuasive. Since the abrogation of Article 370, the Union government has highlighted the region’s economic development, underlining that Kashmiris have a stake in the larger India growth story. That promise must be bolstered by a renewed commitment to strengthening federal democracy and guaranteeing individual freedoms in the Valley.

Now that the UT of J&K has a chief minister and legislature, it is looking ahead to the return of statehood, a promise made by the Centre. Wednesday’s draconian order, however, takes several steps backward. The J&K administration also seems to have forgotten the most basic principle of freedom of expression, articulated by then Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, S K Kaul, while quashing the criminal case against writer Perumal Murugan: “There is no compulsion to read a book. Literary tastes may vary — what is right and acceptable to one may not be so to others. Yet, the right to write is unhindered.” So, too, is the right to read.

CLIMATE DENIALISM

Trump administration’s decision to rewrite global warming data is a chance for other countries to step up, fill knowledge vacuum

FOR NEARLY 25 YEARS, the US government’s National Climate Assessment (NCA) Reports have been seen as among the most comprehensive analyses of global warming and its impact on human health and economy. In a country where wildfires and storms have increased with alarming frequency in recent years, these reports are widely used by planners to devise mitigating strategies. The NCA’s insights also inform global policymaking. But in April, the Trump administration dismissed hundreds of scientists working on the latest edition of the NCA. And last month, the US government deleted the website that hosted these reports — some of them are still available elsewhere. On Wednesday, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright announced that the Trump administration would “update” these studies. The Department of Energy has said that “Wright was not suggesting he would personally be altering past reports”. But this clarification does not appear convincing in light of the US Energy Secretary’s well-known climate scepticism. In the past, Wright, one of the most ardent proponents of the Trump administration credo of “Drill, Baby, Drill”, has criticised the NCA studies for “not being fair” in their “broad assessment of climate change”.

In his first term, Trump withdrew his country from the Paris Pact and regularly suppressed or downplayed scientific research, which underlined the need for regulation to protect public health and the environment. In his second tenure so far, his administration has taken an even more disquieting approach — weaponising budget cuts to erode the autonomy of scientific agencies and making climate denialism part of their mandate. Hours after withdrawing from the Paris Pact for the second time, Trump asked the US Environmental Agency to reconsider its 2009 statement, which linked greenhouse gases (GHG) with adverse public health effects. Less than a week before Wright’s announcement on revising the NCAs, the Department of Energy produced a report which claimed that “concern over the climate crisis was overblown”. Criticised by several scientists for cherry-picking data, the study emphasised the positive effect of carbon dioxide — it said that the GHG promotes “global greening” — without acknowledging its role in extreme weather events. Some experts cited in the study have reportedly criticised it for taking their research out of context.

The cancellation of NCA data could make the world’s largest economy and second-largest GHG emitter less informed about one of the most pressing crises facing the world — and less prepared to confront it. America’s retreat from the climate fight also comes at a time when the global resolve is nowhere close to what is required to confront the challenge. It’s now up to institutions in other parts of the world to step up.

EATING MINI

Willpower wilts in the face of restaurant serving sizes.
Now, portion control may be kicking in

IF GLUTTONY is the foundation on which the edifice of the modern restaurant industry was built, could the GLP-1 class of drugs be the wrecking ball that brings it all crashing down? From London to Dubai to New York City, eateries are faced with the newly shrunk appetites of customers, thanks to the “miracle” wrought by drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy. This has led to a scramble to design special “mini meal” menus, of smaller servings with appropriate pricing; after all, customers who push food around on their plates after just a few bites cannot be expected to stomach the prices for regular portion sizes.

That these so-called “mini” portions are closer to the actual recommended servings is, of course, what lends a tinge of irony to the restaurant industry’s predicament. The finding of a 2016 study, published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, that most restaurants’ individual main courses alone exceed the recommended calories for a single meal, underscored the extent to which the culture of eating out has contributed to obesity and related illnesses. Other studies have highlighted the phenomenon of “portion distortion”, showing how even restaurant plates have grown in size over the decades, contributing to the problem of overeating.

It appears that the hunger-curbing power of GLP-1 drugs may succeed where mere willpower has repeatedly failed (the cephalic phase of digestion in humans kicks in at the very sight and smell of food). Yet, even as restaurants recalibrate their business models for a future where burgers and fries are no longer “super-sized” and fewer and fewer customers order enough food for there to be a doggy bag, weight-watchers themselves might consider revisiting a hoary piece of advice: Eat more at home. It is both healthier and cheaper.

Global free market is a myth



PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

As Washington plays bully, New Delhi must assert sovereignty, secure oil supply, build competitiveness

IF ANYTHING TESTIFIES to the truth that might is right in today’s world, it is the ostensible reason underlying Donald Trump’s imposition of a 50 per cent tariff on Indian exports to his country. The level of tariff is matched only by the rate slapped on Brazil. This, even though Prime Minister Narendra Modi has wooed Trump assiduously ever since his first term in office. The hugs and the hand-holding have meant nothing when it came to the United States pursuing its interests, no matter the malevolence of denying over a billion people access to oil, on which their livelihood depends. The US has been complicit in the devastation unleashed on Gaza by Israel. If India is “fueling Russia’s war machine” by buying its oil, the United States is Israel’s war machine itself. Almost all the weapons of mass destruction used by Israel are sourced from the United States. Historically, the US has not only bankrolled Israel with aid but also rescued it from censure in international fora for the genocide in Palestine. Given that the world knows this record, it hardly needs to be pointed out that in the case of Russian oil, it singles out India when its NATO partners have purchased more of that oil than India has since 2022.

Trump’s actions have upended the premise on which Indian economic policy has been based since 1991. Economists imbued with the American ideology, who have driven that policy, purveyed the idea of a global free market for goods with which India must integrate for its own sake by dismantling all trade barriers. India has gone a great distance in that direction since then without reaping the reward promised. The share of industry, the sector of the economy most exposed to world trade, has hardly grown. Now India has discovered something far deeper — that there is no free market for goods globally.

Trump’s actions have upended the premise on which Indian economic policy has been based since 1991. Economists imbued with the American ideology, who have driven that policy, purveyed the idea of a global free market for goods with which India must integrate for its own good by dismantling all trade barriers. India has gone a great distance in that direction since then without reaping the reward promised. The share of industry, the sector of the economy most exposed to world trade, has hardly grown. Now India has discovered something far deeper — that there is no free market for goods globally.

India needs to do three things in response to Trump’s action. First, in a version of Trump’s own “reciprocal tariff”, it should impose a 50 per cent tariff rate on US goods. This will convey the message to the world that India has gumption. In any given situation, standing up to a bully has costs as well as benefits. The obvious cost in this case will be that Trump will not be pleased. The benefit of standing up to the bully would be the support that will come from countries who view Trump’s actions as unacceptable. Some of them also happen to possess an export item that is particularly valuable to India — oil. Prominent among them would be Russia and Iran, major global suppliers of oil. While India has maintained its historic relationship with Russia, which has held it in good stead, it has shortsightedly eased up on its much older, civilisational association with Iran. In response to US sanctions, it has reduced its purchases of oil from that country. India should now pivot towards Iran, buying oil from it instead of purchasing it from the United States under pressure, as India currently does. In fact, India should scour the world for every possible source of assured oil supply. Securing its supply chain, therefore, is the second thing India needs to do.

The third imperative for India following the Trump tariff would be to hunker down and focus on the heavy lifting of building global competitiveness for its goods and services. In principle, India can find other markets for its goods now facing higher tariffs in the United States. But this is not assured. The reformers of 1991 have shown themselves to have assumed innocently that India need only align itself with the policy regime of Western economies to reap rich rewards on the global stage. This episode has revealed that integrating with the world economy can have positive re-

sults only if you have products to export that are competitive, in that they offer the same value at a lower price. There is very little in economic theory or global experience which assures us that competitiveness will simply follow the rescinding of trade barriers. It would require infrastructure, enabling laws, a skilled workforce and marketing. As may be gathered by anyone schooled in economic history, the role of a strong and nimble government in coordinating such a transition would be indispensable. Markets left to their own devices cannot deliver competitiveness to a country’s products.

Prime Minister Modi has had his American Dream punctured by Trump, who has led him up the garden path, only to pull the rug from under his feet. Given America’s record of involvement in Asia, from Hiroshima in the last century to Iran in this one, his advisers should have cautioned him against reposing full trust in Trump. Now, he has some hard work to do. He must steel himself to fulfil the first two of the three imperatives I have outlined. For the third, he will need more than just *atmanirbharta*; he needs to craft a far more imaginative economic policy than he has produced thus far.

Despite the naivete he has displayed in his dealings with Trump, Prime Minister Modi is not responsible for his perfidy. In dealing with the national emergency that we now face, he needs to be supported politically. Every section of India depends on oil, almost all of which is imported. It is indisputably in India’s interest to assure its supply even as we reduce our dependence on it.

The author is honorary visiting professor, Centre for Development studies, Thiruvananthapuram



SUGATA BOSE

IN 1975, WE were third-year students at Presidency College, Calcutta, when a breath of fresh air entered seminar room 17 on the first floor of the old building in the form of Professor Rajat Kanta Ray. A freshly minted PhD from the University of Cambridge, he integrated the most recent, cutting-edge historical research in his lectures to undergraduates. He believed in the inextricable link between scholarship and teaching. The more mischievous among us parodied the extravagant hand gestures that accompanied his erudite lectures, but we loved him because he treated us as equals.

In February 1977, he was the professor-in-charge who took us on a historical excursion to Khajuraho and other sites in Madhya Pradesh. We were mesmerised by his deep knowledge of architectural history. The doors of his home in Jodhpur Park were always open to his students.

Rajat Kanta Ray had done his doctoral research in the environment of the so-called Cambridge school of nationalism, but he expressed his reasoned dissent from some of its supercilious attitudes in a path-breaking article on “Political change in British India”. His first work focused on the political history of Bengal during the 50-year timespan from 1875 to 1925. He also wrote authoritatively with Ratnalekha Ray on agrarian history in the colonial period. Having been taught by him to think criti-

MY TEACHER RAJAT KANTA RAY

He challenged orthodoxies, upheld finest traditions of intellectual scholarship

Equally adept at political and economic history, Rajat Ray did path-breaking research on the history of industrialisation and industrial policy. One of his finest long-form articles was on the bazaar and the long-distance flows of credit and finance that connected South Asia to Southeast Asia, West Asia and East Africa across the Indian Ocean. I urged him to write a book on the subject, but he was quite happy to hand over the baton to the next generation of Indian Ocean historians.

Later in his long and distinguished academic career, he turned to exploring cultural and intellectual history. He wrote with grace and imagination about emotional history and what he called “the felt community”. During a visit to Harvard early in the 21st century, those were the topics he wanted to discuss with me.

In conventional terms, being appointed vice-chancellor of Visva Bharati from 2006 to 2011 was his crowning glory. I was not particularly excited about seeing my revered teacher take on the burdens of administration. On one occasion, he pros-

cally and challenge orthodoxies, I offered an alternative analysis of agrarian social structure in my own doctoral work at Cambridge. I was always struck by his generosity and open-mindedness in accepting criticism from even his most devoted students.

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trated himself before a statue of Debendranath Tagore to seek the sage’s guidance. Yet, his time in Santiniketan rekindled his interest in Rabindranath’s concept of *jibande-bata*. He devoted himself in his final years to writing in Bengali on this theme.

There was another context in which I saw Rajat Ray closely. For decades, he was a member of the Council of the Netaji Research Bureau. My late mother Krishna Bose and I sought his advice about international academic conferences at Netaji Bhawan where he was invariably a very lively intellectual presence. He was masterful in chairing history seminars.

The passing of this exemplary scholar-teacher at this critical juncture in our country’s history leaves an enormous void. He was bold and forthright in standing up to the assaults on academic freedom and the discipline of history by the forces of Hindu majoritarianism. His answer, however, was not to retreat into narrow provincialism but to uphold the best intellectual traditions of Bengal in their full amplitude. In the enveloping darkness of Bengal’s all-round educational and cultural decline, my teacher Rajat Kanta Ray lit a candle whose flame will forever burn bright.

The writer is Gardiner Professor of History at Harvard University

JULY 8, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

DHRUVA, N-REACTOR

DHRUVA, THE BIGGEST among Indian research reactors and the sixth at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), went critical. Announcing this, P K Iyengar, director, BARC, said the 100 MW natural uranium-based metal reactor, cooled and moderated by heavy water, was an entirely indigenous effort. Iyengar said Dhruva, one of the largest research reactors in the world, had generated considerable excitement among BARC scientists because of the special advantages it offered.

FAROOQ-RAJIV TALKS

FAROOQ ABDULLAH, FORMER chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, met the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and apprised him of the political situation in the state. The meeting is part of the current exercise to find ways to end the present political instability in the state in the context of the growing disillusionment of the Congress-I with the 14-month-

old G M Shah ministry. The PM has, during the past few weeks, held detailed discussions on the situation in the state with the state Congress (I) president, Mufti Syed, party legislators as well as with Chief Minister Shah.

ASSAM MOVEMENT

ASSAM AGITATION LEADERS made it clear that they were not going to accept 1971 as the cut-off year for the detection of foreign nationals. The AASU president, Prafulla Mahanta, and the general secretary, Bhriгу Phukan, said they had agreed to the present revised rolls, taking the 1971 rolls as one of the basic documents, for elections. They, however, made it clear that the voters’ list being prepared at the moment was “full of mistakes and not to their satisfaction”.

MAKEN CASE

THERE ARE SEVERAL chinks in the police claim that Lal Singh, the alleged international terrorist, was involved in the murder

of Congress-IM P Lalit Maken, his wife and an onlooker. The police reportedly arrived at the conclusion by showing Lal Singh’s photograph to several eyewitnesses of the killing and others who had seen the assailants. But at least one of them denied that the killer bore any resemblance to the photograph.

AF-PAK TALKS

THE AFGHANISTAN FOREIGN Minister, Shah Mohammed Dost, said his country favoured direct talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan on August 27 when the next round of UN-sponsored discussions is to open in Geneva. There cannot be much progress without direct talks between the two countries, he said, in an interview at the end of his talks in Delhi. So far, four rounds of “proximity talks” have been held in Geneva. The Karmal government’s insistence on direct talks is mainly due to its desire to achieve Pakistan’s recognition of its existence.

The faultlines of consent

A blanket reduction of the age of consent, without a nuanced approach, risks pushing millions of vulnerable girls further into invisibility and harm



AUDREY DMELLO AND FLAVIA AGNES

THE “AGE OF consent” debate has re-emerged, this time in the *Nipun Saxena and Anr vs Union of India* PIL pending in the Supreme Court before a Bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath, Sanjay Karol, and Sandeep Mehta. The Court will examine whether the age of “consensual” sexual relationships, which is currently pegged at 18, needs to be reduced, under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

As per the POCSO Act, any sexual activity with a minor is a crime. Cases referred to as “consensual” under POCSO rarely involve sexual exploration among teens but on the contrary, reflect a darker and more complex social reality.

Most victims are from marginalised communities and trying to escape violent homes, sexual abuse by family members, discrimination, and/or threats of forced marriage. The age of the victim in some of these cases is as low as 12 years; the man is much older. The man promises her love and a better life. Having had sex with him, she believes the man and agrees to elope. Usually, a “missing person” complaint is lodged by the parents. The police trace the couple, often already married and/or expecting a child. A case under the POCSO Act is registered, the man is arrested, and the girl is institutionalised. Once a case is filed, all hell breaks loose and the pressure from the accused’s family to withdraw the complaint mounts. For the girls, it is a Hobson’s choice — continue the pregnancy while confined in a shelter home until the age of 18 with the hope that the man and his family will accept her, or go back to the natal family where violence and forced marriage await her. In either scenario, the minor girl’s agency is crushed — first by the family and then by the law.

In a controversial judgment, the Calcutta High Court, while acquitting a man of penetrative sexual assault, commented that it was a case of “non-exploitative consensual sexual relationship between two consenting adolescents”. The victim was 14, and the man was 25. The victim claimed that she had married the accused and left her house of her own will. She expressed a desire to continue living with the accused. The court did not examine the home conditions that compelled a mere teenager to want to elope. The Supreme Court came down heavily on the High Court’s comments and restored the conviction but without a jail term, as this would cause further harm to the young woman, now aged 21. Trial court judges often acquit the accused or recommend leniency, terming these cases “Romeo-Juliet love” even where the age gap is significant.

According to NCRB data, as a result of mandatory reporting under the POCSO Act, cases of child sexual abuse rose from 8,541 in 2012 to 53,874 in 2021. In Mumbai alone in 2021, 524 cases of penetrative sexual assault were reported under the POCSO Act. A report by Praja Foundation found that in 54 per cent of these, the accused were romantic partners, friends, or individuals who had



C.R. Sasikumar

promised marriage and deserted the victim. Another 26 per cent were household employees, 12 per cent were neighbours, and 8 per cent were family members or guardians.

Meanwhile, India witnessed 1.6 million child marriages in 2022, with barely 900 cases registered as per the India Child Protection report. The drivers of child marriage have shifted from Brahminical patriarchy to poverty, lack of education, and fear of sexual violence. Poverty-stricken parents marry off their daughters young to safeguard them, not due to tradition but out of desperation.

What we are witnessing is a tragic paradox. Minor girls from marginalised backgrounds choose between the frying pan and the fire. They elope to escape violence, discrimination and sexual exploitation in their own home with the hope of a better life. But eloping exposes them to isolation, threats, and often, more violence by their partners, in addition to the trauma of facing the daunting criminal justice system.

Child rights activists are advocating that the age of consent be reduced to 16 years (except in cases involving coercion, and sexual relationships with persons in authority). Their demand is rooted in ensuring autonomy and agency for young girls — they argue that the criminal justice system severely impacts girls’ lives and offers them nothing.

But if we have to extend this logic, why stop at 16 and not 14? After all, in the West Bengal case, the victim was 14 years old, and our ground work reveals victims are sometimes as young as 12. Also, if the victim’s autonomy and the impact of the system are the issues at hand, why not extend the logic to

Minor girls from marginalised backgrounds choose between the frying pan and the fire. They elope to escape violence, discrimination and sexual exploitation in their own home with the hope of a better life. But eloping exposes them to isolation, threats, and often, more violence by their partners, in addition to the trauma of facing the daunting criminal justice system.

cases of family members’ or guardians’ abuse, as most victims, even in those cases, do not wish to pursue legal action due to stigma or dependency?

More importantly, how are we going to establish “consent” and who will decide? Consent can be enthusiastic, reluctant, vitiated by fear, or extracted by manipulation. It can be revoked, misunderstood, or miscommunicated. “Consent” is the most invoked defence in rape trials. Expecting a minor to understand and articulate consent is unrealistic. Judges, too, interpret it inconsistently, bringing in personal biases about morality and tradition.

The POCSO Act is a path-breaking piece of legislation with a victim-centric lens. However, the faultlines are in its implementation. In the West Bengal case, Justice Abhay S Oka stated, “The victim did not get any opportunity to make an informed choice. Society judged her, the legal system failed her, and her own family abandoned her.” He instructed the state to do what the Child Welfare Committee ought to have done right in the beginning: Provide the best possible care and protection for her and her child.

A blanket reduction of the age of consent, without a nuanced approach, risks pushing millions of vulnerable girls further into invisibility and harm. Lawmakers must consider the lived realities of India’s adolescent girls: Their vulnerabilities, the systems that fail them, and the real motivations behind “elopement”.

Dmello is the director and Agnes is the founder of Majlis, a legal centre for women and children. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The names change but the song remains the same: occupation, destruction and the forcible transfer of tens of thousands of Palestinians. Additional soldiers will be sacrificed on this altar, and the remaining Israeli hostages will be lost..”

— HAARETZ, ISRAEL

Countering Trump

His transactionalism needs to be tackled with tact, not aggression



RAM MADHAV

IT’S NOT JUST India — many countries have faced ups and downs in their ties with the US in the past. Even today, the Donald Trump administration is engaged in hardball negotiations with over 20 countries on trade and tariffs. At the root of all this is the sense of “American exceptionalism” that the US leadership developed after World War II. It built post-War financial institutions in a manner that ensured they helped perpetuate its economic hegemony. Although President Harry Truman claimed “all countries, including our own, will greatly benefit”, the real intention remained US supremacy in the world.

It was evident in the US’s enthusiastic support for the creation of the IMF and the World Bank in 1944 while refusing to support the creation of a level playing field for global trade — the proposed International Trade Organisation. When UN members met in Havana, Cuba in 1948 for that purpose, American business leaders made sure such an arrangement, deemed detrimental to their interests, wouldn’t take shape. The US Congress refused to ratify the Havana Charter and a weak and lopsided arrangement called the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was brought in.

The same American businesses realised that despite this weak trade regime, countries like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and Germany emerged as powerful competitors. That prompted them to support the creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, again with the aim of ensuring better opportunities for Western companies in an increasingly competitive trade space. By then, the developing world had understood the rules of the game and offered stiff resistance. At multiple negotiations in the late 1990s and early 2000s, India led the developing world’s campaign for an equitable trade regime. The resistance grew stronger with China’s accession to the WTO in 2001, which forced the body to build a regime that helped the developing world as much as it did the developed ones.

The WTO regime helped countries like China, India, Indonesia and others register impressive economic growth. China raced ahead in the two decades after it joined the WTO, and India, too, picked up momentum in the past decade and emerged as the most promising economy. The Western powers began feeling insecure and started targeting the rising economies once again. While accusing others of violating WTO rules, they themselves did everything possible to cripple that regime by blocking judicial appointments, violating tariff commitments and not paying membership dues for several years. China became the target after it emerged as the second-largest economy, and soon, it was India’s turn. Robert Lighthizer, who was the US Trade Representative under Trump from 2017 to 2021, boasted in 2019 that he got

India removed from the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) regime that allowed developing countries to access US markets easily. Despite regime change, the US didn’t restore India to the GSP regime.

The Western powers always tried to rig the international trade regime in their favour. They never allowed a real level playing field or free flows of trade and investment. Thomas Friedman’s “the world is flat” was merely a platitude, while the reality was that “the rise of the rest”, to borrow from Fareed Zakaria, was never taken kindly by the West as it believed this was happening at its expense. Jeffrey Sachs, the renowned American economist, warns that the Trump administration’s real objective behind tariff aggression is to prevent the Indian economy from growing as a big competitor to the US.

India’s insistence on strategic autonomy, too, became another sore point for many in the US and EU capitals. As America’s influence declined vis-à-vis countries like China and Russia, India was increasingly seen as an important partner. India’s refusal to become a party to power-bloc politics irritated many.

The current tariff tussle should be seen in this context. There can be other, more “Trumpian” reasons, too, like Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s refusal to stop over in DC after the G7 summit in Canada or the Indian establishment’s consistent refusal to accept Trump’s claims of having mediated during Operation Sindoor. Trump sees himself as a serious contender for the Nobel Peace Prize. In the past six months, his regime claimed the President had negotiated six peace deals — a record one-a-month success — which included the India-Pakistan, Thailand-Cambodia and Israel-Iran ceasefires, as well as the resolution of other disputes between Serbia and Kosovo, Rwanda and Congo, and Egypt and Ethiopia. He has invited the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia to sign a truce next week. Several of these countries, including Pakistan, Cambodia and Israel, and some lawmakers in the US, have already submitted his nomination for the coveted prize.

Trump’s transactional approach is an extension of America’s trade exceptionalism, which needs to be tackled not with aggression in turn but with calm and tact, as Europe and others are doing. The Indian leadership, too, is maintaining a studied silence while working to ensure that normalcy returns sooner rather than later.

Trump’s targeting of several countries is rooted in his threefold mission — resolve the Ukraine-Russia conflict, secure a Nobel Peace Prize, and Make America Great Again to contain China. He understands that India is an indispensable ally in achieving all three. For India, these Trumpian dreams can be turned into an opportunity. Trump holds PM Modi in great awe and respect. Having made clear that India won’t compromise on national interests, the question for the country’s leadership is whether long-term discord between the world’s most influential democracies, which have grown closer over several decades of strenuous efforts, is a good sign for posterity. If not, the two leaders are just a phone call or an emissary away.

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



IRAJ ELAHI

Parting the fog of war

US-Israeli attack, which aimed at crippling Iran has, instead, strengthened it

ONE MONTH HAS passed since Israeli and American aggression against Iran halted. Over the past month, more evidence and insights have come to light regarding the 12-day imposed war. As new revelations continue to emerge, it has become increasingly clear that despite the initial media spin by the US and Israel, their attacks cannot be viewed as a success by any standard or measure. What was originally framed as a decisive military engagement is now being reassessed with respect to new data and perspectives, showing the limitations and setbacks that Israel and the US suffered during the conflict.

The scale of damage caused by Iran’s ballistic and hypersonic missiles to Israel’s critical infrastructure has been so extensive, that even a month after the fighting has ceased, many critical Israeli infrastructure sites remain inoperable. Damaged Israeli ports, power plants, refineries, and airports remain unusable, undermining Israel’s ability to recover swiftly from the attack. While Israel undeniably inflicted serious blows to parts of Iran’s missile and nuclear supply chains, Iran has managed to stay resilient and ahead of the curve in many respects. Notably, none of Iran’s vital infrastructure has been completely neutralised, allowing Iran to maintain both its strategic defence capabilities and its economic stability. In fact, the estimated cost of each Israeli offensive and defensive operation alone

has outstripped the total damage inflicted on Iranian facilities.

On the other hand, new evidence shows that despite prior US knowledge of Iran’s targeting of the Al-Udeid base, American air defences failed to prevent Iran’s precision-guided missiles from striking the most critical US radar facility in the West Asian region. This failure highlights a significant gap in the US military’s ability to defend against highly advanced and sophisticated Iranian missile technologies. Iran’s success in this regard represents a major setback for US interests in the region.

The Iranian people, who had previously questioned the benefits of nuclear energy due to the economic pressure from illegal US sanctions, are now more united and determined than ever in their stance. The aggression has only strengthened their resolve to assert Iran’s legitimate right to pursue nuclear energy.

If the setbacks for Israel and the US had ended solely on the battlefield, they might still have been manageable in a political sense. However, what has proven to be even more damaging than the military defeat is the loss in the narrative war. For 45 years, the US and Israel invested billions in constructing a narrative that painted Iran as brutal, oppressive, and fanatical. This narrative has now been challenged and weakened. Today, the world sees a different image: Iran as the leading supporter

of the Palestinian cause, standing in defiance of the supremacist and racist policies of the US, Israel, and a handful of their European allies. By positioning itself as a vocal advocate for Palestinian rights, Iran has gained widespread global sympathy.

Moreover, the blow of this military and ideological defeat was further compounded when the US and Israel — hoping their attack on Iran would trigger domestic unrest and facilitate a regime change — were instead met with a unified and nationally cohesive Iranian response. Rather than seeing divisions or internal unrest, the Iranian people have rallied around their government, reinforcing the leadership’s position and undermining any efforts for regime change. They condemn the Israeli and American attacks against their sovereignty, and they are increasingly unified in their readiness to resist any future aggression.

Meanwhile, global public indignation over the actions of the Israeli regime — widely seen as committing atrocities against children and engaging in genocide — has grown so intense that even Israel’s traditional allies have started to distance themselves. Many states, fearing backlash both at home and internationally, have become cautious about being publicly associated with Israel. This shift reflects the growing disillusionment with Israeli policies.

Altogether, these developments have left both Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu

in a worse position than they were in when they first launched the attack on Iran. Despite their best efforts to spin the narrative, they are now scrambling to claim that their operations were a success, asserting that they intercepted nearly all of Iran’s projectiles and minimised both casualties and damage. But the truth cannot be concealed indefinitely.

Given the increasingly difficult political situation they now face, both Trump and Netanyahu have a vested interest in convincing their domestic audiences that they achieved their objectives. However, deep down, both men are aware that the recent failure has only propelled Iran closer to cementing its position as a regional power. Iran has not only withstood the military assault but also proved its resilience and ability to respond to external threats. Once again, it has reaffirmed its role as one of the main pillars of regional peace and stability, countering the expansionism and criminal activities of the Zionist regime as well as the interventionist policies of extra-regional powers like the US.

What was intended as a calculated move to cripple Iran has instead strengthened it, both in the eyes of its people and on the world stage.

The writer is the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SMART RESPONSE

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Stay calm, negotiate smartly’ (IE, August 8). In an era of volatile global trade, India must resist the temptation of reactive policy swings. Trade disputes, particularly with the US, are no longer episodic but persistent features of the global economy. Our response must be anchored in structural competitiveness, efficient logistics, modernised ports, robust manufacturing, and value-added agriculture. The real challenge is to future-proof our economy by diversifying markets, incentivising innovation, and forging resilient supply chains. Negotiation from a position of economic strength, not vulnerability, will ensure India’s voice commands respect in an increasingly protectionist world.

Zainab Irshad, Patna

US’s CALCULUS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Bracing up’ (IE, August 8). The tariff onslaught on India is but a secondary theme for the US and will be sorted out. The key irritant for the US remains our active neutrality post-Independence. Since World War II, the US has consistently used India and Pakistan as instruments in its broader strategic calculus. Now, the US is once again courting Pakistan to ease friction with Beijing. The tariffs on India are but the US’s reprimand to our political ethos. If despite all this, we are on our way to becoming the third-largest economy, we need only proceed with the same self-belief.

R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

ECI MUST ANSWER

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘1 lakh votes stolen in 1 Assembly segment of Karnataka: Rahul’s charge against EC’ (IE, August 8). There is no obvious reason to dispute Rahul Gandhi’s hard-hitting public exposé of massive electoral roll manipulation, backed with ample evidence. Though the ECI refused to supply the relevant electoral data digitally, his team manually scrutinised piles of paper and unearthed thousands of fake, duplicate, and ineligible voters. Ordinary voters don’t want the ECI to hide behind technicalities to protect itself from the Opposition’s questions; they just want a clear and straight explanation for them.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

STRIKING A BALANCE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Warning bells, unheard’ (IE, August 8). Brushing aside rain-related impact as “nature’s fury” would be fallacious. For decades, scientists have been warning of a rise in extreme rainfall events as a result of climate change. Environmental safeguards are often sacrificed at the altar of business interests. Development activities that cause damage to the environment prove counterproductive in the long run. Striking a balance between development priorities and environmental concerns is the way forward. There are no easy solutions to urban flooding or continuing disasters in the hills.

SS Paul, Nadia



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Rain, landslides, flash floods: an uncertain mix

The Uttarkashi incident demonstrates the rising risk of disasters in ecologically fragile regions, and the increasing uncertainty around their occurrence



AMITABH SINHA

THE FLASH flood that devastated Dharali village in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district on August 5 has spotlighted again the threats from extreme weather events in India's hill states. The incident has resulted in the loss of at least four lives, and many people continue to be missing. There has been widespread destruction, with hundreds left homeless or stranded. Several similar events have occurred in Himachal Pradesh over the last one month, in which dozens of people have been reported killed and thousands affected.

The flash flood in Dharali
Flash floods are usually triggered by extreme rainfall events that lead to landslides

or mudslides. Large amounts of debris end up in streams or rivers, and flow down steep slopes with the surging water, sweeping away buildings, vegetation, and roads in its path. What triggered the flash flood that hit Dharali, however, remains unclear. The area had been receiving monsoon rainfall, but not in unusually high amounts. A senior glaciologist has suggested the possibility of a breach in a glacial lake that may have formed upstream. While glacial ice-breaks can trigger flash floods, the occurrence of such an event is yet to be confirmed in this case. More than anything else, the Dharali incident indicates the rising risk of such disasters in these ecologically fragile regions, and the increasing uncertainty around their occurrence. This is making the task of installing early warning systems and taking mitigation measures even more difficult.

Heavy rain and cloudburst
While Uttarakhand as a whole has received heavy and continuous rainfall this month, Uttarkashi district specifically has not seen that much rain. On August 3 and 4, the two days preceding the flood, districts such as Haridwar and

Udham Singh Nagar received very heavy rain, but Uttarkashi had less than normal rainfall for those days. Data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) show that on August 5, the day of the flash flood, Uttarkashi district received 32 mm of rain — double the normal rainfall for the day. But this was still not an extraordinary or extreme rainfall event. Also, this rainfall was recorded over a 24-hour period. If the same amount of rain were to fall over a very short duration — say, an hour or two — the impact could be very different. This is what happens during a 'cloudburst' event — which sees a short but very intense spell of heavy rainfall. A cloudburst has a specific definition in meteorology. The IMD categorises an extreme rainfall event as a cloudburst if a small area, roughly 10 km x 10 km in size, receives at least 100 mm of rain in about an hour. By its very definition, a cloudburst is a concentrated, localised event. For this reason, a cloudburst may sometimes go unrecorded if there are no rainfall-measuring devices in that small area. Very high-intensity rainfall during a

cloudburst event increases chances of a landslide. Cloudburst-like events, even if they do not qualify as a cloudburst in the specific terms of its definition, are often behind flash floods in hill states. Many of the recent incidents in Himachal Pradesh were triggered by cloudburst-like events. But again, in the case of Uttarkashi, there is no indication that such an event took place, even in remote locations. **A combination of factors** There are no direct cause-effect relationships among heavy rainfall, landslides, and flash floods. Not all cloudburst-like events result in a flash flood or a disaster. And not all flash floods are triggered by an intense spell of rain. For a flash flood-like situation to be created, several things must come together. In most cases, heavy rainfall followed by landslides or mudslides lead to run-offs into rivers. But extreme rainfall events do not always lead to landslides — and if they do, the debris does not always find its way into a river or stream. Also, the place where this occurs may not

always be located on a slope that is steep enough to facilitate the forceful downward journey of the accumulated mass. But again, landslides are not necessary to cause flash floods. In some cases, extreme rainfall on its own can do so. Sometimes, a flash flood can result if a section of a glacier breaks and falls into a river. In Chamoli district of Uttarakhand in 2021, 3-4 million cubic metres of water was suddenly released into the Rishiganga and Dhauliganga rivers following an ice-break. The possibility of such an event having occurred in the upper reaches of Uttarkashi remains under investigation. Sometimes, even low-intensity rainfall can trigger flash floods. This can happen if the area is already extremely fragile, or the mountain slopes are already eroding, and the soil is saturated, unable to absorb any more water. In these circumstances, even small amounts of rain can trigger landslides or flash floods. The Himalayas are relatively young mountains. The rocks are not fully consolidated, and there are lots of relatively weak geological formations. The region is, therefore, more susceptible to landslides or flash

floods than, say, the older Aravali mountains. The Himalayas are also earthquake-prone. Continuous seismic activity makes the region more vulnerable in case of an extreme rainfall event. Largescale construction activity and high volumes of vehicular traffic are contributing factors as well. **Challenge for early warning** The Dharali incident illustrates the difficulties in developing early warning systems for such events. While heavy rainfall events can be reliably predicted days in advance, and efforts to predict landslides are progressing steadily, whether such events would end up in flash floods remains very difficult to predict. The Dharali experience suggests that even moderate or normal rain can trigger a devastating flash flood. But some mitigation measures can certainly be taken. These would include avoiding construction activity near river banks, moving villages and populations some distance away from rivers, and storing and disposing of large boulders and construction debris in a way that they are not easily swept into rivers.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

WHY NASA WANTS TO SEND A NUCLEAR REACTOR TO MOON, HOW IT WILL WORK

US TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY Sean Duffy, who is now also NASA's acting administrator, last week issued a directive to fast-track efforts to put a nuclear reactor on the Moon. Duffy ordered the agency to solicit industry proposals for a 100-kilowatt nuclear reactor to launch by 2030. **Why put a nuclear reactor in space?** Nuclear reactor technology would transform the ability of humanity to travel and live in the solar system. Many of NASA's robotic spacecraft today operate at power levels equivalent to what a few incandescent light bulbs consume. That limits what scientific instruments can be put on board. The International Space Station gets its energy from swaths of solar panels, but that is not practical for human habitats on the Moon, where the cold, dark night lasts two weeks, or on Mars, where the Sun is farther away and dimmer. Nuclear reactors would enable faster and more efficient propulsion systems. Putting radioactive energy sources in space is not unusual. The Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 space probes, which are still operating after launching in 1977, are powered by plutonium, with the heat of natural radioactive decay turned into electricity. The plutonium heat initially generated 470 watts. In the decades since, the power output has dwindled to about 225 watts. But the plutonium power sources on the Voyagers are more like batteries than nuclear power plants on Earth. Fission — the chain-reaction splitting of atoms like uranium — releases much more energy than solar panels and the power sources on the Voyagers. This is what Duffy's or-

der aims to harness. **How would a nuclear reactor on the Moon work?** A reactor on the Moon would not operate in quite the same way as one on Earth. For one, it has to be small and light enough to fit inside a rocket. Safety precautions would include not turning the reactor on until it reaches the Moon. On the Moon, there is also no water or air. The surface swings between 250 degrees Fahrenheit (roughly 121 degrees Celsius) during the day and minus 400 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 240 degrees Celsius) at night. Those make it more difficult to manage the reactor's temperature to keep it operating efficiently. Kevin Au, the vice president of lunar exploration at Lockheed Martin, said the biggest challenge of a higher-power reactor would be developing materials that could survive hotter temperatures for use in the conversion of heat to electricity. However, experts say building such a power source falls within what is realistically possible. **How feasible is the lunar reactor plan?** What is unrealistic, according to some outside experts, is building a reactor and launching it by 2030. They also call the decision somewhat perplexing because NASA is not currently planning anything on the lunar surface that would require a reactor there that soon. "It's just a very aggressive, frankly unrealistic timeline for something that is good and should happen," said Kathryn Huff, a former nuclear energy official at the Department of Energy.

THENYT

EXPLAINED URBAN ISSUES

Why an order by Mumbai's civic body on feeding pigeons is now before HC



Dadar kabutarakhana, August 3. The cover is meant to curb pigeon feeding. Akash Patil

a Jain temple. Records show that in 1937, the Jain temple in Dadar wrote to the president of the erstwhile Bombay Municipality seeking permission to construct an enclosure for the protection of pigeons and other birds. In 1948, the temple trustees asked for permission to build a home and a water trough for the pigeons on the traffic island. In 1954, the Bombay Municipal Corporation allowed the temple to fence the traffic island to protect the pigeons. **Directives by govt, HC** The long tradition of feeding pigeons notwithstanding, the explosion in the birds' population, and the rising instances of pulmonary ailments among humans being traced to their feathers and droppings, have raised concerns in recent years. This issue was raised in the Legislative Council by Shiv Sena leader Manisha Kayande on July 3, following which Industries Minister Uday Samant said that BMC would be directed to shut down the *kabutarakhana*s and take strict action against illegal feeding. The BMC crackdown began a day later. On July 14, three animal rights activists approached Bombay High Court asking that the demolition of pigeon-feeding areas be stopped, and that citizens not be prevented from feeding the birds.

The court observed that "human health" was "paramount" and that the rights of humans and animals should be balanced. It declined to pass an interim order to allow feeding of pigeons, but halted the demolition of heritage *kabutarakhana*s. Trustees of the Dadar Kabutarakhana Trust moved the court separately, arguing that the entire *kabutarakhana* was a heritage structure. On July 24, the court said that "there cannot be anything more vital than human health and if any hazard is caused due to pigeons' congregation at feeding areas, the same was a matter of grave social concern". On July 30, the HC directed the BMC to register FIRs against people who were "illegally" feeding pigeons at *kabutarakhana*s despite BMC's policy and the denial of interim relief by the court. The HC asked BMC to install CCTV cameras to monitor "mischievous" feeders, depute beat marshals or civic officers at feeding sites, and use nets to prevent pigeons from congregating. **Escalation and anger** As the BMC, which is empowered to impose penalties over illegal bird-feeding, cracked down, at least 141 individuals were fined of Rs 500 each at 44 of the 51 *kabutarakhana*s in the city. Between July 13 and August 3, the civic

body raked in Rs 68,700 in fines. On August 1, the BMC registered an FIR against an unknown person at Mahim police station for feeding pigeons at Dadar Kabutarakhana. Over the next two days, the civic body covered the site to prevent the congregation of pigeons. Members of the Kabutarakhana Trust alleged that 980 pigeons in the vicinity had died in three days, and called a peace prayer meeting at the site on August 6. As the crisis escalated, Cabinet Minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha wrote to BMC on August 3 asking it to look at the possibility of alternative feeding spots. Two days later, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis met with members of the Jain community and the Dadar Trustees, and directed the BMC to allow feeding at public spaces in a controlled manner to ensure that the birds did not starve. Assuaged, the Trust called off its planned peace meeting. However, hundreds of people, apparently unaware of the decision, still gathered at the site, and a group led by women tore down the tarpaulin cover and fed the pigeons. **Where matters stand** The BMC is now considering the option of allowing feeding in a staggered manner for a few hours of the day, in line with the CM's directive to permit controlled feeding, officials said. On Thursday, the High Court recorded that since the BMC had not revoked or diluted its decision, the ban on feeding in public spaces "very much stands". It allowed the petitioners to apply to the BMC if they intended to feed pigeons, and said the civic body should consider the "larger issue of public health" before making its decision. The HC cited an opinion by Dr Sujeeet Rajan of Bombay Hospital recommending "dismantling of pigeon-breeding areas at the earliest", but it said that the court was "not an expert to examine" the issue. Therefore, the court said, it was considering setting up a committee of experts, and if this committee agreed with the BMC's decision, the authorities should consider an alternative workable mechanism for the pigeons. The court will hear the Advocate General for Maharashtra and other parties on the setting up of the committee on August 13.

Was Jaisalmer ever part of the Maratha empire? Here's what historians say

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND & SOHAM SHAH
NEW DELHI, PUNE, AUGUST 8
A MAP in the new NCERT Class 8 text book showing the extent of the Maratha empire in 1759 has come under criticism. Chaitanya Raj Singh, head of the royal family of the erstwhile princely state of Jaisalmer, on Monday called the map, which shows Jaisalmer lying within the Maratha dominion, "historically misleading, factually baseless, and deeply objectionable". Michel Danino, chairperson of the NCERT's curricular area group for the new social science textbooks, on Wednesday clarified that a "revised map will be prepared" if the current one's boundaries are "incorrect". What do historians say? **Marathas' 'northern expansion'** As Mughal authority crumbled in the early 18th century, Peshwa Bajirao I "could not resist a Maratha drive" into the north,

historian Stewart Gordon wrote in his book *The Marathas 1600-1818* (1993). At the time, the Marathas were already a formidable force in the Deccan where they were collecting tribute from erstwhile Mughal dominions. In the 18th century, the Marathas pushed into parts of Rajasthan, the areas around Delhi and Punjab, and Bundelkhand, and attacked Orissa, Bengal, and Bihar, Gordon wrote. These conquests, according to Gordon, saw the Marathas make next to no attempt to displace the local powers. Instead, they focussed on entering agreements to collect tribute. Rahul Magar, assistant professor of history at Savitribai Phule Pune University, said collecting economic tribute should not be confused with exercising political authority. "These states, like Rajputana and even Orissa and Bengal, were paying financial tribute, but it is not necessary that they politically considered the Peshwa as their overlord," he told *The Indian Express*. Dilbagh Singh, retired professor of his-



Maratha empire in 1759; NCERT map posted by C R Singh on X. X/@crsinghbbhati

tory at Jawaharlal Nehru University, concurred. No Rajput state was "directly ruled by the Marathas," he said. **The Marathas & Jaisalmer** "The Marathas didn't raid Jaisalmer and Bikaner. They never went too far. Most of their attacks were confined to Jaipur and Jodhpur," Singh said. Jaisalmer remained under the rule of the Bhati clan of Rajputs till Independence. Other historians agree. Professor B L Bhadani, former head of the History Department at Aligarh Muslim University, told *The Indian Express*, "I can say with full confidence that Jaisalmer was never a tributary state. This map is incorrect." Gordon wrote of a tribute-collecting expedition that Bajirao I led in 1728 through western Malwa. "There had been, however, a friendship between Bajirao and Jai Singh (of Jaipur) which lessened the pressure for tribute in the 1730s. After Bajirao's death, Maratha military contingents invaded Rajasthan almost every year," he wrote. "Through the later years of the 1750s, the Peshwa, Scindia, and Holkar sent armies into Rajasthan to collect the arrears of the large promised tribute...but nothing like an

administration was in place. As soon as the main-force Maratha army left, the Maratha representatives were thrown out, and no tribute paid," Gordon wrote. Professor Manisha Choudhary of Delhi University said, "Even Amber-Jaipur was not paying the tribute regularly, forget about any other state located in the present territory of Rajasthan. "If somebody is not paying you full-fledged revenue but only sending some gifts and nazars occasionally, that doesn't fit them in the category of a subsidiary state," she told *The Indian Express*. **What 'empire' means** It is easy to project modern ideas of statehood into the past. But historical empires seldom had as much authority as they are sometimes credited with today. Historian Richard Eaton wrote in *India in the Persianate Age* (2019) that in the decades of the 1730s to the 1750s, "Maratha rule was patchy and irregular across much of central India". Some regions were fully administered by the Peshwa's men "and

others only thinly administered, and populated by recalcitrant *zamindars* who managed to defy Maratha authority from behind walled strongholds," Eaton wrote. "It is true that the dominant clan of the Marathas in the 18th century made a general claim of sovereignty over almost the entire north and north-western parts of India as well as the Deccan," Prof Pankaj Jha of the Lady Shri Ram College told *The Indian Express*. "However, their actual control varied enormously. The more critical question is how authority is made, rather than which dynasty or clan proclaimed themselves to be great," he said. Prof Magar highlighted the need for nuance in cartographic representation. "Such maps should be made using different shades of colours...One indicating direct control, another for tributary states, one for territories that were captured but did not remain under control, and another indicating influence. This blanket map is not consistent with the truth."

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Validation concerns

Draft mobile number validation norms need review

The Department of Telecommunications’ (DoT) proposed amendments to the Telecom Cybersecurity Rules, 2024, mark a pivotal moment in India’s digital governance. By introducing a new category of entities — Telecom Identifier User Entities (TIUEs) — the draft rules aim to tighten cybersecurity and combat digital fraud through a government-run Mobile Number Validation (MNV) platform. While the intention is noble, the framework raises concerns around privacy, due process, and costs.

At the heart of the proposal is the MNV platform, designed to authenticate users by matching mobile numbers against telecom databases. This is meant to reduce impersonation, secure online transactions, and support national cybersecurity. But the platform, by design, centralises user data, potentially enabling unprecedented access for the government and telecom providers to detailed information about individuals and businesses. In the absence of clear limits on data use, retention, or safeguards, this could lead to misuse or even surveillance. More troubling is the opacity around what kind of data TIUEs will receive from the MNV system. Will it be limited to basic mobile-number validation or will it provide richer Know Your Customer (KYC) data? Without clarity, there is a risk of excessive and unnecessary data sharing that threatens the constitutional right to privacy, upheld by the Supreme Court in *KS Puttaswamy vs Union of India* (2017). The judgment says that any restriction on privacy must meet the test of necessity, proportionality, and legal oversight. These criteria are missing from the draft rules.

Additionally, the denial of services through invalidation of mobile numbers raises due process concerns. If a legitimate user is flagged wrongly, there appears to be no stated way to contest or correct it. Worse still, the burden of proof falls squarely on the user to prove s/he is the rightful owner of a number. In a country where mobile phones are often shared among family members, especially women and those in low-income groups, such rigidity could deny legitimate users access to essential services, deepening digital exclusion if not harassment by state agencies.

The economic impact is sobering. The per-request validation charges, ₹1.50 for government-mandated checks and ₹3 for voluntary ones, can accumulate rapidly for large platforms. These costs are likely to be passed on to users or cut into innovation budgets, especially for smaller firms. Far from fostering digital inclusion, this framework could discourage new entrants in the tech ecosystem. Without tight controls, the MNV system could be gamed by bad actors posing as TIUEs and purchasing sensitive user data under the garb of verification. The absence of guardrails — consent, audit trails, explicit limitation of purpose, and strong eligibility checks — poses a problem. The final rules must include user notification protocols, an appeal mechanism, stringent limits on data use and a transparent governance framework for MNV.

OTHER VOICES.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump Targets Russia via India

President Trump wants at long last to raise the pressure on Russia for a cease-fire in Ukraine, and on Wednesday he threatened India with a 50% tariff if it keeps buying Russian oil. The puzzle is why the President is so far giving China a pass, though Beijing buys more Russian oil than does New Delhi. The new tariff is included in an executive order “Addressing Threats to the United States by the Government of the Russian Federation.” India is a target because its purchases of Russian oil are a major source of revenue for Vladimir Putin’s war machine. India has long bought Russian crude, but its purchases since Russia invaded Ukraine have increased enormously and help Mr. Putin continue his deadly rampage. NEW YORK, AUGUST 7

The Guardian

A public reckoning on the gambling industry is overdue No one should be surprised that the highly profitable UK gambling industry is intensifying its lobbying efforts, with a view to avoiding both higher taxation and stricter regulation of its activities, including advertising. Establishing a presence, and a voice, in parliament is what the leaders of growing business sectors do. In the five years since Michael Dugher, a former Labour MP and shadow culture secretary, became chief executive of the Betting and Gaming Council, the £11.5bn-a-year industry has seen off a Tory white paper that threatened to curb its advertising, and resisted pressure for the higher taxation that many expected last year. Now, with Rachel Reeves reviewing gambling taxes in advance of the autumn budget, and amid growing calls for ministers to be more active in addressing gambling harms, including addiction, the organisation and its supporters are making fresh efforts to influence MPs in their favour. LONDON, AUGUST 7

Shaping character, building futures

FINE BALANCE. Residential schools preserve cherished traditions and values while adapting to contemporary realities



VIPIN SONDHI
HIMMAT DHILLON

Residential schools have long stood as pillars of educational excellence — in India and across the world — with a distinctive model of shaping not only young minds but entire personalities. Institutions such as Eton College in the UK and India’s own St George’s, The Lawrence School – Sanawar, Daly College, Kodaikanal International, Doon School, Mayo College, YPS, Scindia School and many more have produced generations of leaders, thinkers and professionals who have left their mark in diverse spheres.

But what is it that gives residential schooling this enduring appeal? Why do these institutions remain relevant in a world of changing pedagogies, technological revolutions and evolving parenting philosophies? The answer lies in their holistic focus: fostering academic rigour, shaping character, nurturing leadership and preparing young people to thrive in a complex global society.

A LEGACY OF PURPOSE, SERVICE The legacy of India’s leading residential schools is woven into the fabric of the nation’s history. Many were established during the colonial period and, over time, embraced the ethos of service, meritocracy and nation-building. Alumni from these institutions have shaped the country’s political, administrative, military, cultural and business landscapes.

Importantly, the concept of ‘legacy’ in this context is not about entitlement or elitism, but about values; of integrity, service, courage and excellence. These values are reinforced in traditions such as the prefectural system, which provides students with leadership opportunities and instils responsibility.

Despite changes in education and in society, these schools continue to attract families because they offer a broad-based, well-rounded learning environment that fosters personal growth as much as academic achievement. Perhaps the greatest strength of residential schools lies in their commitment to character building. The very structure of residential life — living with peers, sharing routines, collaborating across activities — naturally fosters discipline, resilience, empathy and social skills.

From the simple act of adhering to a daily schedule, to the collaborative



BALANCED APPROACH. Residential schools embrace diversity and prepare students for global challenges

dynamics of dining, sports, outdoor treks and dormitory life, students learn to respect structure and value teamwork. Wearing the same uniform, sharing communal spaces and participating in collective activities diminishes barriers of class or background, promoting equality and camaraderie.

Moreover, many residential schools integrate strong cultural values into daily life, nurturing a spirit of service, respect and good citizenship. School and house spirit, reinforced through traditions and rituals, foster a collective identity rooted in enduring principles.

The outdoor experiences these schools offer — trekking, hiking, camping — further contribute to personal development. It is no coincidence that India’s mountaineering tradition has often been led by alumni and staff from residential schools.

One of the key differentiators of the residential model is that learning is not confined to formal classroom hours. The entire ecosystem — whether hobbies, sports, social service or leisure — is seen as part of the curriculum.

Living away from home teaches

The confidence, curiosity and collaborative spirit nurtured in these settings often lead to well-rounded individuals capable of excelling in varied environments

students to be self-reliant, to manage their own time, and to navigate interpersonal dynamics. In contrast to day-school students who may remain more dependent on family support, residential students cultivate independence early.

Residential schools are also fertile grounds for building critical 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, negotiation, communication and leadership. The National Education Policy’s emphasis on holistic education aligns perfectly with this approach, one that develops not just cognitive but also emotional and social intelligence.

It is sometimes argued that residential schools may not always top purely academic league tables. Yet their real strength lies in the breadth of education they provide. The confidence, curiosity and collaborative spirit nurtured in these settings often lead to well-rounded individuals capable of excelling in varied environments.

PREPARING GLOBAL CITIZENS Today’s residential schools embrace diversity and prepare students to engage with a globalised world. With students from different regions, faiths, ethnicities and even countries living together, tolerance and understanding naturally emerge.

Dormitory life is itself a rich educational space — what scholars call the “third classroom” — where values, empathy and social skills are learned through daily interactions. Students learn to appreciate differences, resolve

conflicts and forge lasting friendships across cultural lines, all vital for global citizenship.

Furthermore, many residential schools are consciously evolving their curricula and pedagogical approaches to incorporate international perspectives, sustainability and digital literacy.

The best residential schools today achieve a fine balance: they preserve cherished traditions and values while adapting to contemporary realities. This includes modern teaching methods, integration of technology in learning and a greater focus on student well-being and mental health.

Indeed, the residential setting offers a unique advantage in today’s hyper-connected world, a space where young minds can disconnect from the constant pull of social media and digital distractions.

Residential schools provide a healthy environment for what might be called a ‘digital detox,’ fostering deeper focus, stronger interpersonal bonds and greater mental resilience.

It is important to acknowledge that residential schooling is not without its challenges. Concerns around elitism, separation from families, mental health pressures and affordability are valid and must be addressed sensitively. The best institutions are doing so by strengthening pastoral care, ensuring inclusive environments and building strong partnerships with parents.

By remaining self-reflective and adaptive, residential schools can continue to serve as beacons of holistic education.

A LASTING IMPACT

One of the most enduring aspects of the residential school experience is the lifelong sense of community it fosters. Alumni networks remain vibrant and supportive, helping graduates navigate professional journeys and contribute meaningfully to society.

Stories from history abound — for example, the victory at the Battle of Basantar in 1971, particularly for the valour of 2nd Lt Arun Khetarpal from The Lawrence School, Sanawar — of leaders shaped on the playing fields of these institutions. The phrase rings true: much of life’s future battles are indeed won in the character-forming crucibles of school life.

In an era where education often risks becoming transactional or overly driven by metrics, residential schools remind us of a deeper purpose, to nurture the whole person.

Sondhi is former MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland, and Member, Board of Governors, The Lawrence School, Sanawar; Dhillon is Head Master, The Lawrence School, Sanawar

Trump tariffs’ impact on economy and stock markets

How Trump’s additional penalty for buying Russian energy affects our exports and growth

bl.explainer

Lokeshwarri SK

What is the latest salvo fired by Donald Trump against India?

On Wednesday, the US President announced that a 25 per cent penalty will be imposed on goods imported from India, for continuing to purchase oil from Russia. This is in addition to the 25 per cent reciprocal tariff announced on July 31, taking the total baseline tariff to 50 per cent.

The reciprocal tariffs have come into force from August 7, and the penalty will be applied 21 days from now, that is from August 27. Goods which are in transit on August 27 but enter the US before September 17 will face the earlier rate of tariffs.

Which items are excluded from these tariffs?

Sectors which are undergoing Section 232 investigation (pharmaceuticals, semiconductors & electronics, among others) are currently exempt from reciprocal tariffs. These exempt items account for approximately 30 per cent of India’s exports.

But this is not a matter of relief because Section 232 allows the US

Department of Commerce to investigate whether import of the goods threaten national security. If yes, then additional tariffs can follow. Section 232 tariffs are currently applicable on steel & aluminium (50 per cent) and autos — finished and parts (25 per cent).

What will be the broader impact of the tariff?

India’s exports to the US stood at \$86.5 billion in FY25, accounting for 19.5 per cent of our total exports. The US is our largest export partner. The tariff charged on Indian goods earlier was around 3 per cent. The hike to 50 per cent now will certainly make all the imports from India extremely expensive. With India’s competitors such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines facing reciprocal tariffs of less than 20 per cent, Indian goods are going to find fewer takers in the US market. Exporters in the textiles, chemicals and gems and jewellery segments have said that they will face reduction of 50 to 70 per cent in their exports to the US now.

According to GTRI, the 50 per cent tariff can reduce overall Indian exports to the US by 40 to 50 per cent.

With exports to the US accounting for approximately 2.2 per cent of our GDP



EXPORTERS. A worried lot ISTOCK.COM

in 2025, per Commerce Ministry data, a 50 per cent reduction in the US exports can lead to a decline of at least 30 to 40 basis points in our GDP for FY26, if the rates are not negotiated lower.

What will be the sectoral impact?

Sectors such as textiles and apparels (37 per cent share), chemicals (15 per cent), electrical machinery (32 per cent share), gems and jewellery (30 per cent share) — are going to feel the heat of these increased tariffs, if implemented.

According to Nomura, “the steep 50 per cent tariff would be similar to a trade embargo, and will lead to a sudden stop in affected export products. The lower value addition and thinner margins

across a number of industries (textiles, gem and jewellery) could jeopardise operations, especially of smaller firms that will struggle to compete. The effective tariff rate also makes the burden on India similar to that of China and much higher than ASEAN economies (19–20 per cent), putting India’s goods at a significant disadvantage.”

What will be the impact on stock markets?

The listed stocks in chemicals, textiles, gems and jewellery are not large-cap heavy weights. While stocks like Gokaldas Textiles, Kitex, Camlin, Aarti Industries, Atul, Bharat Forge, Suprajit Engineering, Sona BLW etc will see a sharp reduction in revenue and profitability, the benchmark indices may not be too affected. But there will be the secondary impact of the weakening of external demand for our companies due to the ongoing chaos, which can dampen the outlook for all companies.

If India decides to reduce or stop crude oil imports from Russia, then Reliance and the other OMCs can take a hit. If crude oil prices increase due to this, then margins of all listed companies will get hit. It will be best for investors to tread cautiously for now.

On businessline.in

Why unlimited banking of carbon credits can undermine compliance



A Banking Sunset Clause could be introduced to limit credit carryovers to a three-year period to avoid market distortions, say **Aparna Sharma** and **Gopal Sarangi**

https://tinyurl.com/y7s8t93m

The carbon paradox: How America rebranded pollution as fertilizer

The US telling the world that CO₂ is beneficial is hilarious and dangerous. It is also a masterclass in double standards, argues **Sathya Raghu V Mokkalati**



https://tinyurl.com/bdd7v352



Fix the flaws

Voter registration problems demand systemic solutions by the ECI

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has levelled serious allegations of “criminal fraud” against the Election Commission of India (ECI), by claiming that over one lakh fake votes were created in the Mahadevapura Assembly segment of the Bangalore Central Lok Sabha constituency in order to ensure a victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2024 general election. His detailed presentation outlining five categories of alleged electoral malpractices demands careful examination, not wholesale dismissal. The Congress leader’s documentation reveals troubling patterns: voters registered multiple times within the same constituency, identical Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers across different States, and improbably large numbers of voters listed at single addresses. While identical EPIC numbers across different States are not a significant issue – the ECI addressed these anomalies earlier this year – his claim that party workers found booth slips showing multiple votes by the “same person” in a single booth represents a serious violation of the “one person, one vote” principle, if verified. Mr Gandhi claimed that these discrepancies were not limited to Mahadevapura but were part of a calculated modus operandi to help the BJP in marginal constituencies across the country. The Congress party had made similar allegations about massive increases in electoral registrations prior to the Maharashtra Assembly election, claiming that these had contributed to the unexpected victory of the BJP and its allies, though without elaborate proof of erroneous registrations as seen in Mahadevapura. Mr. Gandhi’s analysis stops short of proving that these discrepancies directly enabled the BJP’s victory. The BJP won the Mahadevapura Assembly seat in 2023 with a margin of approximately 44,500 votes. The increased margin, to over 1,14,000 votes, in 2024 happened even though the total accretions in the electoral roll were around 52,600 electors and the actual voter count increased only by around 20,000. Establishing a causal link between electoral roll errors and poll outcomes requires more than circumstantial correlation. The leap from documenting registration flaws to alleging deliberate fraud orchestrated by the ECI in collusion with the BJP remains unsubstantiated.

The ECI has adopted an unnecessarily defensive stance by demanding that evidence be submitted ‘under oath’ – a requirement that legal experts suggest may not apply in this situation – and attributing electoral discrepancies to the failure by political parties to raise concerns during registration. More problematic is the ECI’s practice of releasing voter information in bulky image PDFs rather than structured, searchable text formats, which hinders verification efforts by political parties and civil society organisations. The ECI’s approach to voter registration relies heavily on self-declarations and lacks robust verification mechanisms. The Mahadevapura controversy highlights the urgent need for comprehensive electoral roll reform through door-to-door verification, the most reliable method. The ECI’s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in Bihar appears to respond to critics about electoral roll problems. In theory, this should help maintain more accurate rolls. However, rushed implementation and problematic identity verification requirements risk creating new issues related to legitimate voter deletion. Data already show higher deletions among women electors than men in Bihar. Considering that most out-migrants are males, the higher deletion of women electors could indicate that marginalised electors – particularly those who are illiterate (literacy rate of women aged 15-49 years in Bihar was 55% in 2019-21, according to the National Family Health Survey) – have been erroneously excluded in the enumeration process for the draft SIR roll.

The broader challenge extends to multiple aspects of electoral administration: lax implementation of campaign finance regulations and the Model Code of Conduct, tallying VVPATs from only small samples rather than statistically significant proportions, inadequate technical safeguards for symbol loading in VVPATs, and the unwillingness to submit the EVM’s technical safeguards to independent expert verification. The ECI’s resistance to retaining CCTV footage from polling booths, delays in publishing final turnout figures, and evolution into an institution viewing criticism as an attack represent a troubling departure from democratic norms. The fundamental issue underlying current electoral controversies is the erosion of institutional trust. The ECI’s credibility depends not merely on technical soundness but also on public confidence in its impartiality and transparency. The process of appointing Election Commissioners needs to follow the Supreme Court’s recommendation to include the Chief Justice of India in the selection panel, currently side-stepped by the government. Mr. Gandhi’s allegations fall short of establishing deliberate fraud. But his party’s findings perform a valuable democratic function by highlighting systemic flaws. The appropriate response requires comprehensive voter roll auditing, enhanced transparency in data sharing, improved technical safeguards including comprehensive audit trails of EVM commands and security protocols for symbol loading, stronger enforcement of electoral regulations, and consultations with political parties. The ECI must embrace the principle that democratic institutions grow stronger through scrutiny. The alternative – continued erosion of confidence in electoral processes – poses far greater risks to democratic governance than any specific allegation of malpractice.

With tariffs, India’s growth rate needs a careful watch

The United States imposed 25% reciprocal tariffs on India’s exports with effect from August 7. On August 6, the U.S. imposed a penal levy of an additional 25% on India’s exports because India continued to import oil from Russia and this comes into effect on August 29. The two taken together can weaken India’s exports to the U.S. We first examine the impact of the 25% tariff and, later, the impact of the penal rates.

India runs a merchandise trade surplus with the U.S. – for 2024-25, it stood at \$41.18 billion – which is increasing over time. To narrow this trade surplus, the U.S. appears to focus both on India’s exports and imports. While a 25% reciprocal tariff could hamper India’s exports, the penalty could work on exports as well as serve as a non-tariff barrier on crude imports from Russia, thus, pushing India to import crude from the U.S. or elsewhere at a higher cost. While the U.S.’s measures could reduce the trade gap between the two countries, it is important to understand its implications on India’s growth and external account. Such unilateral actions are contrary to the principles of free and fair trade

Impact of reciprocal tariffs

The immediate impact of reciprocal tariffs would be on the trade balance. Assuming that there is no impact on imports from the U.S. (except for a limited diversification of oil imports from Russia to the U.S.), tariffs could adversely impact India’s exports to the U.S. But to what extent? Assuming that the import elasticity with respect to tariffs as (-)1, which is on a higher side, India’s exports to the U.S. can go down by 25% – this is a sharp decline. However, its impact on trade balance depends on how much the share of India’s exports to the U.S. is in total exports. As the data for 2025-26 is not available, the implications of this expected drop in U.S. exports is worked out for 2024-25, ex post.

Even in the extreme case, where elasticity is assumed to be (-)1, the overall trade deficit widens by about 0.56 % of GDP to 7.84%. Consequently, real GDP growth drops by about 0.6% to 5.9% from 6.5%. What is of more concern is its impact



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Taken together, the total impact of the reciprocal tariffs and penal levy on India’s growth rate can turn out to be severe

on the Current Account Deficit (CAD). Due to the U.S.’s reciprocal tariffs, the CAD is estimated to increase from 0.6% to 1.15%. While these estimates are for 2024-25, the extent of the impact in 2025-26 would not be very different from these estimates for 2024-25, had the tariffs been effective from the beginning of the year. However, in the current year (2025-26) four months are behind us, the decline in GDP growth rate may be 0.4%, and correspondingly the CAD may also be reduced.

Some caveats

These estimates are, however, subject to some caveats. India recently signed a comprehensive economic and trade agreement with the United Kingdom, while negotiations are underway with the European Union and other major countries and their impact on external account is not assessed. These may have a favourable effect on the CAD.

We are also not considering the effects of tariff increases imposed on other countries that are competitors for Indian exports, and this can moderate the impact on India’s exports. Further, we are not taking into consideration any likely changes in the exchange rate due to the recent U.S. trade measures and its impact on trade balance. Indeed, the rupee-U.S. dollar depreciated sharply and was hovering over ₹87.5 since reciprocal tariffs were imposed. The new trade agreements as well as rupee depreciation could help narrow the CAD a bit and also limit the impact of the U.S. tariffs on India’s GDP growth to some extent.

But for 2025-26, and for the coming years, GDP growth, even after considering these two factors, could still be lower by about 0.5% than the base case growth forecast of 6.5%; the CAD could also widen by a similar extent. Further, following the penalty threat, any larger shift away from Russia on crude imports and towards the U.S. might have further implications on the CAD as well as the exchange rate and domestic inflation. Added to this, an increase in world oil prices and the uncertainty surrounding the world economy could exert more pressure on the CAD and its

financing. It can also have an effect on inflation.

How can India mitigate the downside risks of Donald Trump’s tariffs? One option is that India still has the space to negotiate with the U.S. as the trade deal has not yet been finalised while not yielding on contentious issues such as agriculture and allied sectors and micro, small and medium enterprises.

The other way is, as many have suggested, to diversify the export market. But this would be difficult in the short term. One possible way is to look at our own tariffs that we impose on our imports. Our empirical results do suggest that India’s exports are negatively affected by import tariffs. The estimated elasticity with respect to import tariffs is more than (negative) one. With the increasing import content of our exports over time, the negative impact of tariffs on exports growth has only increased. The government may look at the existing tariff rates and may reduce those that have an adverse effect on exports.

Impact of penal levy

The impact of the penal levy, which is another 25%, will have the same effect as reciprocal tariffs. However, there are some commodities that are exempt from this levy. Here the impact will be somewhat lower. Taken together, the total impact on India’s growth rate can be quite severe, a reduction of over 0.6 percentage points from the base growth rate of 6.5% in the current year. To avoid the penal levy, India has to bring to the attention of the world at large the inequity of the decision. It is highly discriminatory. There are many other countries which import from Russia far more than what India does. The interval of three weeks that is available now for negotiation must be effectively utilised.

Reciprocal tariffs with penal levy are a clear case of using tariffs to compel nations to follow a specific policy. India needs to work with other nations to get back to a different system of world trade. While the immediate impact of the tariffs on the growth rate of India may be managed, the continuation of this kind of trade regime will not be in the interests of all countries including the U.S. and India.

Industrial accidents, the human cost of indifference

After spending 37 years in India’s oil and energy sector, this writer has walked through the innards of factories, refineries, and chemical plants across the country. This writer has seen, up close, the tragic aftermath of industrial accidents – not as distant events, but as raw human tragedies. These are not acts of fate. They are the result of choices – bad ones made by individuals, institutions, and systems that fail to care.

We have seen it again, recently – as explosions at Sigachi Industries in Telangana, and as a firecracker unit disaster in Tamil Nadu. They are not aberrations. They are the symptoms of a deeper, ongoing national crisis.

A universe is shattered every time

In the last five years, at least 6,500 workers have lost their lives in India’s factories, construction sites, and mines, according to government data compiled by the Labour Ministry and several Right to Information-based reports. This means nearly three fatalities every day in peacetime, in a growing economy, in the 21st century.

In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu alone, over 200 fatalities have occurred in major industrial mishaps over the past decade. But the true toll – especially from the unregistered or informal sector units may be much higher and rarely makes news. Each of these cases is not just a data point. It is about a breadwinner gone, a child orphaned, and a household thrust into trauma and penury. This writer has witnessed this – an empty seat in a refinery canteen after a fatality, families pacing outside the plant gates, waiting for news they know will break them.

A study in 2022 by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) found that India had had over 130 major chemical accidents in just a 30-month window post-2020, with 218 fatalities and 300-plus injuries. Most of these occurred in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often operate under regulatory radar.

What makes these deaths even more



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India must assure every worker, who risks life and limb to keep its industries running, that industrial safety is a right

inexcusable is how elementary and avoidable their causes are: no fire No-Objection Certificate (NOC) – factories running without even the basic No-Objection Certificate from the Fire Department; no firefighting systems – alarms, sensors, extinguishers missing or dysfunctional; no permit-to-work system – high-risk jobs undertaken casually, with no formal hazard identification or job safety analysis; no training – especially for migrant and contract workers who often speak different languages and oblivious to the signage or safety protocols; no fire exits – or exits locked, blocked, or hidden under storage materials; no accountability – audits, when conducted, are often tick the box exercises. Convictions for safety lapses are rare, and penalties are negligible.

Not a core value

Even in large corporates, the focus on operational excellence often overshadows basic safety culture. Globally, countries such as Germany and Japan have embedded safety deeply into industrial design and workplace culture. In contrast, India still treats safety as a compliance hurdle rather than a core value.

While the spotlight is on Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, let us not pretend that other States fare better. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh have their own grim records. In fact, Gujarat witnessed over 60 major industrial fires and gas leaks in just a single year (2021), according to media and State records.

According to the Directorate General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI), India records one serious industrial accident every two days in registered factories. What are unregistered units? Nobody truly knows.

The pattern is now familiar to the point of fatigue: tragedy, outrage, compensation, committee and then silence. The root cause remains untouched. The next accident is just waiting to happen.

What keeps this cycle alive is national

indifference – the silence of the public, the inertia of regulators, and the cost-cutting impulse of companies that treat safety as overhead, and not obligation. Workers, especially those on contract, are seen as disposable.

There is also a deeply troubling class bias. Would a similar safety lapse at a high-rise corporate headquarters or in a software park go similarly unnoticed? The harsh truth is that these lives are undervalued because of who they are – migrant workers, contract labourers, and the economically voiceless.

The phrase ‘act of god’

There is a phrase that we often hear, which is “act of God.” It sounds biblical, a way to distance ourselves from culpability. But these disasters are not divine punishment. They are man-made. A National Geographic documentary once explored this very idea showing how industrial accidents across the world stem not from chance, but from negligence and failed systems.

Countries such as South Korea and Singapore now have corporate manslaughter laws, holding senior executives criminally accountable for gross safety failures. India needs to begin that conversation.

This is not just a call for regulatory reform or better audits. It is a call for collective conscience. As citizens, as industry leaders, as media, as policymakers we need to say, “We care”.

We must not only hold companies to account but also strengthen our labour safety boards, digitise risk reporting, and ensure whistle-blower protection. And for every worker who risks life and limb to keep our industries running, we must affirm this truth: industrial safety is not a favour, it is a right.

The question is not whether we have the means to prevent these tragedies. We do. The only question is this: do we care enough to act? Or will we, through silence and resignation, keep proving that unspoken indictment true? Who cares?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Proof of ‘elections stolen’

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi’s detonation of his “atom bomb proof of vote *chori*” – allegations of massive voter theft in the Mahadevapura Assembly constituency in Karnataka – raises serious questions about the very sanctity of the electoral process. Mr. Gandhi’s claim that a Congress party team spent six months analysing voter data to spot gross irregularities, is too serious to be dismissed either by the Election Commission of India (ECI) or the Bharatiya Janata Party, the alleged beneficiary of such irregularities. The institutional integrity of the ECI and its competence are at stake. Mr. Gandhi has put out full and verifiable data

in the public domain. The ECI must probe the allegations in a transparent manner. It is needless to mention that Mr. Gandhi and his party will pay a heavy political cost if his allegations are found to be baseless and malicious. S.K. Choudhury, Bengaluru

There is no obvious reason to dispute the evidence-based exposé of large-scale electoral roll manipulations. One must consider that a team of his party workers completed a seemingly impossible task of meticulously analysing entries from piles of paper sheets over months. Other skeletons may emerge if a similar exercise is conducted in several other constituencies. The

common man is unconcerned with the ECI hunting for technicalities in Mr. Gandhi’s fight with the ECI. They only want clear answers for each of his ‘open and shut’ instances of voter list manipulation. Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

A fair and free election does not mean the pride in computing voter turnout only. It also means a true voters’ list. The Election Commission has to prove that it is clean. M. Xavier, Vallioor, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

If what the Congress leader has alleged has any substance or evidentiary value, it is a blow to democracy. The evidence given by the Congress

leader is already in the public domain and the ECI can straightaway take up a detailed probe. If the probe falsifies the allegations, let the law take its course against him. Else, there will be every justification to suspect the primacy, the sanctity and the integrity of the poll body. V. Johan Dhanakumar, Chennai

The charge of “vote theft” has reignited the debate over the Election Commission’s role. The BJP counters this as “selective outrage”, noting that the Congress never questioned the ECI’s neutrality where it won. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, while cautioning against hasty electoral roll revisions, stresses that any bias or

disenfranchisement – especially of the poor – would be a “monstrous development”. My view is that the ECI, as an independent constitutional body, is an easy target for Opposition parties after an electoral defeat – just as the BJP might have done if in the opposition. The Congress, long used to being in power, seems unwilling to adapt itself to being out of power. However, the BJP too has erred in not accepting the Chief Justice of India as the neutral third member in the Chief Election Commissioner’s selection panel, which would have strengthened institutional trust. A robust democracy demands both: credible elections and restraint in undermining constitutional

bodies without solid proof. Gopalaswamy J., Chennai

It is distressing that Mr. Gandhi has stooped low to salvage his fading image by issuing unwarranted and denigrating insinuations against a constitutional institution as exalted as the Election Commission of India. He has not shown any sign of remorse even after being reprimanded by the Supreme Court for his penchant of coming up with shallow public utterances. Mr. Gandhi should desist from attacking our democracy in such an irresponsible manner. Ravi Mathur, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

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

GROUND ZERO



Hundreds of migrant workers wait in long queues to board the few unreserved compartments of a long-distance train to Hyderabad, in Telangana. They say there are few jobs in West Bengal, forcing them to return to work in other States.
DEBASISH BHADURI

In the name of a nation

As thousands of Bengali-speaking migrants across some of India's States are questioned on their citizenship, detained, or pushed into Bangladesh, a wave of fear has brought them back to West Bengal. Shiv Sahay Singh explores the reasons for the migration, as the controversy opens up the debate about Bengali identity. Political parties use the crisis as a plank for the Assembly elections next year

Nazimuddin Mondal (34) recalls that he was slapped before being asked to sing the national anthem. "At the police station they told me to sing it and then checked my phone to see if there were any phone numbers from Bangladesh," he says.

Mondal says life had been going smoothly for about a year and a half in Mumbai's Nalasopara area, where he lived on rent. With a daily wage of ₹1,300, the migrant from a village in Murshidabad district, West Bengal, had come to Maharashtra to work. On June 9, 2025, there was a knock on his door. Men in uniform had come for him. They took him to the local police station. Mondal recalls that there were 13 Bengali-speaking men at the police station. Then began a journey of about 2,500 kilometres spanning six days.

From the police station in Mumbai, Mondal says he and a few others were taken for a medical check-up, then driven to Pune the next morning. He recalls that they were put on a flight from Pune to West Bengal, their hands in zip-ties.

After landing somewhere in north Bengal, Mondal says he was driven along the international border in the early hours of one morning and pushed into Bangladesh.

"The men in plainclothes forced me to cross the border. It was the scariest day of my life," he says. He was handed ₹300 in Bangladeshi currency, a packet of food, and a bottle of water. "You all are Bangladeshis," the man told me in Bengali, threatening to shoot me if I tried to return."

On June 14, a video of him and two others, Minarul Sheikh and Mostafa Kamal Sheikh, both also migrant workers from West Bengal, allegedly picked up by the police in Maharashtra, surfaced on social media. Sitting in an open field, the men cried out to the West Bengal Chief Minister for help: "Mamata (Banerjee) Didi please save us... We have been pushed into Bangladesh." The next day, the three were repatriated through the India-Bangladesh border close to Mekhliganj town of Cooch Behar district, West Bengal.

Across India, thousands of Bengali-speaking migrants are being asked for documentation to prove their Indian citizenship. The crackdown began, say sources in the Home Ministry, after the regime change in Bangladesh in August 2024. The questioning intensified after the Pahalgam attack in April this year. CM Banerjee alleges that the intensity of it is felt most in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled States.

The Delhi Police has checked documents of over 16,000 Bengali-speakers over the past few months. The Haryana government had set up detention centres in July, where they allegedly held people. In Gujarat, over 1,000 were detained in Ahmedabad and Surat. Through June and July, migrant workers have been leaving jobs in other States to return to West Bengal.

Almost a month after the incident, Mondal is back home. He wears the same shirt in which he was seen in the video, and is struggling to find work in his village. "The contractor (in Mumbai) is calling me regularly, but I have no documents; they were all taken by the police. Here, even if I



We have had several cases of people of the Matua community being held by the police in Maharashtra. When the police pick up people on the basis of language, both Hindus and Muslims will be arrested

NIKHILESH ADHIKARI
Lawyer fighting cases of two migrant workers

get work, I don't get even ₹500 a day," the migrant worker says.

The village, located along one of the distributaries of the river Ganga, has a standing crop of jute in July, rising to almost five feet. The roads are filled with potholes so deep that ducks swim in them. Most men in the village migrate out of West Bengal for work, though there is no reliable data on how many do.

Going back to work

Less than a kilometre from his house, is a locality where other migrant workers have been forced to return from their place of work. They were detained for three days in the neighbouring State of Odisha. They are part of a group of about 400 who were detained by the Jharsuguda police during the second week of July. On July 9, the Trinamool Congress (TMC), the ruling party in West Bengal, posted a 55-second video of the workers on social media. In the video, Samiul Ansari (31) describes how they were picked up at night.

At their village in Murshidabad, Samiul is joined by four others: Yeasmin Ali Ansari (50), Manaruzzaman Ansari (41), Newton Ansari (33), and Amanat Ansari (31). They sit in a circle and narrate their ordeal during detention for 72 hours. By Indian law, police can detain a person for no longer than 24 hours, before which they must be produced before a magistrate.

"The police did not beat us at the detention centre, but kept saying that they had orders from above to detain us," Samiul says. The men say they have been going to Odisha for a decade to work; this was the first time they had faced trouble. Odisha's government is run by the BJP that came to power last year. "There is no work here. Maybe we won't go to where the police had detained us," they say. The three younger men in the group went back to Odisha 11 days later.

The men, who were detained in Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha, say they have no choice but to leave to other States for work soon. Their greatest fear is what identity documents they should carry so that the police does not detain them.



Rajjak Sheikh in Murshidabad, the father of two migrant workers, who has filed a habeas corpus petition in the Calcutta High Court. SHIV SAHAY SINGH

In the village, Razzak Sheikh, the father of two migrant workers, has filed a habeas corpus petition before the Calcutta High Court, when his sons were detained elsewhere in Odisha. "I got a call from the police there, who threatened to push my sons into Bangladesh if we failed to produce birth certificates."

Having an Indian birth certificate is, however, no guarantee say migrant workers, that they will not be harassed. Amir Sheikh, 19, from Malda's Kaliachak area, who was allegedly jailed in Rajasthan for a week before being pushed into Bangladesh in May 2025, had one, say his parents.

Up to 1,000 people were identified as suspected Bangladeshi nationals, detained, and sent to six detention centres, in the State. The parents have produced their passports too, but say their son is still stuck in Bangladesh. On August 7, the father filed a habeas corpus before the Calcutta High Court.

On July 30, the Maharashtra government claimed that 42,000 'fake' birth certificates issued to 'Bangladeshis' had been cancelled, and the number to be further cancelled by August 15 would be far higher.

Politics at play

In the first week of May 2025, weeks before these stories of migrants alleging detention and pushing into Bangladesh surfaced, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Samirul Islam wrote a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah. In it he claimed there was a "disturbing pattern of targeted hostility" against Bengali workers in BJP-ruled States such as Gujarat. Islam is the chairperson of West Bengal Migrant Welfare Board.

By the second week of July, reports of migrant workers in different parts of India began surfacing almost daily in West Bengal. On July 16, CM Banerjee hit the streets in Kolkata and warned that protests would rage across the country if Bengali migrants continue to be harassed.

Two days later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking at a public meeting in Durgapur in the southern part of West Bengal and one of India's main steel-producing centres, said that "Bengali *asmita*" (identity and culture) was paramount to the BJP, but emphasised that "whoever has infiltrated into the country will be dealt with as per law".

On July 21, Banerjee addressed her party's annual Martyrs' Day rally. This is a commemoration of the day 13 people were killed in 1993, when police fired on the Youth Congress, then led by Banerjee. Before lakhs of supporters in Kolkata she claimed that the BJP government at the Centre "was unleashing terror on the Bengali language" and announced that a "language movement" would continue until the Assembly polls, due in 2026. From the stage of the mega Trinamool event, the party chairperson read excerpts from what she called a secret notification issued by the Union Government in May 2025, and sent only to BJP-ruled States, which stated that if someone was suspected of being Bangladeshi, they should be detained for a month and sent to detention or holding camps.

Amidst thousands of migrants returning and the disruption of work, the debate on Bengali language and identity continues to rage. On August 3, the Delhi Police issued a letter referring to the Bengali language as Bangladeshi, which the TMC took up as an insult to the "Bengali-speaking people of India".

The very next day, while justifying the action of Delhi Police, BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya said, "There is, in fact, no language called Bengali."

The West Bengal BJP leadership said that the drive is to identify Bangladeshi infiltrators and not migrants of the State. Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari and newly appointed State BJP president Samik Bhattacharya speak of "sanitising the voter list and removing lakhs of Bangladeshi voters". They insist on a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the voter list on the lines of what is happening in Bihar.

Economically speaking

The flight of industries and unemployment remain major challenges in West Bengal. The National Statistical Office's (NSO) Annual Survey on

Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) made public in 2024 pointed out that West Bengal lost 3 million jobs in unincorporated enterprises from 2015-16 to 2022-23.

In 2024, the Union Finance Minister had said that the share of industrial production in West Bengal had declined from 24% at the time of Independence to 3.5% in 2021.

Economist Abhirup Sarkar, the chairperson of the West Bengal Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation, says, "There are historical reasons behind the decline of industries in West Bengal. One of the biggest factors is that Kolkata was dominated by British companies, which left after independence. Then, during the Left regime, militant trade unions and strikes played a role in the flight of capital." He adds that productivity is low in West Bengal, but there is also a perception battle about the State.

More than a shared border

West Bengal shares a 2,216 kilometre border with Bangladesh, and about 450 km of the border remains unfenced, making it porous in parts. Home Minister Shah has said this is largely because the West Bengal government is not providing land to do so.

However, there are cultural, historical, and geographic ties between the Bengalis on both sides of the border. The partition of Bengal took place on Rakshabandhan day in 1905, when the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, divided the Bengal Presidency into west (predominantly Hindu, including Bihar and Orissa) and east (predominantly Muslim, including Assam). This was annulled in 1911, when the capital was moved to Delhi.

However, there was further turmoil in 1947, when East Pakistan was formed, and people moved across the newly-formed border, on the basis of religion. In 1971, when Bangladesh was formed, another wave of people came to India.

Ten years ago, in 2015, a Land Border Agreement was signed between the two countries, where land parcels were exchanged, because there was Indian territory deep within Bangladesh and vice versa. People in these parcels were given the choice to become Bangladeshi nationals or Indian citizens.

Shamshul Haque and Rabiul Haque chose India, and migrated to Gurugram, in Haryana, to work. They were arrested on suspicion of being Bangladeshi nationals.

"We chose to come to India leaving our place of birth behind because we always thought of ourselves as Indians. I had never thought, even in my dreams, that I would be held on suspicion of being Bangladeshi," Shamshul says, showing a citizenship certificate issued by West Bengal's Cooch Behar district administration.

While the majority of migrant workers detained or pushed into Bangladesh are Muslims, there are some from the Matua community, a sect of Hindu Namashudras, Dalits who migrated from Bangladesh, who are also facing detention.

In Nadia district, two migrant workers from a Matua family, who had openly announced their allegiance to the BJP, were arrested by the Maharashtra police several months ago. Manishankar Biswas (23) and Nirmal Biswas (22) had left their home to work as carpenters in Akola district. Their father, Nishikanta, is an agricultural labourer. He and his wife, Puspaha, do not have the money to travel to Maharashtra. They live in a house put together with tin sheets.

"We have had several cases of people of the Matua community being held by the police in Maharashtra. When the police pick up people on the basis of language, both Hindus and Muslims will be arrested," says Nikhilesh Adhikari, a Nagpur-based lawyer who is trying to arrange bail for the two men.

On June 28, Banerjee urged migrant workers to return to West Bengal and assured them of work. Just a little over a month on, there are serpentine queues of migrant labourers at Howrah Station, booking tickets to leave again.

Rakesh Alam, 27, is boarding the Howrah Ahmedabad Superfast Express, leaving his four-month-old daughter behind. He says, "I cannot stay in Bengal when I have a family to feed."

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A thought for today

A govt that robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul

GB SHAW

Field Notes

Factory jobs are key to health of Indian farming

India did right by not opening its agri markets to US grains, fruit, dairy and fish. Agriculture sustains 42% of India’s population and employs 46% of workers. But as it generates less than a fifth of GDP, most farmers are poor. A recent Nabard report said farming households earn ₹13,661 per month, on average, of which actual farm income is just ₹4,476. The rest is income from other work. Pitting millions of such small farmers against the output of America’s highly mechanised farms would amount to throwing them under the bus. So, when Modi says, “For us, our farmers’ welfare is supreme,” we can’t agree more.



But it’s time farmer welfare moved beyond protectionism. The greatest good that govt can deliver to farmers is to free them from the yoke of subsistence farming. Only 2% of US population works in agriculture, 1% in Germany and UK, and 3% in Japan. In 1991, the number was 60% for China and 63% for India. China has brought it down to 22% – below the global average of 26% – but India is now in the league of Afghanistan (45%), N Korea (47%) and Myanmar (45%).

There’s no glory in subsistence farming. Population growth has fragmented landholdings to an unviable size. From 2.28ha in 1971, average farm size came down to 0.74ha by 2021. And as TOI reported last month, input costs and inflation have risen faster than earnings from most major crops. Yet, the share of workers in agriculture has grown from 44% in 2017-18 to 46% in 2023-24. That signals a failure of industry to create jobs at the required rate of 7.9mn every year. GOI must address this problem, not for Trump’s deal but to modernise India.

Hello Dr AI

GPT-5 gets mixed reviews, but everyone’s trying it

They say the worst day to review a new AI model is launch day. Clearly, no one told the internet. Reviews of GPT-5 were flooding in even as Sam Altman was still on stage unveiling it. Honestly, you can’t blame the excitement. Everyone remembers how much their world was shaken by the OpenAI chatbot when it launched in Nov 2022. Altman calls GPT-5 a PhD-level expert in your pocket. By comparison, the previous version was a college grad. And the one before that? A high-schooler. Some early testers say it “absolutely blows”. Others complain it’s more evolution than revolution. Either way, the weight of public opinion on this is still settling. And unlike 3 years ago, today



users can test GPT-5 against Claude, Gemini, DeepSeek, Grok...

Actually, want to play a fun game? Ask a question not from one, but four different chatbots. Or do the same with an image command. Obviously all this is very serious stuff too. A recent McKinsey global survey finds that generative AI’s effects are still not solid on bottom lines, with more than 80% respondents not seeing a tangible EBIT impact in their organisations. But 71% used gen AI in at least one business function in 2024 compared to 33% in 2023.

It’s at the AI companies themselves that the productivity gains are stellar. For example, the majority of code written at Anthropic is already written by Claude. And overall, experts say AI investments amount to the biggest US infra boom since the 1960s, or maybe even the railroad 1880s heyday. In India, Altman said users are doing “really quite remarkable” things with AI. Worryingly, the same cannot be said about India’s AI makers.

Our Lives Are What We Pay Attention To

Information glut isn’t the real problem of these times

Anxiety over the hold of technology on daily lives and minds drives everyday conversations – the ills of fake news and misinformation, how politicians exploit algorithms, what social media is doing to our thoughts, to our children and body politic, are analysed to the last byte. Availability of, and access to, information right, wrong and indeterminate is infinite and plentiful. It is a cheap resource. There is no dearth of predictions on the scary outcomes of the stranglehold of this surfeit of information.

Yet all of it misses the reality that we are not living in an Information Age, but in an Attention Economy, argues journalist **Chris Hayes** in *The Sirens’*

Call: How Attention Became The World’s Most Endangered Resource. Way more critical than all the muchly debated ills of an information glut is that we have ceded control over who and what has our attention – a finite resource.

Hayes uses American legal scholar Lawrence Lessig’s example of a picnic table to explain his point. *Information* is the idea of a picnic table in your backyard. Even if others pick up the idea of that picnic table – your information – it doesn’t really impact your own picnic table, it is still yours, you still have it. But, the picnic table itself – that’s attention. So, if your picnic table is taken away – well, that entity has your attention and you don’t have it.

That’s how finite attention is. You either control who has your attention, or you’re flitting from one to another. The fight is for your attention. Our capacity to focus is limited, which makes attention a scarce and sought-after commodity. Reality is grainy and grey, so we much better enjoy glitzy tinsel-tinted bright hi-def images and noise – it grabs our attention.

The book explores how industries have evolved to capture and monetise our attention. Social media platforms’

and news outlets’ systemic effort to design content and experiences that keep us engaged, often at the expense of our well-being. The book delves into how modern technologies tap into our neurological responses, creating addictive patterns similar to those found in gambling. This exploitation leads to a state where our attention is continuously hijacked, diminishing our ability to engage in deep, meaningful focus.

The attention economy thrives on sensationalism. Content that provokes emotional reactions is rewarded, mostly at the expense of accuracy. Hayes argues that propagandists exploit this to manipulate public opinion. This creates an environment where misinformation spreads faster

mindfield
SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS



than truth, eroding trust in institutions and making consensus-building nearly impossible.

Algorithms tailor content to individual preferences, creating echo chambers and filter bubbles. Such personalisation reinforces ideological divides. Citizens no longer share a common information base. Without a shared reality, public discourse fractures. Society loses the ability to even agree on what

needs solving. The public sphere turns reactive.

Hooked to this stream of information/misinformation translates into not paying attention to grainy realities of governance. Digital distraction directly impacts democracy, which depends on citizens paying attention to governance. But attention is hijacked by entertainment and outrage in equal parts. People disengage from civic life. This, the book argues, opens the gates for authoritarian tendencies because fewer people are participating in democratic process or holding leaders accountable. Commodification of attention is more than a cultural or technological issue. It’s a structural threat to democratic society. Our lives are what we pay attention to.

Swinging Four Of Geopolitics

Trump tariffs are a reminder that US, China, India, Russia are engaged in a complicated dance. Russia is a swing state between India & China. India is a swing state between US & China and between US & Russia. Russia is a potential swing state between US and China

Pankaj Saran



India’s relations with Russia have once again come into the spotlight, not because anything unusual is happening between them, but because of what others are saying or doing.

NSA Ajit Doval’s visit to Moscow, cancelled at the last minute a few weeks ago, was scheduled long before Trump dropped the tariff bombshell on India. Similarly, an impending visit by foreign minister Jaishankar to Russia is part of the regular meetings of the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission. A bilateral summit between India and Russia, not held in India since 2021, is expected to take place later this year. Modi and Putin spoke yesterday. All these are par for the course, and not signs of any Indian design to bring down the Western-led world order.

US, Russia, China and India constitute four moving parts of a quadrilateral geopolitical system. Bilateral interactions between each affect their relations with the other, while each bilateral relationship is impacted by developments in the other relationships. This linkage has never been more evident than at this point in time. This is a manifestation of India’s rise in the international totem pole of global power. India is in a sense living through the growth pangs of becoming an entity in its own right, rather than a plaything of others.

US and Western disapproval of India’s relations with Russia and anger against its oil purchases from Russia could look discordant if efforts to find a settlement between US and Russia succeed, and doors open for multi-billion dollar deals for American companies in Russia. There is credible talk coming out of both Washington and Moscow of a possible Trump-Putin summit. It could well be the case that a US-Russia summit precedes an India-Russia summit. India is a deeply interested party in reduction of tensions between Russia and US, and an end to the Ukraine war.

The India-Russia relationship has survived for decades not only because of its bilateral strengths but also because of the overhang of US and China policies towards India. When relations have flourished between

India and US, the Russia relationship has faced stress. Yet there was a time not long ago in the early years of Putin when both the India-US and India-Russia relationships co-existed because the US-Russia relationship was relatively “normal”.

Russia’s pivot to China is a historically recent phenomenon, attributable to the breakdown of its relations with the West. India has had to adjust to this reality, something not of its liking, but beyond its control. This is the card dealt out to it. India has a choice of

inherent in them. With this qualification, Russia is a swing state between India and China, India a swing state between US and China and between US and Russia. And Russia a potential swing state between US and China.

It is against this backdrop that Modi’s forthcoming visit to China, the first after the border clashes in 2020, acquires significance. The visit’s importance transcends its bilateral aspects. The tables have turned slightly, with the China relationship coming out of a hole, and the US relationship heading into one.

However, despite the current tensions with America, there are limits to both the speed and magnitude of India-China rapprochement. To give credit where it is due, India anticipated the unpredictability of a Trump presidency by moving to defreeze the China relationship last year, because a deal between US and China cannot be put past Trump’s manner of operations. It is important not to forget that Biden held a summit meeting with Xi in every year of his term. Sensing an opportunity thrown up by India-US tensions, the Russians and Chinese, unable to hide their enthusiasm, and good luck, are pushing for a Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral summit. India is holding its horses, for the moment.

The spaces to watch out in the coming weeks are the US-Russia dynamics and the India-China summit. The former will impact the direction which the US-India and the India-Russia relationships take. Will Russia return to the international mainstream, or will the East-West confrontation degenerate further? Putin’s strategy towards India will depend crucially on which of these scenarios plays out. He has in past months publicly wooed India and Modi personally.

The meeting of Indian and Chinese leaders, on the other hand, could redefine the strategic landscape in the region and beyond. Last but not least is the (other) Quad summit, and Trump’s participation in it, which India is to host. Ironically, at this point of time, there is greater certainty of bilateral summits between India and Russia, and India and China being held in the next months than between India and US.

The writer is former ambassador to Russia and ex-deputy national security adviser



Chad Crowe (USA)

either pursuing a policy that further cements the Russia-China relationship, or puts brakes on it, and prevents a complete slide of Russia into the Chinese orbit. Current Indian policy can be characterised as reflecting the latter school of thought.

What are the drivers of the Russia-China relationship and how to deal with it are at the heart of the strategic discourse between India and the West. Some sections within Trump’s close circles believe in the possibility of a replay of a reverse Nixonian moment. While every major relationship is anchored in its specificities, there is also a margin of manoeuvre

Marriage Isn’t Made In Heaven, Divorce Needn’t Be Hell

Conscious uncoupling doesn’t have to be exclusive to celebrities. Ordinary couples, especially double income-no kids, can also leave their marriage without nastiness and big lawyers’ fees

Radhika Vaz



Last month, Saina Nehwal and her husband Parupalli Kashyap announced that they are splitting up. As is required of celebrities today, she released a statement. It revealed that after great deliberation they as a couple have decided to part ways and are choosing “peace, growth and healing” as opposed to the usual toxic mud-slinging that I was personally hoping for.

Every time a celebrity couple behaves in a dignified fashion by opting to respect each other rather than wash, rinse and spin-dry their filthy laundry in public I am a little irritated because apparently my petty life can only be elevated by bad things happening to other people.

This whole business of keeping secrets started a decade ago when Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin decided to “consciously uncouple”. They refused to share any gossip as to why they were dissolving their union, only promising that they would be dedicated to co-parenting their ridiculously named offspring.

And yes, they too only wanted the best for one another which I assume included peace, growth and healing. At the time I prayed this pretentious trend would die a quick and painless death but it has not. If anything, it has gathered steam and I have a feeling that very soon lay-people like us will start aping this custom of maintaining our privacy and prioritising our children instead of telling everyone what actually happened.

And it was on pondering all of this that it struck me that perhaps absolutely nothing had actually happened. Nothing bad anyway. None of the usual awful things that could drive a wedge between two people. In both of the above cases there was no cheating, beating, lying,

gambling, boozing, no weird mother-in-law drama reported, no problems as such. So why call it quits?

Because, as both couples put it in their own way, they had grown apart. I did not understand what this meant in 2014 when Gwyneth piped up, but I have a better understanding of it today. Mainly because I complete 21 years of marriage in a few months and I can understand that it can be quite annoying to wake up and realise that you want to fly business class but the one with the money in the relationship does not.

But I digress. What I am saying is this – I think growing apart means that you both want entirely different things in your immediate and distant futures

and neither wishes to compromise. Under these circumstances it makes more sense to release the

other to fulfil their dreams rather than stay because of children/parents/social pressure/prying public and end up bitter, angry and resentful on a long-haul flight, in economy class, in a middle seat.

Despite my desire to revel in the murk of other people’s business I tip my hat to Gwyneth and Saina because they have pushed the boundaries. Thus far we were all forced to think of marriage as the be-all and end-all of a person’s life. The holy

grail of relationships without which one is only half-human. One gets in and stays in.

So big a deal have we made of it (and so much money and time did we waste celebrating it) that if one wishes to end a marriage one has to come up with not just a good reason but a great one – you can refer to the list of options in para #5.

And the reason “grew apart” never made it on to that list is because if it did, I have a feeling the divorce rate in my extended family alone would spike. We have to make leaving a marriage difficult, frightening, and expensive to maintain the social order that patriarchy has devised.

But that is all changing like it or not. With both partners financially independent and with more couples deciding against having kids there are very few good reasons to stay put once the interest has waned.

The fact is many couples marry because it’s what we have been conditioned to do. Maybe it’s to please our parents, maybe it’s to please our hormones, maybe it’s to please the govt of Uttarakhand. But when the fog clears and you can see that there could be a different future, one that involves fully reclining seats, maybe the best thing to do is admit you have grown apart, wish each other peace, growth and healing, and enjoy the welcome beverage.

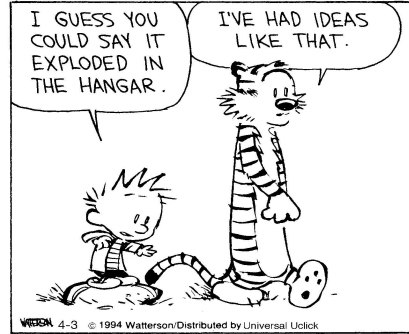
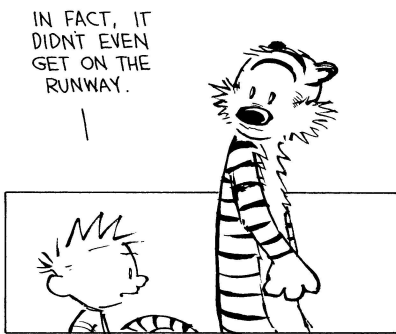
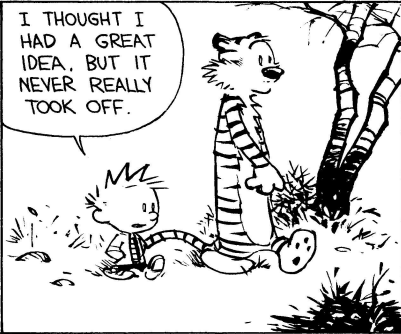
Even if Saina and Parupalli change their mind and stay together, as Instagram is now hinting.

The writer is a stand-up comedian



Uday Deb

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



I know this world is ruled by infinite intelligence. Everything that surrounds

us- everything that exists - proves that there are infinite laws behind it. There can be no denying this fact. It is mathematical in its precision.

Thomas A Edison

Mahat-Tattva And Creation Of Our World

Sonal Srivastava

Astronomers have recently discovered a planet, ‘theoretically habitable’, orbiting the Sun-like star Alpha Centauri. The planet resembles our very own Saturn, a gas giant, eliminating the chances of supporting life like our home planet does.

The cosmos is an intriguing place. With billions of stars, planets, asteroids and rocks, which often makes one wonder where it all began. Physicists say it’s the Big Bang – the universe expanded from an inflexion point and continues to expand even today, as I write this article. Philosophers, of course, wonder ‘why’. Why did the universe expand? Where did it come from? What was there before the singularity? Where did singularity come from, so on and so forth.

Sankhya school of Indic philosophy explains that origin of the cosmos can be attributed to the proximity of purusha and prakriti – consciousness and

matter/ nature, and from that arises Mahat, the great cause of the universe or cosmic intelligence. It is the first product of this proximity and the first step in the beginning of creation.

Sankhya says that prakriti is initially a constitution of three gunas – satva, rajas and tamas. Once this equilibrium is disturbed, creation begins, and Mahat emerges – the cosmic intellect, which also, interestingly, constitutes individual buddhi. From Mahat comes ahamkara, ego, i, which gives rise to the mind, senses, and elements. S Radhakrishnan says in the *Indian Philosophy, Volume 2*, “While the term ‘mahat’ brings out the cosmic aspect, buddhi, which is used as a synonym for it, refers to the psychological counterpart pertaining to each individual.” Hence, Mahat is used both in a cosmic sense and in an individual psychological sense as Mahat-buddhi.

Radhakrishnan says, “The functions of buddhi are ascertainment and decision. All other organs function for intellect, buddhi, and the intellect, which works directly for purusha, enabling the latter to experience all existence and discriminate between prakriti and itself.”

In the Bhagwad Gita (14.3), Krishn says, “My primordial nature, known as the great Mahat Brahmn is the womb of all creatures, in that womb I place the seed of life. The creation of that union follows from that union of matter and spirit, O Arjun.” Therefore, Mahat-tattva is the primordial womb from which emerges creation. It is both within and without; it constitutes our buddhi, intellect and is also the universal intellect. In effect, it is both seer and the seen. It emerges from proximity of purusha and prakriti and becomes the eyes of purusha, relaying and informing what it perceives to purusha.



THE SPEAKING TREE

The Mahat-tattva is the organiser of creation, the first efficient cause. From Mahat-buddhi, arises ahamkar, ego or self-sense, individual i. From a sattva-dominated ahamkar, comes manas and five organs of perception – functions of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch; five of action: vak, pani, pada, payu, upasthi, and five elements: prithvi, jal, fire, agni, air; vayu, and akasha, determined by varied combinations of three gunas. Five tanmatras: shabda, sparsha, roop, ras and gandha are linked to the five sense organs.

Thus, creation unfolds in all its breathtaking glory, complexity, and contradictions, with Mahat – cosmic intellect – emerging first. The subtle turns into gross as physical worlds of stars, planets and exoplanets, all guided by the Mahat, emerge. The cosmic intellect can guide the individual intellect when individual buddhi tunes into Mahat buddhi through dhyān, dharna, and samadhi, or shravan, manan, and nidhidhyasan.

DECCAN
Chronicle

9 AUGUST 2025

Israeli military control of
Gaza City is unwelcome

Israel is to go on the offensive again to take military control of Gaza City into which more than a million Palestinians have crammed themselves in apartments or makeshift camps amid the rubble created by Israeli air raids. The world, by now accustomed to the indescribable cruelties inflicted on the Palestinians, may look on hopelessly in its inability to do anything about Israel's continued trampling of the people of Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Security Cabinet has taken this decision to occupy Gaza City after long deliberation and overruling the Army chief Lt Gen. Eyal Zamir who is loath to recommend such an operation considering the difficulties of taking on the remnants of the Hamas fighting force ensconced there amid the civilian population.

Gaza City, in the north of the Gaza Strip, is one of the few areas not under evacuation orders while most Palestinians have been forced northwards as Israel built a security zone upwards of the Egyptian border. What this will entail is greater spread of the famine that has gripped the people as Israel has made the free flow of food and medicines aid near impossible.

The senseless fury of the October 7, 2023, cross-border terror attack by Hamas on Israelis, killing 1,200 and taking 250 hostage, brought upon the Palestinians an unrelenting campaign of destruction of civilian areas and the dehumanisation of a whole people, of whom more than 61,000 have been killed — mostly women and children — and more than 1.5 lakh injured.

Much more of this horrendous infliction of cruelty on the Palestinians will now be enacted as Israel looks to get back the 20 hostages still thought to be alive in and around Gaza City. To end the operations, Israel seeks disarming of Hamas, a demilitarised Gaza, total security control over the enclave and the establishment of an alternative civilian government that should not include Hamas.

Though it already controls over 75 per cent of Gaza, save for a coastal strip running from Gaza City to Khan Younis in the south, what Israel is laying down are impossible conditions as Hamas holds on to a few hostages in tunnels. The few still alive are being deliberately starved as retaliation for Israel denying food aid to Palestinian civilians who are forced to get by on broth that aid workers distribute as food for the day.

If some people are left who do not accept what Israel is doing in Gaza is genocide, it may be because they are diehard supporters of the State of Israel. Much of Europe is also turning against Israel's continued oppression of the Palestinians, with France declaring its support for a two-state solution and the UK ready to do so soon unless a ceasefire comes about.

Driven on by his hawkish war cabinet and the far-right parties in an umbrella ruling coalition, Mr Netanyahu would see the latest move to annex Gaza city as another way of extending his hold on power. And he well knows there will be no end to the war unless Hamas is prepared to release the hostages which it will not do unless there are guarantees of a durable ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal. The impossible conditions for truce will ensure Mr Netanyahu stays in power.

Climate poses planning challenge

Just two days after the cloudburst in Uttarkashi that led to flash floods, heavy rain in Hyderabad — with more than 100 mm of rainfall recorded at 15 locations — disrupted life in India's fifth-largest economic hub, turning roads into water streams and forcing taxis and autorickshaws off the streets.

Even after the rain subsided, the traffic situation did not return to normal for several hours because of waterlogging, keeping people stranded in transit for a long time. However, this is not something that happens only in Hyderabad, it is a routine affair in almost every Indian city during monsoons. Stories abound about people's struggles to reach home after a sudden downpour — be it in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru or Kolkata.

While monsoon travails highlight poor urban planning and the subpar construction quality of public infrastructure in Indian cities, people's poor civic sense is equally to blame for bringing cities to such a pass. Those who keep their houses clean and tidy often do not show similar responsibility in public spaces, littering roads with impunity. Garbage strewn on streets clogs drains, leading to waterlogging that affects even those who caused it.

Cloudbursts — involving heavy rainfall of over 100 mm in a short duration — have become increasingly common in recent times. By 2030, a study projects that India will see a 43 per cent rise in short and intense bursts of rain. Such intense rains will make flood control difficult in metro cities, as legacy drainage systems are designed for historical averages and not for this phenomenon.

State and Central governments must, therefore, reevaluate their urban planning in light of extreme weather events. Similarly, people should live closer to their workplace, adopt carpooling and choose schools closer to home for their children. Instead of concentrating in one location, companies should spread out their facilities within a city or switch to remote working models in periods of weather crisis. For people and companies, this requires a 360-degree reassessment of existing routines. Yet, in the absence of drastic realignment, no city can withstand extreme weather events such as these induced by climate change.

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Subhani



Mumbai's pigeon politics:
Will CM or Shinde win?



Shobhaa's Take

Talk about the theatre of the absurd! Didn't imagine it would come to this — a political game of one-upmanship triggered by *kabootars*! Yes, Mumbai's well-fed pigeons are at the centre of a mini-storm that pitches chief minister Devendra Fadnavis and his deputy Eknath Shinde. Our pigeons are a pampered lot. Without moving from their perches, they receive generous meals around the clock, while in the same vicinity, under-privileged kids scrounge around garbage dumps for scraps of food. I have nothing against *kabootars*, per se. But they are a bloody menace... besides posing several, well-researched, well-established health risks to humans. Mumbai gangsta speak includes "kabootar" — slang that refers to a weak, unreliable, untrustworthy gang member. In corporate lingo, a "kabootar" is someone who is a soft target for scams and can be easily taken advantage of. Not sure who's winning the local *kabootar* war, but my guess is that it will be Mr Fadnavis. Our "shaana" chief minister frequently defies convenient pigeon-holing. And this time he has cleverly set the cat among the *kabootars*.

Kabootar politics has as much to do with playing into religious sentiments while ignoring health issues. Mr Fadnavis has shrewdly aligned himself with the affluent and influential Jain community by ordering the BMC to ensure "controlled feeding" of pigeons in the city. Animal rights activists are backing the chief minister's move while those more concerned about health repercussions continue to protest. This is tricky terrain. Public health is being pitted against religious sentiments. I am rooting for the health of citizens over the *khana-peena* of *kabootars*. Our *kabootarkhanas* pose many hazards, including

ecological ones. Pigeons are more than capable of feeding themselves.

It is not as if millions of pigeons will starve to death and fall from the skies if this practice is discontinued. Pigeon feeders need to be aware of the many health issues unleashed on human beings with this ongoing indulgence. According to a report published in 2023 by the State of India's Birds, the population of pigeons has increased by over 150 per cent since 2000. How can one continue to ignore the advisories issued by leading doctors and veterinarians against the ever-burgeoning presence of pigeons in the middle of our overcrowded metropolis — all in the name of compassion. What about disease transmission? How can we ignore the warnings issued by pulmonologists?

Lung diseases are on the increase, often caused by an allergic reaction to bird droppings, leading to an inflammation of lung tissue and breathing difficulties. Surely, minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha blithely ignored the HC's order in this matter. His preposterous suggestion to create feeding stations for pigeons inside Sanjay Gandhi National Park, BKC and the Race Course, as an "amicable solution" to the problem, shouldn't even be considered. Said Shiv Sena MLC Manisha Kayande: "It's like the government is now officially feeding pigeons, which is a violation of the court order."

The non-violent Jains are on the warpath, literally. Protesters tore off tarpaulins in Dadar and demanded a reopening of the feeding area, threatening they'd opt for the NOTA option in the coming civic elections. "Pigeons are innocent... we must be allowed to feed them," supporters insisted. Meanwhile, alarmed citizens are what — sitting ducks?

Didn't spot too many pigeons in Delhi during a

Not sure who's winning the local *kabootar* war, but my guess is that it will be Mr Fadnavis. Our 'shaana' chief minister frequently defies convenient pigeon-holing. And this time he's set the cat among pigeons.

short visit. Of the avian variety, that is. I was told the real *kabootars* flock to the corridors of power and stalk VVIPs. Like Mumbai's lazy, fattened-on-free-grain pigeons, the Delhi *kabootars* also thrive on *moofat* public feeding and patronage of different groups. The Dilli Kabootar is a special breed and easy to spot. Perpetually *bhooka*... looking for hand-outs, hanging around gang leaders, err... political *netas*. Obsequious in posture. Sly in dealings. One can observe clusters of *kabootars* at places like the India International Centre and India Habitat Centre. Dozens of grim-faced babus walk around with files under their arms, behaving like the future of India rests on their shoulders. Most are pigeon-chested, to boot. And make the same cooing sounds as their feathered counterparts during conversations. Shifty-eyed and restless, they appear *kursi*-obsessed.

Understandably so... senior babus specialise in keeping underlings insecure — sudden transfers. Overnight orders.

Changed portfolios. Unexplained suspension. Delhi *kabootars* are skilled tight-rope walkers. Just like Mumbai's annoying pigeons perched on innumerable illegal cable connections criss-crossing the cityscape.

One question: Why are *kabootars* being singled out for this preferential treatment? Why not other birds? I'm thinking of the vast and varied avian population — peacocks, sparrows, crows, vultures, hawks.

Political birds in Parliament, parroting rhetoric. We have enough grain to feed them all! Without religious connotations. The pigeons of Mumbai are entitled and privileged indeed. Too fat to fly, too entitled to

look for food.

Meanwhile, there's a great deal of chirping about the appointment of Aathi Sathe, former spokesperson of the Maharashtra BJP, as a judge of the Bombay high court. Critics are squawking that the appointment of a political figure raises doubts about the entire process of delivery of justice. NCP (SP) legislator Rohit Pawar dubbed her appointment "the gravest blow to democracy". The lady remains unfazed. "I have resigned from all political posts before this. So, that settles it." Does it?

Our young, good-looking, fit and fabulous badminton stars Saina Nehwal and Parupalli Kashyap must be congratulated for going public with their "trying again" social media post, after the earlier one announcing a separation. Fans of the couple were relieved and genuinely happy for them for "trying again". It is a brave and admirable decision. Sports stars deal with enormous and exaggerated public scrutiny. Over-sharing personal dilemmas on the social media comes with a hefty price tag. Perhaps our shuttle-cockers were victims of just that. Well... happy reconciliation, you two!

Mohammed Siraj came home to a rapturous welcome at the airport after his spectacular performance in England. The Hyderabad Hurricane is every Indian cricket fan's super hero. "God must have written something good for me. That's why I won this match and took the last wicket," he humbly stated. Mobbed and cheered while leaving Mumbai airport, it was exhilarating to see such an enthusiastic reception for a fast bowler who had "saved" India. Generally, only mega movie/pop stars see such crowds at the airport. Reporters gushed over Siraj's swag and style as he deftly dodged fans. My only grouse? Can we please stop addressing him as "Mya Bhai"? He has a name. Why tag his religion while congratulating him?

Meanwhile, Happy Raksha Bandhan... I am tying my rakhi on Vladimir Putin's wrist!

Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe; Twitter handle @DeShobhaa

LETTERS

WHEN JUDICIAL
LINES BLUR

The Supreme Court Bench's reversal of Justice Prashant Kumar's order in a civil-cum-criminal dispute was correct on merits — misuse of criminal law in civil matters is a growing menace. However, the controversy stems not from the reversal itself, but from the Bench's decision to go further: barring the judge from hearing criminal matters and directing him to "sit with a senior judge for a tutorial". Such directives step into the domain of the High Court's internal administration, which lies under its Chief Justice's authority. Thirteen Allahabad High Court judges have rightly flagged this as overreach. Judicial independence is a two-way street—protecting trial and High Court judges from unwarranted administrative intrusion is as vital as correcting their legal errors. Restraint, even by the highest court, is essential to maintain institutional balance and mutual respect within the judiciary.

Gopalaswamy J
Chennai

TOP COURT RULING

In the verdict of the Supreme Court on using CM Stalin's name on welfare schemes mooted by the TN Government the judges observed that litigations of political nature should not be brought before them. Adding insult to the injury, the Judges have also imposed a mind boggling fine of Rs 10 lakh on the petitioner who is a Rajya Sabha member. Being an ordinary citizen with no legal acumen and background I would like to be enlightened on the nature of litigation like Ram Janna Bhoomi, Abrogation of article 370, Imposition of President's Rule in Manipur and dozens of cases of similar nature before the Supreme Court. Was not their recent verdict in the case involving the TN Governor not of political nature?

Kooduthuraiyan
Coimbatore

Mail your letters to
chennai@deccanmail.com

Farrukh
Dhondy
Cabbages
& Kings



"The winds blow over the emperor's tomb
He now lies safe in eternity's womb
Eternity denies us all rebirth
To lie there hearing all echoes of doom
But why, Bachchoo, these morose thoughts today?
I've just been reading a history essay
Proving we never learn from human past —
Guns and bombs constantly have their way..."

— From The Rubaiyat of Aesop Goal

In the last week three million people tuned in to a speech by the British MP, Danny Kruger. He had, some days earlier, delivered it to a virtually empty House of Commons as his parliamentary colleagues, not having any political differences to settle or demonstrate their partialities, had quit the green benches, had a good lunch and presumably retired to their constituencies.

Nevertheless, dedicated Christian Kruger, addressed the green cushions and the handful of nodding-off colleagues because he had, he thought, something urgent to say about the state of the country, its heart, its soul, its present as he saw it and its future as this present threatened.

His speech began on a note of despair. The churches were emptying. He hadn't checked the latest statistics which proudly announce that the reverse trend seems to be spreading through the country — abandonment is slowly but surely being abandoned.

Nevertheless, Danny carried on. His contention was/is that Christianity is in the very fabric of this country and its values. He used the metaphor of it "being the substance of its bones!". He could have appealed to a younger constituency by saying it was in its DNA, but perhaps that would be wrong as the pagan, tribal, Druidic past of this country only changed when St Augustine brought the word of Jesus to the green and pleasant land.

Danny was of course conscious that though there weren't any ears of peers listening in the House, his speech would reach a gracious, numerous following of Christians through the advertised social media transmission.

There were two forces, he said, which were displacing Christianity: Islam and Wokery. "Fact?" as the Orange blob would ask (sorry, he uses the word to give questionable veracity to a lie. So "!!!!", and not "??") I am afraid not. I beg to differ on both counts.

There is absolutely no evidence that masses of Christians are converting to Islam. But perhaps that's not what Danny means. He wants to imply that Muslims have invaded the country in hordes and mosques and Islamic centres are cropping up in most cities and in communities where Muslim immigrants have settled. Aha! — the dog-whistle against immigration and the supposed alien invasion?

If at all conversions are taking place, they are not to Islam but to the cults of Hinduism. The Hare

Krishna crowd in their *lungis* and shaved heads chant in some city squares. Others have taken to following Hindu godmen in search of spirituality. Yoga, despite its roots and origin in Hindu theology, is incarnate in Britain as an absolutely secular way of staying nimble.

So, what then of Danny's contention that the second religion displacing Christianity in contemporary Britain is "Wokery"? His speech took for granted that his listeners would have, through common perception, a uniform definition of what the word means.

As Humpty Dumpty said to Alice, the word means what he intends it to mean.

To my mind, gentle reader, it seems to mean very many different things. To the right-wing commentators in anti-Left vituperative publications such as Britain's weekly *Spectator*, it means anything that the entire spectrum of what it characterises as "The Left" believes.

For some commentators — again writers for Britain's dailies *The Telegraph*, *The Mail* and *The Express* — support for the people of Gaza, for a state of Palestine or any stand against the genocide by the Benjamin Netanyahu government qualifies as "wokery". Some of these commentators — and I can name them, but their identities would mean little to most of this column's audience — would characterise the counter-demonstrators who oppose the mobs who gather to attack the hostels and living spaces that the gov-

ernment has allocated to migrants awaiting their appeals for residence to be processed, as "wokery".

I have always understood the word to have originated as American slang for having woken up from the trance of social injustice. That is legitimate linguistic invention for an advance in states of thought or awareness.

I'm not unaware that the word has been widely applied to some foibles of university students who attempt to ban certain, even innocuous, words or expressions on the grounds that they make others feel insecure. Very many of these bans or curtailments are legitimately "wokery" in so far as they prevent insults on the rounds of race, religion, appearance etc.

Then there is the trend, attributed to "wokery", of not using gender-specific pronouns and calling everyone "they". Some anti-woke-wallas, again in the publications mentioned above, have moaned that this is a symptom of the end of civilisation. It isn't — the Orange booby is still President, right-wing parties are on the rise in very many nations, the Royal Shakespeare Company has full houses for every show — though I am sure one day some director, seized by gender-and-race-neutral considerations, will cast a white woman as Othello.

Yes, well — but even that's not the end of civilisation.

When asked to specify what pronoun I prefer for myself, I say I favour "it" — always objective!





'Stolen votes' and the burden of proof

Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi's charges of large-scale electoral fraud and "vote theft" in Bengaluru (Central) during the 2024 parliamentary elections demand urgent scrutiny. Congress alleges over one lakh fake votes in Mahadevapura alone; 11,000 duplicate registrations, 40,000 voters with dubious addresses, 10,000 bulk voters in single dwellings, 4,000 invalid photographs, and 33,000 cases of Form-6 misuse, including nonagenarians registered as first-time voters. Such numbers, if accurate, point to a deeply compromised electoral process. Yet, before blaming others, the party must look inward. When the final draft voters' list was shared with all parties well before polling, why did Congress fail to flag these anomalies? Why did booth-level workers not notice these discrepancies during door-to-door campaigning? On polling day, agents could have formally protested suspected bogus voting, ensuring such ballots were quarantined. Post-results, Congress should have filed an election petition if malpractice was suspected. But it did none of these. Is this belated outrage negligence?

That said, the postmortem still matters. If Rahul's documents are authentic, it indicates a significant compromise in the sanctity of the electoral rolls. Duplicate entries often occur when people fail to get their old registrations deleted after shifting residences, but this could have been avoided out using modern database tools. On this front, the Election Commission's (EC) lapse is undeniable. The bigger question is whether these alleged fake voters actually cast their ballots, thereby influencing the election outcome, or if their names merely appeared on the rolls? Rahul's evidence suggests at least one person with an identical name and address voted twice.

The EC has demanded he submit his charges on oath, with a veiled threat that he could face legal action if they are found to be false. However, the EC should have adopted a more proactive approach. By now, it should have independently verified Rahul's claims rather than allowing the political theatre to dictate the pace of action. When the finger of suspicion points at the very body meant to ensure free and fair elections, it cannot be allowed to sit in judgement over itself. The Congress must demand an independent Special Investigation Team (SIT), monitored by the High Court, to conduct a forensic audit of the rolls and election process. If Rahul's claims are baseless, let him face prosecution. But if substantiated, consequences must follow from ground-level officers to those who cleared these "tainted" rolls. This is more than a contest between two political parties. If elections have been manipulated and the will of the people stolen, it is an affront to the Constitution and an assault on democracy itself.

Sovereignty above trade compulsions

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done well to declare that India will not compromise on its interests in the face of the heightened tariff threats from US President Donald Trump. He mentioned the interests of farmers and fishermen, but what really is at stake is the country's interest and dignity. The Prime Minister also mentioned a "personal" price he'll have to pay for the position he has taken but the country would be willing to pay that price to safeguard its interests. The US has imposed an additional 25% penalty on most imports from India over its continued purchase of Russian oil, pushing overall duties to 50%. The announcement came in a second tranche, a few days after the 25% tariff was announced.

There is a 21-day buffer for the implementation of the tariffs. India and the US have been negotiating a trade deal that now stands halted. Trump has said that no negotiations would take place until the tariff issue is resolved. The negotiations were reportedly stuck mainly at the US demand for access to India's agricultural market and dairy sector. India would refuse to entertain US demands in these and other areas that may hurt its economy and the livelihood of its people. India is among the countries in the top tariff bracket. Some of the countries have negotiated successfully with the US and ensured lower tariffs. The situation for India, a much larger economy, is markedly different, considering the projection of its sustained growth in the coming decades.

India has already said that the US action is "unfair, unjustified, and unreasonable" and noted that several other countries are doing what India is doing without facing any action from the US. It is possible that Trump is targeting India also for non-trade reasons - he may be responding to India's denial of third-party intervention in its ceasefire with Pakistan after the May hostilities. It is also possible that the US is using the tariff threat for a better bargain in the trade negotiations. India should not go the extra mile to appease Trump in trade or other domains. An adverse tariff regime will take the US hurt India as the US is a major trade partner. It will also leave a dent on the GDP. But the country can look at strategies and opportunities that will help it offset the losses caused by the US action. India's response to the evolving situation needs to be informed by the understanding that its economy is large and resilient enough to absorb short-term jolts.

India's economy will feel the tariff heat but it has the resilience to overcome the setback

Russian oil is central to the US' secondary sanctions but can we halt import and risk a price spike?

RAJOLI SIDDHARTH JAYAPRAKASH

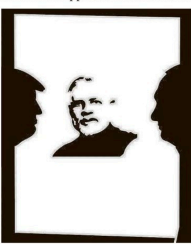
During recent weeks, the debate around strengthening sanctions has gathered momentum in the United States and Europe against the backdrop of Russia's continuing aggression against Ukraine. In the middle of July, the European Union enacted the 18th round of sanctions, which, among other measures, imposed sanctions on major Indian oil importers. More importantly, the recent 25% tariff levied by Donald Trump on India and the additional 25% tariff over the import of crude oil from Russia reflect a shift in the US president's approach to dealing with Russia.

These developments will have implications on the stability of the global energy markets. In light of the threat of further sanctions, New Delhi has continued to defend its purchases by rejecting unilateral sanctions and reaffirming the centrality of the UN as the sole authority in imposing sanctions. A sanctions-happy US imposing secondary tariffs on India, on an issue that it considers its core national interest, will have structural implications on the nature of the US-India relations, and has already resulted in a shift in New Delhi's tone on the sanctions.

How states react to the threat of sanctions is dependent on several structural realities. For instance, in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2018, New Delhi drastically reduced the consumption of Iranian oil, even though the EU did not impose sanctions. The costs outweighed the benefits of creating alternative channels for buying oil from a country sanctioned by Washington. Interestingly, since the invasion of Ukraine, New Delhi's oil imports from Russia began to increase, even with financial sanctions imposed against Russia and the introduction of a \$80 price cap.

Indian refineries continued to pur-

chase oil from Russia - the driving factors were 1) the price: the discounts per barrel in 2022 and 2023 were as high as \$18-\$20 2) the creation of mechanisms for the settlement of trade in Western currencies and the provision for Russian entities to open Rupee Vostro accounts in India and 3) the expansion of the energy sector landscape - recent years have seen India's oil storage and refining capabilities improve significantly. However, the biggest structural factor that supported India's decision



to purchase increasing volumes of Russian oil was an overarching understanding to ensure the stability of the global energy market, especially at a time when the global economy was recovering from the shocks induced during the pandemic. The import of discounted crude has had positive multiplier effects on the Indian economy. These structural realities began to shift and the discounts on the oil prices began to drop to as low as \$2.5 to \$4 per barrel. Additionally, the discourse around the recent sanctions comes amid concerns on Ukraine where Russian aggression has refused to slow down. Even with Trump initially adopting a conciliatory position vis-a-vis Russia, by conditionally facing in some of Russia's demands, the negotiating between Russia and Ukraine have not yielded any tangible results. This deadlock has resulted in pressure mounting on the Trump administration, forcing it to issue an ultimatum to Russia - reach an agreement with Ukraine or be ready to face

punitive sanctions.

Finding new markets
However, Russian oil accounts for 10% of the global oil imports. Sudden disruptions in the supply can see oil prices soar as high as \$120, which countries including the United States do not want. It would also contradict Trump's objective of maintaining low energy costs and keeping inflation in check. This explains the contention that despite the recent tariffs that will have a debilitating political and economic impact, there is a likelihood of both countries reaching an agreement. If enforced, the secondary sanctions will have a short-term impact on India. With the oil discounts falling, the creation of mechanisms or vehicles to facilitate trade at the cost of additional secondary sanctions will not benefit India's interests. New Delhi has been looking for new markets such as Azerbaijan, Nigeria, Guyana, and Brazil to offset its dependence on Russian oil. Even with several refineries diversifying their options, it is too early to draw a conclusion that a switch from Russian oil is in the works.

The political establishment in New Delhi has not been particularly perturbed by the secondary sanctions discourse. Conversely, on multiple occasions, the leadership has stressed that the threats of secondary sanctions and tariffs impinge on the country's sovereignty in making decisions that reinforce its energy security. They have also called out the Western double standards. The rising protectionist discourse in the US, amplified by the secondary tariffs, may result in a growing impetus in New Delhi to strengthen its commitment to regional and bilateral mechanisms such as BRICS and SCO. It may even decelerate the pace of strategic cooperation between the two countries.

That said, there is a contention that both countries will likely be able to reach a deal. A Trump-Putin meeting is coming up and if the two countries were to finalise a roadmap on ending the hostilities in Ukraine, the additional tariffs could even become redundant.

(The writer is a junior fellow with the Observer Research Foundation)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The joy of letting go

There is a whole life beyond the routine, and I intend to live it

JOHN J KENNEDY

Retirement...the word itself seems to carry a weight of finality. So, when I turned 60 and people started asking, "What will you do after retirement?" You can't just sit idle at home. I couldn't help but chuckle. Sit idle? Who has the time? If anything, retirement feels like the universe handing me a blank canvas and saying, "Go wild."

To be honest, though, the idea of leaving a job you've held for decades - especially in academia, where the lecture halls and faculty meetings become a second home - can feel daunting. But while routines are comforting, they can also be stifling. Even if you love teaching and administration (and do), there comes a point when you have to ask yourself: Is this ALL there is? Should I really be

doing the exact same thing at 60 that I was doing at 30 for 30 long years? Isn't there more to life than the familiar?

The truth is, there is a whole world out there waiting to be explored, and it doesn't involve sitting idle. That is a myth perpetuated by people who have never dared to look beyond their routines. Retirement is not the end of productivity; it is the beginning of freedom. Freedom to read books not because they're on a syllabus but because they spark joy. You have the freedom to write, not for peer-reviewed journals, but because you have something to say. Freedom to sit quietly and meditate on life or to reconnect with old friends over coffee (or something even stronger).

Freedom to travel, not just to the off destinations but to truly see new places and meet new people. To take in the world's wonders at their own pace. And let's not forget the younger generation.

By stepping aside, you're creating opportunities for fresh minds to step in. Think about it: how many brilliant young academics are out there, waiting

for their chance to teach, research, and make their mark? Holding onto your position past 60 might feel like staying in the game, but sometimes the most generous thing you can do is to make room for others. It is not about being pushed out; it is about gracefully passing the baton.

Retirement does not mean disappearing into the void. It means redefining what work looks like. Maybe it is writing that novel you have always dreamed of. Maybe it is volunteering, or starting a blog, or finally learning how to paint. The point is, you are no longer bound by the 9-to-5 grind. You get to be the boss of your own time and rhythm.

So, when people ask me, "What will you do after retirement?" I tell them, "Plenty." There is a whole life beyond the routine, and I intend to live it. Not because I have to, but because I want to; the world is vast, and my curiosity is endless. Because sitting idly isn't an option anymore. It's a choice to keep moving, keep exploring, keep growing. After all, isn't that what life's all about?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tariff hike: India finds an unlikely ally in China

US President Donald Trump's substantial tariff increase to 50% due to India's purchase of oil from Russia is puerile, to say the least. India's opposition to the tariff hike has found an unlikely ally in China, which has also vehemently criticised the abnormal increase. The jewellery industry has expressed apprehensions that the tariff hike would stall exports and threaten thousands of livelihoods. On objections to India's purchase of oil from Russia, India

has pointed out that the US and EU themselves import substantial volumes of goods from Russia, making it farcical to criticise and punish India for trade with Russia. The double standard of the US is evident. Trade economist Biswajit Dhar notes that the Trump administration's aggressiveness needs to be met with a reaction from India, as Trump's tariff increase aims to bolster the US economy. **KV Seetharamiah**, Bengaluru

Restore trust

Rahul Gandhi's voter fraud allegations, dismissed by the Election Commission as "baseless," highlight the need for transparency in the democratic process. While the ECI's firm denial reflects institutional confidence, restoring public trust requires more than just rejection; it demands proactive clarity. Gandhi should present concrete evidence if it exists, and the ECI must be open to public disclosure of voting data to reinforce its credibility. A neutral, fact-based review by an independent panel could offer a balanced resolution, moving beyond blame toward accountability and openness to protect electoral integrity and public confidence. **Mohammad Asad**, Mumbai

Sustainable trust

Appropos 'Floods and a few lost seasons' (Aug 8), it is becoming increasingly evident that the tourism-driven policies of Himalayan state governments, particularly in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, are far from sustainable. Experts warn that fragile mountain ecosystems cannot bear the weight of unchecked construction, necessitating strict caps on dwellings and severe restrictions on vehicular access. Governments must confront hard decisions, such as seasonal restrictions during the monsoon, to prevent catastrophic floods. Sustainable tourism in the Himalayas is no longer a choice but a necessity. **N Sadhasiva Reddy**, Bengaluru

Punish the guilty

The recent water poisoning cases in government schools in Karnataka pose a grave threat to students and demand immediate attention. Those involved in such heinous crimes must be brought to justice and given exemplary punishment. It is alarming that instances of hate and divisive tendencies are on the rise without being questioned by authorities, and it is crucial that those responsible are held accountable. **V Padmanabhan**, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.co.in (only letters emailed - not handwritten - will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

...The history of the Congress party is a lie. Rahul Gandhi is an immature personality. The people of India are making fun of him... It is a matter of shame for the Karnataka Congress leaders that they brought Rahul Gandhi here to raise this issue (of voter list manipulation and election fraud)...



Chavaladi Narayanaswamy,
Karnataka Legislative Council LoP and BJP leader

You have attained maturity; display it for us, if you please.

Mary Janice Davidson

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

The case for Cyber Saathis

Cybercrime is rising sharply in Karnataka. Can a cadre of everyday individuals help in the defence?

ANUPAMA SHETTY, HARINI SANTHANAY AND ANNAPOORNA RAVICHANDRAN

In the popular Kannada film *Su from So*, while audiences are drawn in by its humour and everyday charm, there lies a deeper narrative. Dwelling on societal structures and their paradoxes, it also places a spotlight on the quiet emergence of strength, the kind that resides within common folk, waiting to rise. In the current landscape of cybercrime that is endemic in proportions, we need a cadre of Cyber Saathis who need to be just that: everyday people who choose to stand up for others in the digital world. They are not cyber experts, but driven citizens. Like the protagonist in the film, they remind us that courage isn't loud - it's consistent, conscious, and compassionate. And in a world increasingly online, we need many more such everyday digital heroes.

An elder OTT series *Jantara - Sabka Number Aaya* offers a compelling glimpse into the growing lure of cybercrime, particularly among rural youth. It portrays how young individuals, drawn into phishing schemes, seduced not just by money but by a deeper, more dangerous illusion - a false sense of empowerment. As one character in the series chillingly states, "Yek kanna sirf paisa kamaane ka naahi hai, power ka bhi hai." This line encapsulates the deceptive narrative of agency and purpose that often fuels such illicit ventures. Defining cybercrimes in particular, we are talking not about standalone crimes, but a suite of purposeful crimes such as digital arrests, cyber stalking, blackmailing, sextortion, cyber frauds and attacks perpetrated against young adults and digital pornography. Crimes through online games victimising children. According to a recent statement made by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in the Rajya Sabha, the number of reported cybercrimes rose by over 40% since 2021. Many of these crimes targeted children and created undue challenges for their growth and development at a young, impressionable, but defenceless age. Between 2018 and 2022, more than 3,000 cases related to the violation of child pornography and 500 cases of cyber stalking of children were registered.

Karnataka has been worst-off as the state third-reported affected by cybercrimes, behind Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. There has been a dramatic increase, by 424%, of cybercrimes in the state, from 2021 to 2024, as per statistics

in the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal. Building a rapid response team that can understand and quickly respond to any cybercrime event is the need of the hour.

A Cyber Saathi model could typically focus on developing a strong ecosystem of cybercrime busters of all ages, aiding the police force. This cadre would be adept at assessing contextual issues, thereby providing a realistic assessment to cybercrime cells, but also providing the much-needed peerage support to victims, in the form of a Saathi, as the first line of credible information and defence, in the community. They can help tide over the societal impacts of these crimes, marching hand in hand with the real-time crime fighters - the cyber cells of the police forces, making sure there is more time available to fight the core issues that perpetuate them.

Awareness and outreach
Cyber Saathis can be trained to build capacity, to not only create awareness on the nature and societal impacts of cybercrimes, but also to administer 'cyber first-aid', leading victims through the process of formal registration of complaints and access to legal support. The model can be intensified via a Public-Private Partnership Model with the law and policymakers providing core guidance and support for capacity-building activities, while civil society organisations, NGOs, and CSR entities can adopt and institutionalise the model to provide broader coverage.

While it is not practically possible to eradicate cybercrimes in the short term, a beginning must be made, not only in communities, resident welfare groups, and civil society organisations with linkages to wider support systems and initiatives by the State. The model can empower everyday individuals to become digital sentinels in their communities, just as *Su from So* reminds us that true change and empowerment often begin in the quietest corners, with someone simply choosing not to look away.

Cyber Saathis become relevant since technology can alert, but only context can interpret. They come in since these crimes target children and are rooted in real communities, and trained to connect the dots that machines can't. Law enforcement is overburdened, often coming in post-facto. CSR can raise the public's awareness and action, preventing harm, not just responding to it.

(Anupama is Mission Director - Biocon Foundation affected by cybercrimes, Harini is an assistant professor, Department of Sciences and Humanities, Manipal Institute of Technology, and Annapoorna is an independent consultant)

ELECTION COMMISSION MUST RESTORE FAITH IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

ELECTIONS should be free and fair for democracy to be just and meaningful. The allegations raised by Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, have cast a disturbing shadow on the impartiality of the Election Commission of India and brought recent elections under a cloud of suspicion. The Congress leader accused the EC of colluding with the BJP to facilitate ‘vote theft’. Citing an analysis of the voter list for the Mahadevapura assembly seat, part of the Bangalore Central parliamentary constituency, Gandhi claimed that 1,00,250 “fake votes” were created to ensure a win for the BJP in 2024. He also hinted at large-scale manipulation across the country. Relying on his team’s analysis of documents provided by the EC, he alleged the presence of duplicate voters, those with invalid addresses, bulk voters at the same address, and voters with invalid photos on the rolls, besides 33,692 cases of misuse of Form 6, which is meant for enrolling new voters. In response, the EC asked Rahul to submit his evidence under oath.

Gandhi’s questions stem from the suspicion of election tampering and are based on efforts to gather evidence. Hence, they deserve to be addressed. India takes pride in its democratic character, and the constitutional body tasked with conducting elections should be above suspicion. Although his questions about the apparent absence of anti-incumbency against the Narendra Modi government and the inaccuracy of opinion polls appear merely political in nature and can be ignored in this context, the accusations about voter list manipulation need to be thoroughly investigated. If the EC has the responsibility of conducting elections, it is also bound to dispel any suspicions about the exercise whenever questions are raised.

Especially at a time when its Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bihar has been questioned, the EC cannot afford to be dismissive of the allegations raised by the Congress leader. Gandhi also spoke about the EC’s reluctance to share information in a digital format. The question is, why should EC resist accountability and be afraid of questions if it’s convinced of its sense of duty and neutrality? This should not turn into another occasion of political mudslinging. The system must respond quickly and convincingly to restore faith in the democratic process.

GOOD INTENT GOES HALF WAY FOR GENDER JUSTICE

THE Tamil Nadu government recently released a state policy for transgender and intersex persons. The problem, however, begins with the title, which only mentions transgender persons; the Tamil version only mentions ‘transwomen’. The issue has been flagged before the Madras High Court as part of a case from which many progressive directions for the LG-BTQIA+ community have emerged.

This in itself is evidence that good intentions, as the state government may indeed have, are not enough without real understanding and empathy. As a result, the policy speaks the right words but remains vague on details and framework for implementation. A key miss, much to the disappointment of the community, is that the policy, while assuring representation in employment and education, makes no mention of a 1 percent reservation in both areas, as has been demanded by the community at the national and state levels for some time. The policy also does not go into details of health interventions that the community may need access to, based on international guidelines. It does, however, speak of amending succession laws so that trans persons may be able to inherit property, counselling services to help with intra-family disputes and a 24/7 helpline to support the community.

The policy acknowledges that the trans community is extremely marginalised and faces multiple forms of oppression, including discrimination in education and employment. Further, it unfortunately subsumes the problems of intersex persons into a larger policy, failing to provide sufficient attention to that community’s specific problems and contributing to the conflation of both communities in the public view.

The creation of a special policy for transgender and intersex persons was a demand by the community as, initially, the state had planned a policy for the larger LG-BTQIA+ community. A section of trans persons raised the need for a separate policy on the grounds that their community is particularly marginalised and impoverished. Given that background, it is unfortunate that the policy that emerged has failed to respond to some of their key needs. It is hoped that the state remedies the issue in its action plan to be released to ensure implementation of the policy. The state must also release at the earliest its policy for the LG-BTQIA+ persons, as it has assured the Madras High Court.

QUICK TAKE

INVOKE SPORTING SANCTIONS

IT’S time to consider barring Israel from international football. The country has wreaked unprovoked violence in the world of football in recent months. On Thursday, far-right fans of Israeli club Beitar Jerusalem set off so many fireworks in a Latvian stadium that it attracted police action and a UEFA enquiry. Also this week, Israeli forces killed ‘Palestinian Pele’ Suleiman al-Obeid while he was seeking food aid. Last November, Maccabi Tel Aviv fans beat up Arabs in Amsterdam. Arguably, Israel isn’t to football what, say, South Africa was to cricket in the 1960s. The proud Proteas’ ban from international cricket during 1970-91 shamed the country. Can FIFA do what the UN cannot? Today, if Russia is barred from international sports, why not Israel?

JULY 23 was a landmark day in the global fight for affixing legal responsibility on all nations for inaction to contain the harmful impact of climate change on people around the world. That day, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the Hague delivered an unequivocal judgement that governments are legally accountable for failure to act in accordance with the commitments they made while pledging support to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which the Conference of Parties adopted in 2015. A panel of 15 judges gave their verdict in the form of an advisory opinion to the UN. The ICJ was responding to a referral by the UN General Assembly of a case initiated by several countries in 2023.

While this verdict cannot be enforced by the ICJ, it provides a strong legal basis for international and national litigation against governments that are lax in fulfilling their commitments towards climate change mitigation. Under international law, even countries that have not signed the Paris Agreement or have exited from it, like the US, will now be open to legal scrutiny for acts of omission and commission that run counter to the global agenda for containing climate change.

The verdict is a tribute to ICJ’s wisdom in identifying the International and inter-generational harm being caused by governments that are unresponsive to the threat of climate change. The case presents a remarkable story of how young climate activists combined audacity of imagination with astute activism at the global level, to invoke ICJ’s intervention by engaging the UN. It was initiated by law students from low-lying Pacific islands that face an imminent danger of their homes, fields and heritage being submerged by rising sea levels due to global warming.

In 2019, a law student from Solomon Islands came up with the idea of approaching the UN for legal action. Cynthia Houniuihi was alarmed at the devastation caused by climate change in her home country. She proposed the idea in a classroom discussion. Undeterred by skepticism from some adults, she persuaded law students from other Pacific islands to unite in a fight for climate justice. Under her leadership, 27 law students across the islands formed an organisation called Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC).

The Islanders had reason to be alarmed and energised for action. Sea

Law students from Pacific islands have managed to get a historic judgement on climate action from the ICJ. Govts are now open to legal challenges from their citizens

YOUNG ACTIVISTS FROM TINY NATIONS IN CLIMATE FIGHT

K SRINATH REDDY

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SOURAV ROY

levels had risen 3.5 cm across their countries over a decade. Nasa estimates that in the next 30 years, Pacific island nations such as Tuvalu, Fiji and Kiribati will experience at least 15 cm of sea level rise. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s estimates, large portions of Tuvalu’s main island could get completely flooded and become totally uninhabitable by 2050.

Due to this existential threat, Tuvalu is taking steps to become the world’s first ‘digital nation’, and has initiated the ‘Future Now Project’, which involves creating its digital twin in the metaverse—preserving its culture and ensuring that its legal status and statehood survives in the case of its geological disappearance.

Other small island nations are at grave danger too, as global temperatures rise

in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions. The PISFCC has campaigned vigorously to build a global coalition of endangered island nations. Houniuihi enlisted the support of Vanuatu’s minister for foreign affairs. The government of Vanuatu garnered diplomatic support from other countries while PIFCC mobilised youth activists across the world. In March 2023, 132 governments co-sponsored a resolution in the General Assembly urging the UN to seek the ICJ’s legal opinion on the liability of countries for climate inaction. As the UN decided to approach the ICJ, World’s Youth for Climate Justice emerged as a global coalition of young climate activists. They campaigned on the slogan: “We are bringing the world’s biggest problem before the world’s highest court.”

By 2024, Earth had heated by 1.34°C

REDEFINING COOL IN AI ERA

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SPEAKEASY

being reoriented because attitudes to knowledge, ethics, politics, value, language, culture and perhaps even human life are changing rapidly; technology is re-orienting to new goals, and AI is available to be embedded into roles in which it performs faster than humans.

The last time the world wished hard to be reborn and new technologies were at hand to make it possible was in the 1960s, when colonialism gave way to a fresh wave of globalisation and the progressive liberal ethic, Cold War polarisation deepened and traditional ideas of nationhood, commu-



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When the world was reborn in the 1960s, new technologies like solid-state electronics, plastics and the pill were at hand with transformative cultural and political movements to make it possible. Today’s secret spice is artificial intelligence, whose colonial tendency threatens to flatten culture

nity and family fell apart amid giant strides in technology and culture like moonshots, plastics, solid state electronics, the pill, political pop music, *noir*, *avant garde* cinema, modern media, non-alignment, women’s lib and minority rights. Together, they changed the world.

AI seems to be the secret spice which could forge a new world order out of the current chaos, which it is itself deepening by taking over jobs. Its typical roles entail crunching data into information and information into meta-information like reading reams of reports and producing a sum-

since pre-industrial times. The Paris Accord set an upper limit of 1.5°C by 2100, although recent estimates suggest that the barrier is likely to be breached even before 2030. While there are manifold dangers to humanity from atmospheric and land surface warming, the grave danger posed by marine warming is a rise in the sea levels. That will result in coastal flooding in larger countries and submersion of small islands. Alarmed by that imminent existential threat, the island nations sought the ICJ’s legal intervention through the UN.

As the world rallied behind the Pacific island nations, the UN posed two questions to the ICJ:

■ What are countries obliged to do, under international law, to protect people around the world from the consequences of global warming?

■ What are the legal consequences for countries whose actions significantly harmed the environment?

The ICJ responded through a legal advisory. It said that lack of effort by countries ‘to develop the most ambitious plans to contain climate change’ would be a breach of commitments made by them under the Paris Agreement. Failure to deliver on those commitments can lead to other countries initiating legal action against the errant ones. Even within countries, governments can be legally challenged by their citizens for actions which fall short of stated commitments towards climate protection.

Other environmental issues, ranging from air and water pollution to deforestation, have been addressed by national courts in the past. Concerns on biodiversity loss, such as protection of endangered animals, have also drawn judicial support. However, this is the first far-reaching legal pronouncement on climate change at the global level.

The harmful impact of climate change has been addressed by courts or human rights bodies within some countries. In 2019, the Supreme Court of the Netherlands declared that protection from the potentially devastating effects of climate change is a human right. The European Court of Human Rights and its American counterpart have both opined that the dangers posed by climate change infringe on human rights.

The verdict given by the ICJ is even more powerful by holding all governments legally accountable for their failure to address the most serious threat to the survival of our civilisation.

(Views are personal)
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MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Himalayan responsibility

Ref: *Himalayan havoc* (Aug 8). Human apathy and greed are the prime factors that have contributed to, and increased the magnitude of such natural disasters. Shying away from responsibility and waiting for another calamity to happen in eco-sensitive zones is a trend that has become common.

Biju C Mathew, Thiruvananthapuram

Exam negligence

Ref: *Fix exam glitches that harm aspirants’ future* (Aug 8). Gross negligence and lack of accountability by constitutional bodies risk nearly 10 million aspirants’ futures. Despite recent legislation to curb examination malpractices, carelessness goes on as usual. A centrally conducted common recruitment exam would enable aspirants to save on time and reduce mental strain.

A Sreeramarao, Vishakhapatnam

Pharma gamble

Ref: *Fill the vaccine blanks* (Aug 8). To strike a deal in the health sector is a tight rope walk for India, considering the US is considering tariffs on the pharmaceutical sector too. Those opposing Indian vaccines would always doubt the effectiveness and side effects of vaccines.

Jalkishan N, Bengaluru

Kerala’s strengths

Ref: *Bold roadmap to an economic dawn in Kerala* (Aug 8). The article rightly stresses that Kerala’s economic revival hinges on cutting bureaucratic delays, safeguarding investor confidence and leveraging its educational strengths. Without urgent reforms, its high unemployment and debt risks will deepen. A pragmatic, consensus-driven approach could reverse these challenges.

Abbharna Barathi, Chennai

Gaza genocide

Ref: *When silence is not golden* (Aug 8). Prominent organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and scholars from the universities of Boston, Cornell and Yale have determined that Israel is ‘committing a genocide’ in Gaza. I urge that media organisations should also call Israel out on its crimes and formally use the term.

Febin D’Cruz, email

Constitutional duty

Ref: *Rahul shows IL ‘vote theft proof’ in K’taka* (Aug 8). The job of a public institution, when allegations of wrongdoing are made, is to transparently investigate and take corrective action. Public institutions have forgotten their oath-bound duty to the people of the republic!

Satjit Dhillon, Gurugram

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Centre's take on age of consent issue is bang on

THE BJP-led NDA government at the Centre has done exceedingly well while reiterating its objections to reducing the age of consent from 18 years to 16 years to help 'protect children from exploitation and abuse' in a more authoritative manner. Its contention is quite right in that any further lowering of the existing age would open the floodgates to trafficking and other sordid forms of child abuse apart from diluting the statutory presumption of vulnerability that lies at the heart of child protection law. A grim reality and the country's bane are that many victims don't open or approach higherups because the perpetrators happen to be people known to them, including from within the family, neighbourhood or school. They bear the trauma and anguish in silence because of fear that they would be subject to more harrowing times up ahead. However,

there are contrasting opinions as regards consensual sex between adolescents aged 16 to 18 years. The Centre relies on the fact that deep-rooted Indian laws offer an unambiguous intent to provide a "robust, non-negotiable shield" to minors against any form of sexual exploitation. This issue has shot to prominence following the contentions of eminent lawyer and amicus curiae Indira Jaising, who argued that consensual sexual activity between adolescents aged 16 to 18 should not be classified as "abuse" or criminalised under the POCSO Act. Incidentally, the Law Commission of India has cautioned against lowering the age of consent. Instead, it suggested a guided judicial discretion in cases involving tacit approval of children in the 16-18 age group. Handling a case related to a similar issue, the Supreme Court had ruled that consensual sexual activity be-

tween minors, where there is no coercion or deception, does not automatically constitute rape under Indian law. The question is how and who will decide on aspects like 'consensual' and 'coercion'. One can never know the truth as it will remain unknown to any third person given the dicey nature of the experience. According to a 2007 central survey data, 53.22 per cent of children reported facing one or more forms of sexual abuse.

It will be in the fitness of things if one goes beyond the age of consent issue. A rethink on the major and minor status can have serious ramifications in other fields and bring back the gory days of long held social taboos like child marriages. If a rise in trafficking is a possibility so also are the chances of more road accidents if vehicles are driven by 16-old-old kids. In the United Kingdom and many European nations, the age of consent

for any form of sexual activity is 16 years regardless of the gender. Maybe this uniformity (unlike the 21 years for boys and 18 for girls in India) needs to be deeply investigated. The Centre has assured to come up with a comprehensive defence mechanism whereby the norms are strictly complied with. If one goes by what has been happening one wonders if any such 'categorical' legal measures would have any meaningful relevance. Despite 'stringent' existing laws, we continue to hear of child marriages in Rajasthan and Gujarat, there is no check on minors plying vehicles and there is no end to the problem of child-labour. The last remains rampant because the 'employers' are quite liberal in keeping the authorities in good humour. More than reworking on laws, it would be better if the authorities swear by the existing laws and punish accordingly.



LETTERS

Trump should change his approach

WHEN the world still wants to engage in trade with the United States of America, its President Donald Trump's reckless rhetoric, desperation and behaving like a bully while doubling tariff rates at will is not only unfair and unjustified but also unreasonable by any yardstick. Despite veiled threats and strongman theatrics, India's response has been measured by telling America clearly that there is nothing wrong in protecting one's national interests. It refused to stoop to Trump's level, by rightly pointing out that when a President threatens global partners, it not only erodes trust and credibility but risks alienation and the moral standing of his own nation. Nonetheless, Trump being unable to touch China on buying oil from Russia possibly targeting India, is diplomatically destructive. By and large, India reminding Trump that this is a new Bharat, a self-reliant, rising military and economic face and not a pushover, made it clear that his writ will not run, especially in matters related to trade with Russia because their relationship is bound by decades of trust, military cooperation and geopolitical alignment. It is high time, Trump understands the ground realities and becomes sensible and reasonable in his approach, otherwise not only India but the rest of the world will give a damn to his utterances. Moreover, when the US economy is floundering, it is better Trump changes his attitude, failing which it is America's reputation that will take a beating.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad-3

Modi's anti-tariff stance is justified

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's subtle message directed at U. S. President Donald Trump that India will never compromise on the interest of its agri/dairy farmers and fishermen and went ahead by declaring that he is ready to personally pay huge price for it, if necessary, is a profound statement. I don't think any former prime minister had made such a statement concerning his personal safety. The country's intelligence agencies should take a serious note of it and initiate appropriate steps to strengthen his security. The egocentric Trump, having failed to make India follow his diktat, would go to any extent to destabilise India by encouraging Pakistan and Bangladesh to foment trouble through proxies. Similarly, this may activate Khalistani elements to spew venom at India and cause widespread unrest in Punjab and elsewhere, as also North America and Europe. The strained relationship between USA and India due to the tariff trade war, can impact the country in the days to come. India should firmly thwart threats emanating from both within and outside.

R. J. Janardhana Rao, Hyderabad-28

India-US relations hit rock-bottom

WHILE the United States imposed massive retaliatory tariff of 50 per cent over Indian imports for purchasing oil from Russia, the much hyped 'cordial relations' with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and India has hit rock-bottom. This has exposed US President Donald Trump's hypocrisy and cunning, while further endorsing the age-old perception that like in politics even in international relations, there are no permanent friends or foes. Trump is setting a dangerous precedent with his tantrums.

B V K Thampi, Thiruvananthapuram

Focus must be on Atmanirbhar

THIS refers to the editorial 'India's response to Trump's bombast must be strong'. The impulsive and irrational move on the part of the US President Donald Trump to impose, at first a 25 per cent tariff on Indian exports to the US and following it by an additional 25 per cent by way of additional tariff is beyond anybody's wild imagination. The additional tariff was ostensibly to 'punish' India for importing oil from Russia despite having several vendors to choose from. What Trump fails to understand – rather irresponsibly, is that it is up to India to choose from whom it should buy oil. It needed be guided or goaded by somebody else. This is a bad business strategy on the part of the US to target India by way of exorbitant tax burden. In a way this is yet another lesson for the country to become 'Atmanirbhar' in every possible way for the country's requirements in future. This is more important as a measure to overcome the whimsical attitudes of leaders from other nations.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Raichur beggar donates Rs 1.83 lakh for temple renovation, inspires many

RAICHUR: In a moving example of generosity, a 60-year-old beggar from Bijnagera village in Raichur district has donated a staggering ₹1.83 lakh all from alms collected over several years for the renovation of the local Anjaneya temple. The act has won hearts and set an example that one does not need immense wealth to contribute to society; a rich heart is enough.

The donor, Rangamma, originally from Andhra Pradesh, has been living in Bijnagera for over four decades, surviving solely on alms. For the last six years, she meticulously saved her earnings in three large gunny bags. The notes and coins were counted by over 20 villagers, taking nearly six hours. It was discovered that ₹20,000 worth of notes had been damaged due to dampness.

Rangamma has always been selective about where she begs – approaching only bike riders, auto drivers, and other vehicle users. A few years ago, villagers even used ₹1 lakh from her savings to build her a modest 4x5 ft shelter.

When villagers recently stumbled upon her savings, they asked her plans for the money. Without hesitation, she said she wanted it donated for the temple's renovation so her contribution could serve the community.

Locals note that many believe giving her alms brings them good fortune, with people offering amounts from ₹10 to ₹100. In return, Rangamma has chosen to give back selflessly. The temple's inauguration was held recently, where Rangamma's contribution was celebrated.

Read more at
<https://epaper.thehansindia.com>



ON one hand, the Himalayas groan under the assault of unrestrained development. On the other, political discourse drowns in absurd distractions, ignoring nature's growing fury.

The opposition echoes Donald Trump—his baseless peace claims, laughable remark that India's economy is "dead," or ignorant comments about Operation Sindhoor. This blind parroting erodes India's dignity on the world stage.

But the real war is in the mountains. Not with guns—but with concrete, bulldozers, and ignorance. What's being called progress is mutilating the Himalayas—guardians of the Indian subcontinent for millennia. Cloudbursts, landslides, flash floods, and glacial lake outbursts are no longer rare—they are all nature's retaliation.

The August 5 disaster in Dharali, Uttarkashi, was another warning. A catastrophic cloudburst unleashed a deluge that swept away homes, hotels, shops, and roads. Nature declared: "Exploit us endlessly, and you won't survive."

Every time the Kheer Gad River swells, villagers don't run—they climb rooftops to watch what's left. The river, a trickle for most of the year, becomes a monster when cloudbursts hit Srikanth Parvat. It rips through lives and landscapes. Locals remember time not by festivals or

elections—but by floods. The flood of 2010 that soaked the school; 2012 took a shop; 2018 buried orchards and now in 2025, the market vanished in 34 seconds.

Two days later, the scale is evident: a 500-metre-wide swathe buried under 50 feet of sludge. Two bodies recovered, while 16 were missing, including nine army personnel. SDRF IG Arun Mohan Joshi calls it an unprecedented operation, with debris as high as rooftops. The army had to airlift a JCB to Matli using a Chinook helicopter.

From 2010 to 2018, despite destruction, no lives were lost. Nature, it seemed, was being merciful. But not any longer. Cloudbursts are now routine. Climate change plays a role, but the deeper blame lies in reckless, unplanned human interference in one of Earth's most fragile ecosystems.

Central and State governments must face the reality. Deforestation, unregulated construction, slope blasting, and unscientifically built roads are pushing the region to collapse. Dharali is not alone. From Uttarkashi to Chamoli, Kinnaur to Mandi—entire districts are under siege from their own governments. The mountains once nurturing rivers and civilisations are now being blasted apart in the name of "development."

Even the Supreme Court has warned: if this continues, Himachal Pradesh may vanish—not literally, but ecologically. With steep slopes and fragile soil, the state is already vulnerable. Cut down forests, dig tunnels, build hotels on riverbanks, dump waste in

National interest abandoned at the altar of political hatred



India's hill states are collapsing under the combined weight of political negligence, unscientific development, and ecological disregard. The recent disaster in Dharali, Uttarkashi is not an isolated event—it's a brutal reminder of what happens when nature's limits are ignored. From reckless highway projects to unchecked

deforestation, fragile ecosystems are being sacrificed at the altar of vote-bank development and tourist revenue. Despite multiple expert reports warning of imminent collapse, neither Parliament nor the media seem interested. This op-ed exposes how greed, distraction politics, and environmental apathy are pushing the Himalayas to the brink—and how continued silence from our leaders could make disasters like Dharali the new normal across India's hill regions

streams—and expect nature to retaliate. Tourism, though economically vital, has become a double-edged sword. The uncontrolled boom in hotels, lodges, and homestays—many dangerously perched on unstable and vulnerable slopes—has reduced the land's capacity to absorb floods. These structures clog natural drainage, creating deadly bottlenecks. Lack of proper EIAs, poor drainage, and unchecked mining make every rainfall a potential catastrophe.

Still, we dig deeper and build higher—racing toward environmental suicide.

It's not ignorance—we know better. Several landmark reports have warned us:

The National Landslide Risk Management Strategy (2019) urged hazard zonation, slope stability norms, and improved building codes.

The Gadgil Committee Report (2011) recommended protecting ecologically sensitive zones in the Western Ghats. The Kasturirangan Committee Report (2013), though diluted, still called for

strong regulation. But these reports ask for restraint—and restraint doesn't win elections. Our politics, driven by greed and showmanship, ignores science. Many politicians themselves are invested in the real estate industry. Debates on ecological collapse are buried under noise about Trump's ramblings or social media squabbles. Legislatures have become battlegrounds for vendettas, not platforms for national survival.

Do MPs from Uttarakhand or Himachal even know what the Gadgil or NDMA reports say? Have they ever raised these issues? Or are their voices drowned out by bulldozers and hollow slogans?

The media is equally complicit. It treats disasters like Dharali as just breaking news—some shocking visuals, a noisy panel, and then silence. No accountability. No follow-up. Just another TRP spike.

But Dharali is part of a larger pattern. Blasting for the Char Dham highway has destabilised slopes and filled

valleys with debris. Thousands of trees have been cut. Without roots holding soil, even moderate rain can unleash deadly landslides.

Natural drainage channels are blocked by construction debris and mining waste. So, when it rains, water floods villages instead of flowing into rivers. Villagers have long warned about this. Ecology experts have pleaded. But bulldozers speak louder than warnings. Asphalt is laid. Mountains bleed silently.

It's time we stop calling these "natural disasters." These are man-made catastrophes—entirely preventable, tragically predictable.

Had we followed sustainable designs, conducted proper environmental assessments, reforested slopes, and regulated construction, much of the Dharali devastation could've been avoided. But the greed of real estate and the hospitality industry and gross negligence by the state government in permitting large scale constructions like star hotels in the riverbed and

laying of roads and providing infrastructural facilities is highly condemnable. Development is necessary but for that one need not exploit the riverbed and add to the miseries. Hotels and motels should be constructed at safer places and during non-flood period tourists can be brought there by buses or private vehicles to enjoy nature and go back safely.

The mountains are not mute landscapes for plunder. They are living ecosystems with limits and laws. Break them, and consequences are swift. Hope all the politicians who are into real estate will learn some lessons and open their eyes at least now. The Modi-led government at the Centre and all Chief Ministers of hill states should immediately address this issue on a war-footing if they are serious about protecting nature and prevent tragedies.

Dharali's destruction is more than a flood. It is a message—delivered in stone and water. If we continue this blind, arrogant path, the next disaster may not leave survivors to reflect on our folly.

We must shed the illusion of dominion over nature. The Himalayas, Western Ghats and Aravallis are not just terrain—they are the lungs and spines of the subcontinent.

Treat them with reverence or prepare for a future where disasters become our national calendar.

Because mountains always maintain the score—and we are losing.

(The author is former Chief Editor of The Hans India)

The unseen faith: A call for distinct Adivasi religious identity in India

LAKSHMAN KOYA

FOR too long, the vibrant tapestry of Adivasi spiritual and cultural life in India has been obscured by a fundamental misclassification in the national census – their categorization as Hindus. This seemingly administrative detail carries profound and detrimental implications, leading to the erosion of a unique identity, the denial of fundamental rights, and the suppression of a rich heritage deeply intertwined with nature and ancestry.

On this World Indigenous Peoples' Day (August 9), it is imperative for the Government of India to acknowledge and respect the distinct cultural practices of Adivasi communities by granting them a separate religion category in the ensuing census.

The historical record of census enumeration itself serves as a stark reminder of this disservice. From "Aborigines" in 1891 to "Animism" in 1901 and 1911, and later "tribal religion" (1921), "primitive tribes" (1931), and "tribes" (1941), colonial authorities, however imperfectly, recognised a distinct religious sphere for these communities. The post-colonial era saw a problematic and ultimately damaging shift. While the 1951 census initially recognized "Scheduled Tribes" this category gradually morphed

into "Hindu," effectively subsuming Adivasi spiritual practices under a broader umbrella that demonstrably does not reflect their reality.

This misclassification is far from a benign oversight; it is a critical flaw rooted in inadequate representation during early census enumerations. Often, Hindu enumerators, unfamiliar with the intricate customs and deeply rooted traditions of Adivasi life, defaulted by categorizing them as Hindus. This unfortunate precedent has since perpetuated a historical inaccuracy, distorting the demographic and cultural landscape of the nation. The 2011 Census recorded the total Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in India at 10.43 crore (104.3 million), constituting 8.6 per cent of the nation's total population. While the census did include an "Other Religions and Persuasions" (ORP) category for 7.9 million people – often encompassing various indigenous faiths – a significant portion of the Scheduled Tribe population was nonetheless recorded as Hindu. For instance, data indicates over 63 per cent of the Santal population was categorised as Hindu in 2011, even as a substantial number also reported 'Sarna' (23 per cent) and 'Sari Dharam' (7.28 per cent). This highlights the incongruity and the urgent need for a more accurate reflection

Today is World Indigenous Peoples' Day

9 AUGUST

PROUD TO BE ADIVASI

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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tion of their spiritual diversity. The consequences of this erasure are far-reaching, extending beyond a mere bureaucratic label. Adivasi identity faces a multi-pronged assault. The unbridled entry of non-tribal populations into Adivasi villages, coupled with the proselytizing efforts of Christian missionaries, further destabilizes traditional structures. Missionaries, often exploiting genuine health vulnerabilities, have converted Adivasis, leading to an insidious loss of traditional leadership, indigenous languages, and invaluable cultural practices.

For example, while Christianity accounts for a notable portion of the Adivasi population in certain northeastern states (90.08 per cent of the ST population in Mizoram was Christian in 2011), in Jharkhand, 15.48 per cent of the Scheduled Tribe popula-

tion was Christian. Furthermore, the broader education system, by failing to adequately recognize or incorporate Adivasi culture, contributes to its marginalization, leaving younger generations disconnected from their ancestral roots.

At the heart of Adivasi identity lies an unbreakable bond with forests. These are not merely sources of livelihood; they are ancestral homes, sacred spaces, and the very wellspring of spiritual sustenance.

The traditional Adivasi worldview sees humanity as an integral part of the natural world, not its master. The fact that over 90 per cent of the Adivasi population still resided in rural areas as per the 2011 census strongly implies their continued deep connection to land and forest resources for their livelihoods. However, this symbiotic relationship is

GROUND ZERO



Hundreds of migrant workers wait in long queues to board the few unreserved compartments of a long-distance train to Hyderabad, in Telangana. They say there are few jobs in West Bengal, forcing them to return to work in other States.
DEBASISH BHADURI

In the name of a nation

As thousands of Bengali-speaking migrants across some of India's States are questioned on their citizenship, detained, or pushed into Bangladesh, a wave of fear has brought them back to West Bengal. **Shiv Sahay Singh** explores the reasons for the migration, as the controversy opens up the debate about Bengali identity. Political parties use the crisis as a plank for the Assembly elections next year

Nazimuddin Mondal (34) recalls that he was slapped before being asked to sing the national anthem. "At the police station they told me to sing it and then checked my phone to see if there were any phone numbers from Bangladesh," he says.

Mondal says life had been going smoothly for about a year and a half in Mumbai's Nalasopara area, where he lived on rent. With a daily wage of ₹1,300, the migrant from a village in Murshidabad district, West Bengal, had come to Maharashtra to work. On June 9, 2025, there was a knock on his door. Men in uniform had come for him. They took him to the local police station. Mondal recalls that there were 13 Bengali-speaking men at the police station. Then began a journey of about 2,500 kilometres spanning six days.

From the police station in Mumbai, Mondal says he and a few others were taken for a medical check-up, then driven to Pune the next morning. He recalls that they were put on a flight from Pune to West Bengal, their hands in zip-ties.

After landing somewhere in north Bengal, Mondal says he was driven along the international border in the early hours of one morning and pushed into Bangladesh.

"The men in plainclothes forced me to cross the border. It was the scariest day of my life," he says. He was handed ₹300 in Bangladeshi currency, a packet of food, and a bottle of water. "You all are Bangladeshis," the man told me in Bengali, threatening to shoot me if I tried to return."

On June 14, a video of him and two others, Minarul Sheikh and Mostafa Kamal Sheikh, both also migrant workers from West Bengal, allegedly picked up by the police in Maharashtra, surfaced on social media. Sitting in an open field, the men cried out to the West Bengal Chief Minister for help: "Mamata (Banerjee) Didi please save us... We have been pushed into Bangladesh." The next day, the three were repatriated through the India-Bangladesh border close to Mekhliganj town of Cooch Behar district, West Bengal.

Across India, thousands of Bengali-speaking migrants are being asked for documentation to prove their Indian citizenship. The crackdown began, say sources in the Home Ministry, after the regime change in Bangladesh in August 2024. The questioning intensified after the Pahalgam attack in April this year. CM Banerjee alleges that the intensity of it is felt most in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled States.

The Delhi Police has checked documents of over 16,000 Bengali-speakers over the past few months. The Haryana government had set up detention centres in July, where they allegedly held people. In Gujarat, over 1,000 were detained in Ahmedabad and Surat. Through June and July, migrant workers have been leaving jobs in other States to return to West Bengal.

Almost a month after the incident, Mondal is back home. He wears the same shirt in which he was seen in the video, and is struggling to find work in his village. "The contractor (in Mumbai) is calling me regularly, but I have no documents; they were all taken by the police. Here, even if I



We have had several cases of people of the Matua community being held by the police in Maharashtra. When the police pick up people on the basis of language, both Hindus and Muslims will be arrested

NIKHILESH ADHIKARI
Lawyer fighting cases of two migrant workers

get work, I don't get even ₹500 a day," the migrant worker says.

The village, located along one of the distributaries of the river Ganga, has a standing crop of jute in July, rising to almost five feet. The roads are filled with potholes so deep that ducks swim in them. Most men in the village migrate out of West Bengal for work, though there is no reliable data on how many do.

Going back to work

Less than a kilometre from his house, is a locality where other migrant workers have been forced to return from their place of work. They were detained for three days in the neighbouring State of Odisha. They are part of a group of about 400 who were detained by the Jharsuguda police during the second week of July. On July 9, the Trinamool Congress (TMC), the ruling party in West Bengal, posted a 55-second video of the workers on social media. In the video, Samiul Ansari (31) describes how they were picked up at night.

At their village in Murshidabad, Samiul is joined by four others: Yeasmin Ali Ansari (50), Manaruzzaman Ansari (41), Newton Ansari (33), and Amanat Ansari (31). They sit in a circle and narrate their ordeal during detention for 72 hours. By Indian law, police can detain a person for no longer than 24 hours, before which they must be produced before a magistrate.

"The police did not beat us at the detention centre, but kept saying that they had orders from above to detain us," Samiul says. The men say they have been going to Odisha for a decade to work; this was the first time they had faced trouble. Odisha's government is run by the BJP that came to power last year. "There is no work here. Maybe we won't go to where the police had detained us," they say. The three younger men in the group went back to Odisha 11 days later.

The men, who were detained in Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha, say they have no choice but to leave to other States for work soon. Their greatest fear is what identity documents they should carry so that the police does not detain them.



Rajjak Sheikh in Murshidabad, the father of two migrant workers, who has filed a habeas corpus petition in the Calcutta High Court. SHIV SAHAY SINGH

In the village, Razzak Sheikh, the father of two migrant workers, has filed a habeas corpus petition before the Calcutta High Court, when his sons were detained elsewhere in Odisha. "I got a call from the police there, who threatened to push my sons into Bangladesh if we failed to produce birth certificates."

Having an Indian birth certificate is, however, no guarantee say migrant workers, that they will not be harassed. Amir Sheikh, 19, from Malda's Kaliachak area, who was allegedly jailed in Rajasthan for a week before being pushed into Bangladesh in May 2025, had one, say his parents.

Up to 1,000 people were identified as suspected Bangladeshi nationals, detained, and sent to six detention centres, in the State. The parents have produced their passports too, but say their son is still stuck in Bangladesh. On August 7, the father filed a habeas corpus before the Calcutta High Court.

On July 30, the Maharashtra government claimed that 42,000 'fake' birth certificates issued to 'Bangladeshis' had been cancelled, and the number to be further cancelled by August 15 would be far higher.

Politics at play

In the first week of May 2025, weeks before these stories of migrants alleging detention and pushing into Bangladesh surfaced, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Samirul Islam wrote a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah. In it he claimed there was a "disturbing pattern of targeted hostility" against Bengali workers in BJP-ruled States such as Gujarat. Islam is the chairperson of West Bengal Migrant Welfare Board.

By the second week of July, reports of migrant workers in different parts of India began surfacing almost daily in West Bengal. On July 16, CM Banerjee hit the streets in Kolkata and warned that protests would rage across the country if Bengali migrants continue to be harassed.

Two days later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking at a public meeting in Durgapur in the southern part of West Bengal and one of India's main steel-producing centres, said that "Bengali *asmita*" (identity and culture) was paramount to the BJP, but emphasised that "whoever has infiltrated into the country will be dealt with as per law".

On July 21, Banerjee addressed her party's annual Martyrs' Day rally. This is a commemoration of the day 13 people were killed in 1993, when police fired on the Youth Congress, then led by Banerjee. Before lakhs of supporters in Kolkata she claimed that the BJP government at the Centre "was unleashing terror on the Bengali language" and announced that a "language movement" would continue until the Assembly polls, due in 2026. From the stage of the mega Trinamool event, the party chairperson read excerpts from what she called a secret notification issued by the Union Government in May 2025, and sent only to BJP-ruled States, which stated that if someone was suspected of being Bangladeshi, they should be detained for a month and sent to detention or holding camps.

Amidst thousands of migrants returning and the disruption of work, the debate on Bengali language and identity continues to rage. On August 3, the Delhi Police issued a letter referring to the Bengali language as Bangladeshi, which the TMC took up as an insult to the "Bengali-speaking people of India".

The very next day, while justifying the action of Delhi Police, BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya said, "There is, in fact, no language called Bengali."

The West Bengal BJP leadership said that the drive is to identify Bangladeshi infiltrators and not migrants of the State. Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari and newly appointed State BJP president Samik Bhattacharya speak of "sanitising the voter list and removing lakhs of Bangladeshi voters". They insist on a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the voter list on the lines of what is happening in Bihar.

Economically speaking

The flight of industries and unemployment remain major challenges in West Bengal. The National Statistical Office's (NSO) Annual Survey on

Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) made public in 2024 pointed out that West Bengal lost 3 million jobs in unincorporated enterprises from 2015-16 to 2022-23.

In 2024, the Union Finance Minister had said that the share of industrial production in West Bengal had declined from 24% at the time of Independence to 3.5% in 2021.

Economist Abhirup Sarkar, the chairperson of the West Bengal Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation, says, "There are historical reasons behind the decline of industries in West Bengal. One of the biggest factors is that Kolkata was dominated by British companies, which left after independence. Then, during the Left regime, militant trade unions and strikes played a role in the flight of capital." He adds that productivity is low in West Bengal, but there is also a perception battle about the State.

More than a shared border

West Bengal shares a 2,216 kilometre border with Bangladesh, and about 450 km of the border remains unfenced, making it porous in parts. Home Minister Shah has said this is largely because the West Bengal government is not providing land to do so.

However, there are cultural, historical, and geographic ties between the Bengalis on both sides of the border. The partition of Bengal took place on Rakshabandhan day in 1905, when the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, divided the Bengal Presidency into west (predominantly Hindu, including Bihar and Orissa) and east (predominantly Muslim, including Assam). This was annulled in 1911, when the capital was moved to Delhi.

However, there was further turmoil in 1947, when East Pakistan was formed, and people moved across the newly-formed border, on the basis of religion. In 1971, when Bangladesh was formed, another wave of people came to India.

Ten years ago, in 2015, a Land Border Agreement was signed between the two countries, where land parcels were exchanged, because there was Indian territory deep within Bangladesh and vice versa. People in these parcels were given the choice to become Bangladeshi nationals or Indian citizens.

Shamshul Haque and Rabiul Haque chose India, and migrated to Gurugram, in Haryana, to work. They were arrested on suspicion of being Bangladeshi nationals.

"We chose to come to India leaving our place of birth behind because we always thought of ourselves as Indians. I had never thought, even in my dreams, that I would be held on suspicion of being Bangladeshi," Shamshul says, showing a citizenship certificate issued by West Bengal's Cooch Behar district administration.

While the majority of migrant workers detained or pushed into Bangladesh are Muslims, there are some from the Matua community, a sect of Hindu Namashudras, Dalits who migrated from Bangladesh, who are also facing detention.

In Nadia district, two migrant workers from a Matua family, who had openly announced their allegiance to the BJP, were arrested by the Maharashtra police several months ago. Manishankar Biswas (23) and Nirmal Biswas (22) had left their home to work as carpenters in Akola district. Their father, Nishikanta, is an agricultural labourer. He and his wife, Puspaha, do not have the money to travel to Maharashtra. They live in a house put together with tin sheets.

"We have had several cases of people of the Matua community being held by the police in Maharashtra. When the police pick up people on the basis of language, both Hindus and Muslims will be arrested," says Nikhilesh Adhikari, a Nagpur-based lawyer who is trying to arrange bail for the two men.

On June 28, Banerjee urged migrant workers to return to West Bengal and assured them of work. Just a little over a month on, there are serpentine queues of migrant labourers at Howrah Station, booking tickets to leave again.

Rakesh Alam, 27, is boarding the Howrah Ahmedabad Superfast Express, leaving his four-month-old daughter behind. He says, "I cannot stay in Bengal when I have a family to feed."

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Is Trump winning on economic policy?



KENNETH ROGOFF

Six months into his second term, it is fair to say that US President Donald Trump has swept the board when it comes to economic policy — at least by the standards he set for himself. In fact, he has imposed his will to a degree no other post-World War II President, with the possible exception of Ronald Reagan, has been able to achieve. For starters, Mr Trump got his One Big Beautiful Bill Act passed, despite a razor-

thin majority in the House of Representatives and credible projections that his signature tax and spending package will add more than \$3 trillion to the federal deficit over the coming decade. And the southern US border is now more tightly controlled than it has been in decades. On tariffs in particular, Mr Trump got what he wanted. Europe and Japan effectively capitulated — agreeing to eliminate their own trade barriers while accepting a 15 per cent US tariff on their exports. Given these humiliating terms, it was more than a little absurd to see European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hail the deal as a success simply because Mr Trump backed down from his initial threat of a 30 per cent tariff. Both the European Union and Japan also committed to invest hundreds of billions of dollars in the US economy, with Mr Trump exerting significant influence over

where that money would be directed. His self-styled “Tariff Man” persona clearly rattled world leaders, many of whom failed to recognise that his threats were unsustainable in the long run. In retrospect, they would have been better off calling his bluff. While European policymakers were busy mitigating the impact of American tariff threats, Mr Trump pushed through legislation aimed at bringing cryptocurrencies into the mainstream financial system with minimal oversight. Astonishingly, despite the Trump family’s multi-billion-dollar crypto holdings, Congress has shown little interest in investigating the President’s glaring conflict of interest. To be sure, the GENIUS Act does contain some worthwhile ideas. One provision, for example, requires that stablecoins — cryptocurrencies pegged to a traditional currency or commodity, usually the US dollar — be backed by safe, liquid assets.

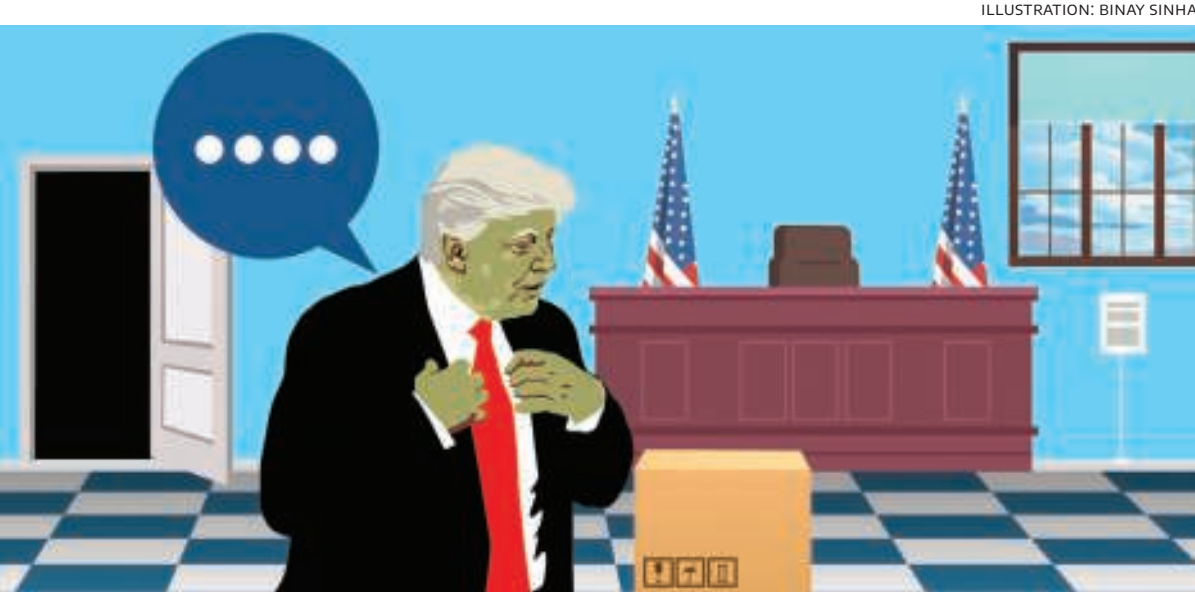


ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Tariffs and the chicken-out game



VIEWPOINT
DEVANGSHU DATTA

The supreme irony of the many ironies swirling around the United States–India tariff row is that petroleum product exports to the US from Indian refineries will not attract the tariffs announced by Donald Trump to “punish” India for importing crude oil and natural gas from Russia. That oil & gas is feedstock for India’s exports of petrol, diesel, kerosene and lubricants. Much has already been written about the hypocrisy of the US importing uranium compounds and fertilisers from Russia, so let’s not go there. From an investment and trading perspective, it’s clear there is no upside to tariffs for either nation. India would lose access to the world’s largest economy, with *desi* goods priced out of contention. In 2024, goods trade between the two nations amounted to \$129 billion —\$42 billion in US exports and \$87 billion in Indian exports. Those numbers would nosedive. The American consumer (and US-based manufacturers) would pay a lot more for whatever they import, wherever they import it from. Manufacturers and importers would pass on the costs — it’s already happening. For example, the Tata group fabricates air-

craft fuselages for Boeing. These are precision components and the manufacturer cannot be easily replaced. So Boeing might hike the price of its planes. Higher prices will mean inflation for Americans, which will lead to a demand dip. That will also mean the US doesn’t realise enough in the way of tariff revenues to compensate for the loss of tax revenues from strong consumption. What does a big tariff do to India’s economy? Many sectors derive a large component of their revenues from exports to the US. Sectors like pharmaceuticals, auto components, and textiles will be hit very hard. Other businesses, with lower exposure to the US will shrug and look for other markets. The stock market will adjust with a string of downgrades once tariffs are a done deal. Indian-owned businesses in the US, like Novelis (a subsidiary of Hindalco) will have to retool supply chains. Novelis imports its raw material from Canada (which also faces tariffs); auto manufacturers with US subsidiaries, like the Mahindra Group, will have to find workarounds for Indian components. Ditto for MNCs like Siemens and ABB, if they have US exposures, since they integrate their Indian subsidiaries into global value chains. The demands made by Donald Trump are impossible to meet. Politically speaking, there is no way the Narendra Modi government can easily open up agriculture. There is also no way in which India can stop buying Russian oil, without taking a huge hit to its trade balance. India will also incur higher costs and run into logistic and engineering issues if it does buy US oil & gas as it did offer to do.

There are few levers for India to exploit to try and change Mr Trump’s mind. The Modi government lacks the nerve to impose crazy countervailing tariffs as China did, as a bargaining counter. Cynically, India could offer to buy lots of defence goodies, negotiate a better deal and then renege, if Mr Trump becomes a lame duck after elections in November 2026. Defence deliveries take a long time. It would take several years to deliver the first F-35, if India ordered some this weekend. So there is the possibility of committing to a defence deal and subsequently cancelling, if tariff problems ease. This brings us to the other variables — the politics of the situation. Mr Trump is not legally capable of imposing tariffs without consent of the US Congress. Right now, that’s not a problem for him since Republicans hold majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate. But there is a good chance that the Democrats could flip the House and just maybe, the Senate too, if Mr Trump’s policies bite voters hard enough. So it may be a question of enduring the tariff pain until November 2026. Finally, oldtimers may recall what traders used to call the “Greenspan Put”. Whenever the economy was struggling, the former Federal Reserve Chairperson, Alan Greenspan (he served as Fed Chair from 1987-2006) would make an incomprehensively convoluted speech and then ease money supply. It didn’t matter what Greenspan said; he would reliably ease money supply. Some traders are now speaking in terms of the “TACO put”. It doesn’t matter what Mr Trump says, as long as he always chickens out.

Trump’s tariff victory is not what it seems

Mr Trump’s belligerence on trade has succeeded in twisting the arms of US allies rather than those of its biggest rival, to whom he has made multiple concessions while receiving little in return

It looks as though President Trump is winning the trade wars. Deals with the European Union, Japan, Britain and many other trading partners, which went into effect on Thursday, seem heavily one-sided. The United States gets to impose tariffs on imports from other countries and they agree to drop their tariffs on some US imports to zero, buy more US energy and other products and commit to increasing their investments in the United States. In the end, the victory will be Pyrrhic, especially for US households and businesses and for America itself, given the expected damage to its relationships with other countries and its standing in the world. There is little clarity about the meaning of countries’ agreements to invest more in the United States. Moreover, few of the deals have been signed. And Mr Trump’s unilateral imposition of tariffs, usurping congressional power, faces legal challenges. Hopes that the tariffs will help create jobs and bring down the trade deficit might also be hurt by other Trump policies. Many businesses, such as American automakers, may be left worse off relative to their foreign competition because they face high tariffs on imported steel and aluminium, as well as engines and other components. And since it is far from clear that the trade deals negotiated so far will stick, the uncertainty will crimp business investment. None of this is good for job growth. Will the trade deficit improve, at least? Certainly, imports ought to shrink as tariff barriers go up. But this is another case in which Mr Trump’s actions will make things worse. In the past, US exports related to tourism, education and financial services helped offset a good chunk of the trade deficit on manufactured products. Mr Trump’s attacks on US educational institutions and his harsh anti-immigration policies will deter students and tourists from coming to the

United States, hurting such service exports. Ever larger government budget deficits suggest that the United States will still be living beyond its means. The profligacy of the US government (and consumers) will result in higher imports, while borrowing from the rest of the world to finance that consumption will drive up the dollar, dampening exports and keeping trade deficits high. Why are other major powers genuflecting to Mr Trump? Even as growth in the US economy is losing momentum, other economies are in worse shape and far more dependent on exports. Losing access to US consumers, particularly at a time when their other export markets are foundering, would damage their economies. Countries securing deals are celebrating 10 per cent to 15 per cent tariffs as an improvement over the higher tariffs that Mr Trump had threatened. Even better for the United States, tariff revenues have soared since April, reaching a total of nearly \$100 billion, three times more than was collected during the same period last year. Mr Trump has talked about distributing some of these revenues to American households as a tariff rebate checks. That would help, because the brunt of the tariffs is being borne by American consumers and businesses rather than overseas exporters. Consumers are beginning to feel the effects in terms of higher prices while businesses are absorbing lower price markups on their sales as well as higher prices paid on intermediate goods and raw materials, which now face tariffs. Promises by other countries to encourage their companies to invest in the United States could prove empty. With all the uncertainty that Mr Trump has fomented in US policies and the increasing fragility of the rule of law, overseas companies may be reluctant to expand their US operations despite prodding by their governments.



ESWAR PRASAD

test is coming if the Supreme Court ultimately decides that he lacks authority to impose tariffs without Congress’s approval. If they stand, Mr Trump’s sweeping tariffs may have long-term effects on US growth. The rest of the world is unlikely to tolerate Mr Trump’s protectionist policies indefinitely. If he starts to look weak for any reason, expect foreign governments to retaliate with sweeping tariffs of their own. The Big Beautiful Bill could compound the damage, triggering a cycle of higher interest rates, rising inflation, and financial repression. Still, we should give Mr Trump his due and acknowledge that his second presidency is off to a far stronger start than almost anyone — aside from Mr Trump himself and his most fervent acolytes — could imagine six months ago. We should not be surprised by whatever comes next — and that might be the scariest part. The author is professor of economics and public policy at Harvard University ©Project Syndicate, 2025

Rewarding princesses of red Brio

EYE CULTURE
JYOTI MUKUL

Red is a colour of passion. Here, it is not about the political hue, but how colours make an emotional difference when chosen for personal pleasure. Colour, however, is the last decision a buyer makes when deciding on a car. This colour might be one that suits their numerological beliefs, looks good on the curves of a particular model, or is simply a favourite. Nonetheless, there has been a perceptible change over the past decade in how car purchases are made. Buyers today are spoilt for choice given the number of manufacturers and models that have been mainstreamed in the automobile sector, especially in high-volume geographies. Despite the steep price rise, the decision on a model is no longer based solely on engine power or range, but is also influenced by features such as torque, autonomous engine braking, and the design of the transmission tunnel — including its usability when running between the front two seats and connecting to the console. These were, however, not the concerns when a red Brio came into the household more than 15 years back. The decision on colour, nonetheless, was made for the enhanced sporty look it gave to Honda’s lightweight, low-priced car. While it was the first car for a new driver, it also meant that her daughter’s

short ride to the bus stop or Dalmatian Bella’s trips to veterinarians happened in style — it was handy for short-distance chores. Each time someone sat in the red Brio without Bella, she missed out on the thrill of a 15–20-minute ride. The Princess of the Red Brio looked forward to barking at random motorists who ventured too close to her mobile principality, at cops who harassed her pet mom during the Covid-19 lockdown, and at roadside strays. The thrill lasted even after she had been jabbed multiple times by a team of veterinarians. If the leash was accidentally left off, the only way to get her back was by opening the door of the red “joy box”. The ownership of 12-year-old Brio lasted until a few months after the Princesses passed away. Cars, however, are not just about thrill and memories. They are about livelihoods, too, whether for a delivery van that brings bottled water to a fuel outlet, which recently stopped dispensing to old cars on government order, or for a self-owned cab driver who moonlights to earn a few extra bucks by switching off his aggregator’s mobile app. To some commercial drivers, they can be like a piece of farmland they never owned but tilled as their own — cleaning it spick and span every day, just as a child is groomed and fed before being asked to study. Car as a machine, however, has a life span, cut short if not maintained well. It is important to understand that this lifespan for a particular vehicle is subjective and tricky to assess. In a pollution-

ridden geography like the National Capital Region of Delhi, the lifespan could be cut short to 10 years for diesel and 15 years for petrol variants. This translated into a recent Delhi government directive where fuel was denied to these “end-of-life” vehicles. The decision was taken back, but if found parked in public space, they can still be impounded. According to the VAHAN portal, the country in 2024-2025 registered 711,932 pure diesel four-wheelers, 5,326 diesel hybrids, and 2,015,030 pure petrol, and 907,197 other petrol hybrids including those that can take E20 fuel. These many vehicles just on petrol and diesel, for the country’s road network of 66.71 lakh km, mean that, in addition to those already on the road, one four-wheeler was added for every two km of road in India. And then there are two- and three-wheelers and non-automotive vehicles, too. It is nobody’s case that old, inefficient vehicles must not give way to newer ones if road congestion and air pollution are to be countered. However, discarding the old — that lives in someone’s memory and runs households — needs a compelling economic logic as well. It is important to build an ecosystem that reaches out to those who resist change by developing a robust reward system. Equally important is to have mechanised recycling that is truly an environment-friendly exercise, for hasty adieus hardly make joyful journeys. The author is a former journalist

Misjudging a presidency



TICKER
MIHIR S SHARMA

There are a lot of people in New Delhi who would like us to forget exactly how pleased, even smug, they were when President Donald Trump was voted into office in the United States (US) last year. The rest of the world might be concerned about his impulsiveness, his wayward economic instincts, and his willingness to burn bridges with America’s friends. But India, these people would tell us, was different. We were confident that we would emerge ahead in the Trump era. Perhaps we thought we knew how to deal with leaders with problematic economic policies? Perhaps we imagined we shared his cynical, amoral approach to international relations? Or perhaps we were just certain that anyone who disliked the same people we do — liberals, etc, etc — would be on

“our side” in international affairs far more than, say, the pesky Democrats. Let Europe, Japan, Canada, and especially China quake in their boots; India was prepared for a Trump term. We now know exactly how much that confidence was worth. India may yet emerge from this period of flux in trading relations with a tariff rate and exemption list from the US that allows some of its exporters to survive. But it is at this point in time unlikely that we will emerge as comfortably as have the old allies of the US — the British, for example — or even our peers and neighbours in Southeast Asia, which have settled in to make the best of it with tariff rates of 19 or 20 per cent. Indian officials are currently wondering how to bring the same rates for us back down from 50 per cent to 25. Unfortunately, some of the same discredited voices that had been so sanguine about India’s position in Mr Trump’s worldview are among the loudest now suggesting that Mr Trump’s insults are insupportable, imperialist, and soon. Any criticism levelled at the President is likely accurate and fair. But, as leaders from Europe to Northeast Asia have figured

out, it is also irrelevant. Some concessions clearly will have to be made to his pet obsessions, particularly on trade. The world is as it is, and Mr Trump is who he is, and the rest of us have to work around him and ignore him as far as possible, not react to his provocations. It seems that some of us — a set that overlaps oddly with those welcoming Mr Trump to office — have now made up our mind that his statements mean that our national interest, indeed our civilisational pride, requires us to hitch our wagon firmly to the Russian Federation instead, chasing a few billion dollars’ per year worth of savings in oil from Moscow over the multiple billions that accrue from trade with America and the West. Countries from France to Indonesia might ignore the President’s provocations and find a way to deal with the US nevertheless, this argument runs, but India must not. It is true that countries can manage a lot of pain if they must. If this is one of those occasions — such as after the nuclear tests — when India must endure a certain amount of privation to secure its long-term interests, then it is one thing. However, we should be very doubtful if the same instincts — driven by overconfidence — that led us to view Mr Trump’s advent with excitement now lead us down a path of isolation. There is, after all, another way of looking at how we have handled the past few years. We determined that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was none of our business, and proceeded to see how we could save some cash from it instead by buying slightly discounted oil. Officials estimated that there was no chance that this decision “in the national interest” would ever lead to anyone taking any sort of measures that seriously inconvenienced a state as pivotal and indispensable as India. Now that such inconvenient actions have been taken, or at least seriously threatened, by the leader of the West, we have two options: Either we recognise that our estimations of “the national interest” were incorrect in 2023, or we double down and insist that “the national interest” further requires us to run into the waiting arms of our close friends in Moscow, and therefore also embrace our reliable associates in Beijing. Which sounds more rational and supportive of the national interest to you?



{ OUR TAKE }

Securing the poll process

The Election Commission of India should engage constructively with criticism

Politics in India is a highly competitive and contested space. Elections are its high point. And there are too many held too frequently. This makes the challenge of the Election Commission of India (ECI) difficult and risky. In the past, this constitutional body has conducted itself in an exemplary manner, contributing to the significant deepening of democracy in the country. Its success in holding elections in a diverse polity such as India with minimum fuss and attracting little contestation has influenced many other democracies to learn from its experience. Against this backdrop, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's allegation that the institution has compromised its integrity to favour the electoral needs of the BJP marks a contentious moment. Gandhi is alleging that large-scale discrepancy in voter rolls in a single assembly segment influenced the results of the parliamentary constituency of Bangalore South, which the BJP won, in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. He has accused ECI of being in cahoots with the ruling dispensation and alleged that it stonewalled requests to share machine-readable voter lists. The BJP has described the allegations as motivated. Unnamed spokespeople for ECI have mounted an aggressive pushback, demanding that Gandhi either sign an affidavit backing his allegations or apologise to the nation. But its response has to be more sober and constructive. It has to offer a clear explanation to the charges the LoP has made to guard its institutional reputation and legacy. It must explore the possibility of releasing machine-readable voter lists and further expand its cooperation with political parties in sharing information with electoral rolls, within the bounds of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

There is precedent in this case. When complaints were raised about electronic voting machines in the past, ECI sought to rebut them by organising public demonstrations of the working of machines and explaining how EVMs are secured during the elections. This was an act that showed ECI as a highly responsible institution accountable to voters and willing to engage with its critics. The body secured not only the reputation of EVMs but also its own. Therefore, ECI should consider giving a more reasoned response rather than resorting to technicalities. It's the job of the poll watchdog to ensure that the electoral process is unsullied and remains above the political fray. For example, the ongoing special intensive revision in Bihar was aimed at cleaning up the voter rolls, but the high bar of documentation triggered complaints, prompting the Supreme Court to ask ECI to consider Aadhaar and voter IDs and remind the body that inclusion, rather than exclusion, should be the objective. Such controversies are best avoided.

There is a takeaway for the polity — both the government and the Opposition — as well. In India, allegations about compromised voter rolls are unfortunately both old and common and have been raised by parties cutting across the political spectrum. In a country with almost one billion voters, managing the electoral roll will always require some hard choices and balancing between fears of wrongful inclusion and wrongful exclusion of ordinary people. These decisions have to be made carefully and deliberatively, in an atmosphere not influenced by polarised electoral considerations. Unfortunately, that appears to be in short supply in India today.

Reconciling the questions about voter-roll integrity

As a start, ECI can be more upfront and cooperative in sharing information about the electoral rolls

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, made serious allegations about the integrity of elections and electoral rolls in the country on Thursday. The Congress has alleged that some *prima facie* credible discrepancies in electoral rolls in a single assembly segment (Mahadevapura) made a critical difference to overall results in the Lok Sabha constituency of Bangalore Central, which was won by the Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2024 polls. He also charged the Election Commission of India (ECI) — one of the most critical constitutional institutions which safeguards the sanctity of democratic competition and hence peaceful transfer of power — of colluding with the ruling dispensation. What is one to make of these allegations? Three things can be said. This is neither the first nor the last allegation of electoral rigging in India via various forms. These allegations are more likely to be levelled against a hegemonic political party that is difficult to dislodge from power. The Left Front and the Trinamool Congress in pre- and post-2011 West Bengal, Lalu Prasad Yadav's rule in Bihar in the 1990s — which brought the TN-Seshan-led ECI in direct conflict with the Bihar government — the BJP's allegations of rigged EVMs after its defeat in the 2009 elections, and the Congress's string of allegations against the BJP in the post-2019 period are some such instances. In many cases, the parties accused of such rigging eventually lost power, which suggests that even if there were irregularities, it was never strong enough to permanently subvert democratic sentiments. If one were to confine the argument to

unscrupulously engineered electoral rolls — which is what Gandhi is alleging now — there is good reason to believe that these were never an epitome of integrity in the past. A data analysis in this newspaper found that the number of registered voters often exceeded the number of adults of voting age in the country (as seen in the census) in many past elections. All this, however, does not mean that Gandhi's allegations should be summarily dismissed. This is because the core of his demand is that ECI be more upfront and cooperative in sharing information about the electoral rolls, and their translation to actual voting, with political parties. While one might have to look carefully at the fine print of laws and rules vis-à-vis the mechanism of ECI sharing information with political parties, in principle, there is nothing wrong in raising such a demand. India has almost one billion voters now, and it is impractical to expect political parties to ascertain the integrity of electoral rolls without resorting to machine-based tools. ECI has to provide machine-readable electoral rolls for this to happen. The longer ECI stonewalls this demand, the more it will hurt its credibility. This brings us to the final point. Even if one were to accept, for the sake of argument, that political actors do try to contaminate electoral rolls to influence results — such allegations go back a long time in India — the question is: Can something be done at a systemic level to prevent this from happening? Regions with a contested history of migration such as Assam have had long spells of unrest over these issues, which in turn led to controversial moves such as the National Register of Citizens. In such instances, allegations about the lack of integrity of electoral rolls triggered mass unrest and often divisive and violent agitations, indicating that there was organic traction, justified or not, in the belief of large-scale vote tampering.



Regions with a contested history of migration such as Assam have had long spells of unrest over electoral roll discrepancies, which led to controversial moves such as the NRC. HT PHOTO

Recent allegations about tampering have seen no such mass unrest, which suggests that they might not be as large in scale. Be that as it may, can ECI and the system as a whole do something about making electoral rolls more robust and immune to malfeasance? This is the proverbial elephant in the room. Should we move towards linking electoral rolls to other databases such as Aadhaar, which, theoretically, make it possible to eliminate discrepancies such as multiple entries for the same person or even prevent the same person voting more than once? Many voices

driven by privacy concerns have opposed such moves, and there is some merit in their concerns about all this emboldening a larger surveillance State. However, it is also worth asking whether we are only protecting privacy on a *de-jure* basis while it is being blatantly violated by State and non-State actors colluding with each other to subvert it in a *de-facto* manner.

Another option could be to resort to processes such as electoral-roll additions or dele-

tions requiring mandatory approval of designated representatives of recognised political parties. As will be obvious to the discerning reader, neither of these processes can be deemed foolproof. The choice, as is always the case while making large databases, will be between wrongful inclusion and wrongful exclusion. The Opposition, with its attacks about fake voters, is emphasising wrongful inclusion. But, it is also protesting possible wrongful exclusion by opposing the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, presently ongoing in Bihar. Logically, one cannot minimise one without letting the other increase.

In an ideal world, ECI should have been a non-partisan body, making both the ruling party and Opposition realise the inherent tension between the concerns of wrong inclusion and exclusion in electoral rolls. But realpolitik and institutional propriety crossed the Rubicon of this ideal a long time ago, and it is condemned to veer towards the banks of one echo chamber or another.

The views expressed are personal.

The physics of violin, when music and science meet

In 1922 a young man, C Subrahmanya Ayyar, gave his first solo performance playing the violin at the Presidency College, Madras. The soiree was followed by a lecture by Ayyar's younger brother on the physical properties of the sound made by the violin. The latter was none other than the eminent physicist, Sir CV Raman. The connection between physics and the violin went much further. Ayyar himself would quote from the works of eminent physicists like Hermann von Helmholtz in his writings on the violin and Raman would go on to build a "mechanical violin player". In the roughly two decades between World Wars I and II, Indian physicists published nearly a dozen papers in the two foremost international physics journals of the day, *The Physical Review* and *The Philosophical Magazine*, on the violin or research closely related to it. There were many more papers in local scientific journals as well. The history of the violin in the hands of Indian physicists is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the relationship between science and culture. Music historian Amanda Weidman relates Ayyar and Raman's interest in the violin to the larger history of the creation of a "classical" form of Carnatic music. The first violins had arrived in India in the 1760s in Calcutta. But they were soon taken up by musicians in southern India. Baluswamy Dikshitar, the brother of composer Muthuswamy Dikshitar; the composer-king of Travancore (in today's Kerala) Swati Tirunal; His court performer Vadivelu; and Varahappayar, the canny minister of Maharaja Serfoji of Thanjavur, are all known to have played the violin around the dawn of the 19th century. A century later, by the 1920s, the violin had been thoroughly incorporated into Carnatic music. But

strenuous efforts were being made to distance it from its earlier historical connections to Irish and Scottish fiddling — from which the Kannada name for it, *piteelu*, had derived, and to establish it as a classical instrument. Even the way the instrument was held, often using one's feet, were vigorously criticised by reformers such as Ayyar who sought to reshape its profile and playing technique to align it with classical western conventions. Weidman also points to the explicit links between these classicising tendencies and the expression of modernised caste and class identities. There were even advertisements of violins targeted explicitly to the then-rising Brahmin middle class in colonial Madras. Such biographical and social context might suggest that the Indian physicist's enthusiasm for the violin was entirely derived from the social milieu of colonial Madras. That, however, would be misleading. If we look closer at the places and people involved in violin research, we find a more complicated history. The man who published the most in international journals on the violin was Kulesh Chandra Kar. His very first paper on the subject, while still a student, would be published in the *Philosophical Magazine*. It was indeed Raman himself who first suggested this line of research to Kar. Kar was himself a musical enthusiast and so he readily embraced the research. But Kar had no discernible relationship to Carnatic music or the social life of Madras. Born in Bihar, Kar was mostly educated in Calcutta and went on to teach at the physics department of Presidency College, Calcutta. As a charismatic teacher, Kar was successful in getting several talented students interested in violin research. One of the students who took up violin research through his influence was BK Sen. Sen



Projit Bihari Mukharji



By the 1920s, the violin had been thoroughly incorporated into Carnatic music. HT PHOTO

went on to work at the physics department of Rajshahi College, in present-day Bangladesh. Like Kar, Sen too rebuilt and improved upon the mechanical violin player originally designed by Raman. Unfortunately, Sen's model was left behind and eventually destroyed during the Partition.

Other, younger researchers such as NK Datta and SK Ghosh, at Presidency College, Calcutta and RN Ghosh at Allahabad University would also publish multiple papers on violin-research. They too worked with versions of the mechanical violin player.

Based in Allahabad, Calcutta, Shibpur, and Rajshahi, most of these researchers were Bengalis. They had little exposure to Carnatic music and certainly were not caught up in the social processes of colonial Madras, as Ayyar and Raman had been. Those amongst them that were musically inclined had their ears tuned to Hindustani classical music, rather than Carnatic.

The violin had never been adopted into Hindustani music the way it had been absorbed into Carnatic music. It was only around the mid-1940s that

VG Jog began to introduce the violin into Hindustani classical circles. Scientists like Kar, Datta, or Ghosh, would, therefore, be unlikely to associate the instrument directly with their own musical tastes. In fact, it is possible that the basis of the interest in violin acoustics amongst Calcutta physicists had roots that predated Raman's. Ramendrasunder Tribedi, a physicist and prolific science-writer, had written about experiments with the violin that were similar — though much simpler — than the ones conducted by Raman sometime around the 1910s. The essay was published in 1926, four years after Tribedi's death. Tribedi was extremely prominent in Calcutta's intellectual circles. He was a close friend and later relative by marriage to Rabindranath Tagore as well as being a founding member and president of the Bengali Literary Association. His work and writings would therefore have been influential for younger researchers. Yet, Tribedi was a connoisseur and student of Hindustani classical music. The roots of Tribedi's influence, like Ayyar's, went back to the research of Helmholtz, whom Tribedi addressed as "Mahatma Helmholtz". While personal interests and cultural resonances often amplified the attraction of particular lines of research, physics also had its own intellectual lineages. The violin, through Helmholtz, had emerged as much a research tool as a musical instrument. The two biographies of the violin — as research tool and musical instrument — occasionally intersected and occasionally did not. To completely conflate the two would not only be misleading but would also caricature the complicated relationship between science and culture. Like people, objects such as the violin, perform in multiple arenas of human existence and creativity. Culture and science are both such arenas. The mutual relationship of these two arenas cannot be predetermined. It unfolds differently in different historical contexts and through the actual traffic of people and objects between these arenas.

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Tamil Nadu's trans policy: Aspirational yet incomplete

The government of Tamil Nadu recently released its State Policy for Transgender Persons. The policy is expansive and aspirational, aiming to institutionalise dignity, non-discrimination, and socio-economic inclusion for transgender and intersex persons. Unlike the narrower contours of the central Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, this policy charts a more intersectional and rights-affirming vision. It upholds the right to self-identification and mandates all state agencies to respect a person's self-declared gender identity without requiring surgical or medical intervention. It affirms that transgender and intersex persons are entitled to equality before the law and protection from discrimination in all spheres. The policy spans a wide range of domains: Education, employment, housing, health, legal recognition, protec-

tion from violence, and political participation. In education, it mandates anti-discrimination measures, grievance redressal officers, and curricular inclusion. Employment provisions require workplaces to ensure non-discriminatory hiring, sensitisation, equal career progression, and redress mechanisms. In health care, it promises to expand state insurance to include gender-affirming procedures, train health care workers, and provide mental health services. It also outlines commitments to legal aid, inclusive housing, shelter homes, and electoral participation. The Transgender Welfare Board is tasked with implementing many of these programmes. Finally, the policy affirms an intersectional approach, acknowledging that caste, religion,

class, and disability may compound marginalisation. It also includes provisions for periodic review and an oversight mechanism. The policy, however, raises three key concerns: inclusive language, reservations, and the scope of its mandate. First, the Tamil version uses the word *thirunangai*, referring to trans women. The more inclusive *thirunar* is used by the community to include trans men and non-binary persons. The persistence of *thirunangai* may lead to continued exclusion. Trans men have previously been turned away from benefits due to such wording. This undermines the commitment to recognising diverse identities. Second, it recognises transgender and intersex persons as "socially and educationally most disadvantaged", in line with the Supreme Court's NALSA ruling. However, it falls short in its approach to reservations. Currently, trans persons in Tamil Nadu are placed under the Most Backward Classes (MBC) category, which flattens caste and gender into a single vertical category, ignoring intersectionality. Grace Banu's petition before the Madras



Jwalika Balaji

High Court (HC) seeks horizontal reservations (like those for women and persons with disabilities), allowing trans persons to claim benefits across caste lines. The policy neither reflects this demand nor takes a clear stance, as urged by the Madras HC. Whether the final design of the reservation framework addresses this concern remains to be seen. Third, in *Sushma v. Commissioner of Police*, the Madras HC directed the state to formulate a policy for the entire LGBTQIA+ community. The present policy, however, excludes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer persons. This narrow framing is a missed opportunity to put in place protections for the broader queer community. In sum, while the policy codifies significant commitments, it remains incomplete. If Tamil Nadu is to retain its reputation as a pioneer in social justice, the policy must adopt inclusive language, commit to horizontal reservations, and expand its scope to include the full spectrum of queer experiences.

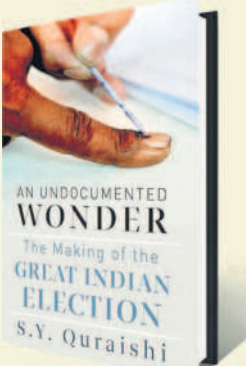
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{ EDITOR'S PICK }

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

A STORY OF INDIAN ELECTIONS

The spotlight is on the Election Commission of India (ECI) with the Opposition accusing the constitutional body of partisanship, and demanding answers regarding alleged electoral roll tampering. Amid this increasing scrutiny of ECI's functioning, we recommend *An Undocumented Wonder: The Great Indian Election* by SY Quraishi. The book documents how ECI has overcome challenges such as India's vast geography and diversity in conducting polls at regular intervals since Independence in 1947. It explores the secret behind the poll body's operational success, the ideals and principles driving the people involved in accomplishing the mammoth task, and how India emerged as the global gold standard in conducting elections. The author, a former chief election commissioner, combines his first-hand knowledge of ECI's functioning and the archival history of Indian elections to explain the biggest show of electoral democracy in the world.



An Undocumented Wonder: SY Quraishi Year: 2014