When you clap, where does the sound come from?

Priyali Prakash

What are the odds you clapped your hands in the last 24 hours? Probably very high. Clapping is a common activity for people – so common that we take the sound it makes for granted. But do you know where that sound comes from?

In a study recently published in *Physical Review Research*, researchers used real-life and experimental data and theory to find the answer.

At the heart of the sound is a Helmholtz resonator – a device that produces sound by trapping and vibrating air within a cavity. When you push air into or out of it, the air molecules oscillate and create sound of a particular frequency. This is also why blowing over the aperture of an open bottle produces a whistling sound.

The researchers said the air enclosed between the palms is the cavity in a Helmholtz resonator. In an experiment, they deposited dry baby powder into a palm cavity to render the airflow visible. Then as the hands clapped, the researchers tracked airflow behaviour, acoustic signal, cavity pressure, and soft material deformation.

The team found that the first and strongest jet of air was heard at the first impact of the two palms, after which the jet dissipated. They recorded a few secondary and tertiary jets as well but they created little sound. This established the clapping sound was caused by air flowing between the palms, not by the palms' vibration. Each clapping sound dissipated in about 10 ms.

Palm shapes

Not all claps were the same. The team found that different palm shapes made different sounds. The frequency, and therefore the pitch, increased as the shape changed from cupped to palm-palm to palm-finger contact.

Claps by some individuals also had two distinct frequency peaks: a lower one associated with the Helmholtz resonator and the higher one with sound from the finger grooves, when the fingers met the receiving hand. These grooves acted like a pipe open at one end, and the sound was made by air vibrating inside.

Because people clap differently and because fingers can bend to different degrees while clapping, the real-life sound peaks varied from theory.

The team also reported that though the extent of skin deformation didn't affect the frequency much, it could still affect the sound's intensity and how long it lasted.

Microgravity increases core body temperature: IIST study

A 3D computational model of human thermoregulation developed by IIST researchers tracks how heat moves through the body, and accounts for mechanisms like sweating, shivering, and other factors that influence regulation of body heat

Shreejaya Karantha

The Voyager 1 spacecraft was 25 billion km away in February, somewhere in the outer edge of the solar system. It's the farthest a human-made spacecraft has gone from the earth. The hope is that in the distant future, a human astronaut will be able to go where Voyager 1 has been – a journey that could take several years of spaceflight.

An important factor that determines an astronaut's well-being on such journeys is thermoregulation: their body's capacity to maintain a stable internal temperature. In the unique microgravity environment of space, this process faces significant challenges.

Now, researchers at the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST), Thiruvananthapuram, have published a study reporting that "microgravity consistently increases core body temperature, with fluid shifts playing a crucial role in thermal balance," in the words of Shine S.R., a professor of aerospace engineering at IIST and an author of the study.

Human bodies respond differently to temperature changes based on age, fitness level, and body fat, among other parameters. In environments with near-zero gravity like earth orbit, the human body changes significantly, affecting bones, muscles, the heart, the immune system, metabolism, even individual cells.

On the trail of body heat

In the microgravity of space, thermoregulation faces significant challenges



Exiting station: An astronaut taking part in a spacewalk. NASA

1 An important factor that determines an astronaut's well-being on space journeys is thermoregulation: their body's capacity to maintain a stable internal temperature

2 IIST Thiruvananthapuram researchers have used a model to find that "microgravity consistently increases core body temperature, with fluid shifts playing a crucial role in thermal balance"

3 Microgravity environments affect the human body's bones, muscles, the heart, the immune system, metabolism, even individual cells

4 Some of the resulting complications can be severe, so space agencies and astronauts continuously monitor a spacefarer's body temperature

5 The model simulates "the effects of microgravity on thermoregulation, including blood redistribution, reduced blood volume, changes in metabolism, and alterations in bone and muscle mass"

Some of the resulting complications can be severe, so space agencies and astronauts continuously monitor the spacefarer's body temperature.

Scientists using a computer model to evaluate the body's ability to regulate temperature in specific conditions must also account for "physiological changes observed in space, including blood shifts, metabolic variations, muscle atrophy, and environmental influences".

Mr. Shine said his team has developed a 3D computational model of human thermoregulation that "incorporates these changes to simulate the effects of microgravity on thermoregulation, including blood redistribution, reduced blood volume, changes in metabolism, and alterations in bone and muscle mass".

According to Chithramol M.K., PhD student at IIST and first author of the study, the team's studies were limited by sufficient as well as accessible data on metabolic changes. In situations where data was unavailable, she said they tested how different factors changed their results and used their "best judgment and standard engineering practices" to assess their impact.

The model uses mathematical equations to track how heat moves through the body in three dimensions, and accounts for mechanisms like sweating and shivering, the impact of clothing, heat generated by vital organs, and other factors that have a say on how a body regulates its temperature.

Each factor is modeled separately and then combined to understand the overall impact of microgravity on thermoregulation.

The team published its findings with the model in *Life Sciences in Space Research* on March 29.

"Our findings reveal that the redistribution of blood from the lower limbs to the upper body in microgravity environments significantly impacts the body's temperature distribution," Mr. Shine and Ms. Chithramol said.

Specifically, the researchers reported that while the feet and hands become cooler as the body spends more time in microgravity, the head, abdomen, and the core get warmer.

The model also indicated that when astronauts exercise in space, their body temperature rises faster than it does on the earth.

Over 2.5 months in microgravity, considering 30% lower sweating and 36% higher metabolism, the core body temperature may increase to around 37.8 C from 36.3 C before flight. If one were exercising in the same conditions, the temperature would be closer to 40 C.

The researchers were able to confirm their model was able to predict real outcomes by using it to simulate astronauts' body temperature onboard the USSR's and Russia's erstwhile Mir space station and onboard the International Space Station, then compared its output to official reports. They matched.

As thermoregulation models indicate how a person responds to temperature changes, they are also used in many everyday situations. For example, clothiers use such models to fine-tune how their products keep people warm or cool. Architects use such models to design buildings to lower heat stress of their occupants. In medicine, especially during heart surgeries, thermoregulation models predict how a patient's body temperature changes, helping both doctors and patients avoid complications.

According to the IIST team, these models calculate the universal thermal climate index – a number that indicates how hot or cold it feels outside by considering factors like wind, humidity, and sunlight.

Mr. Shine said, "These models are valuable tools for enhancing safety, comfort, and performance in diverse real-world scenarios" in addition to astronaut health and safety in microgravity environments.

(Shreejaya Karantha is a freelance science writer.)

'Development' at the cost of Nicobar Islands



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. Balasubramanian

The famous tree crusader and tree lover Shri 'Vanajeevi' Ramaiah who passed away last month was a firm believer that trees are vital for our lives. This Padma Shri awardee planted over one crore saplings across Telangana, thus making us live in unison with nature. But the current dispute between the Telangana State government and the University of Hyderabad about the area of Kancha Gachibowli would have disappointed Ramaiah. While the University wants the land as a green forested area, as a reservoir for 700 varieties of plant species, 200 varieties of birds, and 10-20 different mammals to be preserved as nature's gift, the State government wants this area for technology parks and related purposes. The 'fight' has reached the Supreme Court, and we await its decision.

Unfortunately, several other States across India face the same predicament, with land being used for hi-tech cities, pharmaceutical zones, highways, fast trains, and airports. While all these are needed for the public good, the question is: should these be at the cost of losing greenery, flowery plants, and tribal people who subsist on these? Will this not be a betrayal of what Vanajeevi Ramaiah stood for?

We use the term 'betrayal' drawing from the perspective of Professor Pankaj Sekhsaria, who has over three decades of experience on the Nicobar Islands, examining environmental and wildlife conservation alongside the intricate connections between society, environment, science, and technology.

He has curated a book called *The Great Nicobar Betrayal*, chronicling how the Central government has proposed to use the Nicobar Islands for several purposes: a trans-shipment facility at the Galathea Bay for access across the sea, building an international airport, and a power plant for electricity. In addition, a greenfield township is planned for increasing the population from the current 8,000 natives to about 3.5 lakh, by inviting people from mainland India to come and stay as citizens for these projects and to visit for holidays.



The Centre's plans in the Nicobar Islands, especially land taken over for deforestation, will affect the native Shompen tribe. PUBLIC DOMAIN

The book has raised several important issues concerning the ecological splendour, with over 2,000 species of fauna and 811 species of flora in the islands, plus the future of the native people. All of these will be affected by the 'development' planned by the Central government. Furthermore, as the land is taken over for deforestation, the fate of the native Nicobarese tribe, particularly the vulnerable tribal group Shompen (see picture), which needs forests for livelihood, will be affected. Also, the giant leatherback turtles, found every season in the seacoast, will be in danger when the seacoast is taken over for development. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is yet to answer this query.

But, in January 2023, a group of former civil servants had written to the President of India, pointing out how the Indian government is out to destroy the pristine habitat, which is home to various rare and endemic species. They further pointed out how the government will 'compensate' this loss by planting forests in Haryana, 2,600 km away from Nicobar.

India has, among the 200 countries across the globe, signed the Convention for Biological Diversity, which will 'reduce to near zero the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems of high ecological integrity'. And, as the ex-civil servants have requested, the President and the Government of India should immediately stop the commencement of destructive projects in Great Nicobar.

For interested readers, the book *The Great Nicobar Betrayal* is available from Amazon and *The Hindu* Bookstore: https://publications.thehindugroup.com/bookstore

SNAPSHOTS



Shi's Star Catalogue in China world's oldest, says study

The Shi's Star Catalogue is China's oldest star catalogue. Researchers analysed 118 stars to reveal two distinct observational periods in its pages: around 355 BC and 125 AD. Their findings suggest the Catalogue's original observations date to the 'Warring States' period in China's history and that updates were added during the Eastern Han dynasty, possibly in the time of the philosopher and statesman Zhang Heng. Thus, the study confirmed that Shi's Star Catalogue is the world's earliest known star catalogue.



Submarine canyons move microplastics to deep sea

A study in *ACS Environmental Science & Technology* has reported the first direct evidence of turbidity currents, a.k.a. submarine avalanches, in underwater canyons transporting microplastics *en masse* into the deep sea. Researchers used hydrodynamic monitoring and sediment sampling in the Whittard Canyon off Ireland to find that even canyons not fed by rivers could transport pollutants to depths of more than 3 km. The same currents also move nutrients and nurture deep-sea biodiversity.



Use of cannabis linked to higher colon cancer mortality

Using data from the University of California Health system, a researcher has reported that patients with preexisting cannabis use disorder had a 55% higher five-year mortality rate compared to those without (5.05%). Likewise, patients diagnosed with the disorder prior to cancer diagnosis were 24.4-times more likely to die within five years of diagnosis. The association was found to persist even after adjusting for demographics and disease severity.

Question Corner

Fishing limit

What is the total allowable catch?

The total allowable catch (TAC) is a limit on the total quantity of fish that fishers can catch in a particular area. It's usual for agencies and governments worldwide that have jurisdiction over fisheries or fish stock in seas, oceans, lakes, etc. to impose a TAC to prevent fishers from catching and removing too many fish from the water body. TACs are important so that the fish population in a water body can maintain a minimum size every year that allows it to sustain itself. Without a TAC, overfishing can remove too many fish, leaving behind too few for the population to sustain itself.

Another TAC was recently in the news in an escalating dispute involving the U.S. and Russia. Last month, a U.S. judge blocked the import of Patagonia toothfish caught in the South Atlantic Ocean. Since 2021, Russia has refused to admit a TAC for this species in this area set by the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. The rejection forced all other countries on the Commission to set their own limits.

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

Do public R&D units innovate enough?

What does a recent report highlight about research in India? What are some of the recommendations?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far:
The office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Centre for Technology, Innovation, and Economic Research have released a detailed assessment of public-funded research and development in India. In all, 244 R&D organisations, affiliated to various ministries, participated in the study, 'Evaluation of Innovation Excellence Indicators of Public Funded R&D Organizations'. However, scientific institutions such as those belonging to defence research, space, and atomic energy research, which make up the dominant share of India's overall R&D spend, were excluded from the study, due to the "sensitive nature" of their work. Academic institutions and universities also weren't part of the study.

What was the purpose of this study?
The survey was administered via an online questionnaire and was designed to capture the contributions of public-funded R&D organisations in areas critical to India's growth. The key question that the authors of the report sought to answer was whether these labs were largely engaged in curiosity-driven academic science, or geared towards developing products and new innovations that aligned with the demands of industry. The authors sought to "capture and evaluate" innovation indicators of public-funded R&D labs/institutes.

A significant finding is that only about 25% of the labs surveyed gives incubation support to startups and only 16% provide support to 'deep tech' startups

"The analysis and recommendations in this report were meant to guide the public-funded R&D labs/institutes to increase their contributions meaningfully towards a number of Sustainable Development Goals and national priorities through their research capabilities, to help the nation navigate various challenges on the socio-economic front, from health challenges to ensuring a more diverse scientific base through opportunities for women scientists, and finally to contribute to skilling and creating meaningful employment by working alongside industry and startups," the study noted.

How was it conducted?
These big-picture questions were broken down into 62 parameters. These included questions on the labs' annual spend on R&D, number of young scientists, patents filed, technologies developed, participation of women scientists and their contribution to 'national missions' such as the 'Deep Ocean Mission,' 'National Quantum Mission' etc. Labs/institutes self-selected themselves as 'Basic, Applied or Services' or as 'hybrid' – a lab/institute whose research straddles more than one of the three research categories of basic, applied and services. All the data submitted by the labs/institutes were accompanied with the director's sign-off indicating that the submitted data was authentic and valid.

What were the key findings?
A significant finding was that only about 25% of the labs surveyed gave incubation support to startups and only 16% provided support to 'deep tech' startups. Only 15% collaborated with industry overseas and only half of them opened their facilities to researchers and students from outside. About half the labs/institutes contributed to national policies and developing technologies targeting the 'Make in India' initiative. The Skill India Mission was being targeted by around 35% of the organisations while around 30% of the organisations said they were targeting the Swachh Bharat Mission. A large number of labs/institutes reported a decrease in the number of permanent staff in 2022-23 compared to the previous year and an increased reliance – from 17,234 to 19,625 – on contractual staff. The median share of young researchers increased in 2022-23 to around 58% from 54% in the previous year. The combined budget of 155 labs/institutes increased from ₹9,924 crore in 2017-18 to ₹13,162 crore in 2022-23. The total number of scientific staff and the share of women scientists within scientific staff remained stagnant across 2021-2023.

Does the report make recommendations?
As part of its recommendations, the report advocates that every lab should be "mandated to review their existing mandates" and align themselves to 'Viksit Bharat.' The mandate is to focus on "critical technologies" as directed by the government, and that public-funded R&D organisations must adopt this strategy on a "war footing". They should work closely with industry, as well as each other. The report recommends setting up of Section 8 companies (non profit organisations registered under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs) to provide support to startups, opening research and testing facilities and, improving cross-linkages with higher educational institutes.

What are the key objectives of caste count?

Why is the BJP government's decision a surprise? What are the challenges the exercise will throw up? What are the complexities? What will it mean for the reservation ceiling? Which are the States that have already conducted a caste enumeration?

Priscilla Jebaraj

The story so far:
The Union Cabinet has decided that the next Census will include questions on caste to its enumeration of India's population, for the first time in almost a century. The decision, a reversal of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) stance so far, comes ahead of the crucial Bihar elections, and throws up myriad challenges.

Have Indians been counted by caste before?
When the British first started counting India's population in 1881, caste data was included in the information gathered. For the next half-century, the decennial censuses collected caste information. The last time that data was published was from the 1931 census, which counted 4,147 castes and sub-castes across the country. Though the wartime 1941 census also collected data on individual castes, it was never released. After India gained Independence, the government decided to avoid the question of caste in the census, only counting Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SCs/STs).

In his report on the 1931 census, then-Census Commissioner J.H. Hutton dismissed the arguments of those who did not wish to collect caste and religion data on the grounds that they would perpetuate divisions, noting that "the census cannot, however, hide its head in the sand like the proverbial ostrich, but must record as accurately as possible facts as they exist." He struck down previous British attempts to list a hierarchy of castes, in accordance with their perceived ranks in society, instead choosing to use occupations as the basis of classification, though this did not account for the fluidity of caste identities and the variations in caste names across time and geographies. The 1931 census data was also the basis for reservation efforts half a century later; its finding that 52% of the country's population belonged to castes later grouped under the Other Backward Class (OBC) category became the basis of the Mandal Commission's recommendation for a 27% quota for OBCs in education and government jobs.

No dates have been notified for the next Census, which will include the caste count

In 2011, the Union Ministry of Rural Development kicked off a different kind of caste-counting exercise as part of its Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC). The data collected was meant to be used for research and policy making and to effectively design and implement development and welfare schemes. Though parts of the data were published in 2016, the raw data on specific caste populations was not included. As the SECC left its questions on caste open-ended rather than making them choose their caste from a set list, respondents often entered their surnames, meaning that the SECC enumerators counted more than 46 lakh different castes.



Counting more: Bihar Congress president celebrates with supporters the decision to include caste in the upcoming Census, in Patna, on May 1. PTI

Have individual States counted castes?
At least three States have conducted caste censuses. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar led the effort to survey the State's caste break-up in 2023, finding that OBCs and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) accounted for more than 63% of the State's population, stirring the political pot with demands for higher representation for these castes in politics, education, and employment. The Congress rode to power in Telangana in 2023, partly on the basis of its promise to conduct a caste survey, which was published in 2024 and showed that backward classes make up more than 56% of the State's population. Karnataka's caste survey was also commissioned by a Congress government, in Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's first term in 2015. The results, however, were published only a decade later, and showed that the State's OBC population stood at almost 70%.

What will this data be used for?
Apart from its use in academic research and policy making, the key import of caste data from a public and political viewpoint is what changes it will drive in affirmative action or reservation policies. The 27% OBC quota for education and government jobs was set on the basis of a projection from the 1931 census; a new caste count could well upend those estimates.

In Karnataka, for instance, where the caste survey found that the OBC population is significantly higher than estimated, there have been demands to increase their quota in the State from 32% to 51%. The clamour for more reservation, backed by caste population data, is also likely to lead to a challenge of the Supreme Court-mandated 50% cap on reservation.

What is the context for this decision?
The BJP-led government's decision came as a surprise given that the demand for a caste census has been a major plank of the Opposition's poll campaigns. The BJP has long resisted the demand, accusing the Congress of using caste to divide Indians. Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai even responded to questions in Parliament insisting that there were no plans to include caste in the next Census, terming it a "matter of policy".

The Bihar caste survey, however, set off a political tinderbox that carried over into the 2024 general election campaign. The Opposition, in its campaign for social justice also stoked fears among sections of voters that the BJP was seeking a large majority in order to be able to remove reservations and amend the Constitution, which led to lower vote counts for the BJP in many constituencies.

The decision to conduct a caste count "steals the thunder" from the Opposition's campaign just ahead of the Bihar Assembly elections, where it is sure to become a poll issue. The BJP is seeking to reframe the narrative, claiming that the Congress is all talk and no action, as it had never conducted a caste census at the national level while in power at the Centre. Though the Opposition is seeking to claim credit for pressuring the government into taking this decision, it is also pivoting to the logical next step, of demanding that reservations be hiked in response to the caste census findings, seeking to breach the Supreme Court's 50% cap.

What is the timeline for implementation?
The catch in the Centre's announcement is that no dates have yet been notified for the next Census. The last Census was held in 2011, with the 2021 Census being delayed indefinitely, initially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The addition of a caste component involves more work for Census officials.

The next step will be to draft a code directory of castes to be used in the Census. Unlike the SECC, which had an open-ended query on the respondent's caste, the Census is likely to provide a drop-down list of castes for respondents to choose from. How castes will be listed is a thorny political question, given that the Centre and States have differing, and often contentious OBC lists. Linguistic and regional diversity in caste names, splitting of castes into sub-castes over time, and disagreements on whether specific castes fit into SC, OBC, or general categories, are likely to complicate the process. Religion adds another factor into the mix, with questions about how non-Hindu groups will be recognised and whether they will get benefits on the basis of the caste census.

Are vaccine-preventable diseases rising?

What has WHO, UNICEF and Gavi warned? Why are vaccination schedules being missed? Why is there a threat to immunisation efforts? What are world leaders being advised to do? What happened during the pandemic? What is the status in India?

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

The story so far:
Diseases that can be prevented through vaccination, such as measles, meningitis, and yellow fever, are re-emerging, world health leaders have warned, because millions of children are missing vaccinations due to funding cuts and disruption in immunisation programmes. The World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and Gavi have issued a joint warning stating that immunisation efforts are also being threatened by widespread misinformation, population growth and humanitarian crises. They urged leaders around the world to strengthen vaccination programmes and give the issue their "urgent and sustained political attention."

What set alarm bells ringing?
A recent WHO rapid stock take with 108 of its country offices mostly in low- and lower-middle-income countries showed that nearly half of those countries are facing moderate to severe disruptions in vaccination campaigns, routine immunisation, and access to supplies due to reduced donor funding. Disease surveillance, including for vaccine-preventable diseases, has also been impacted in more than half the countries surveyed.

Vaccines help protect from diseases like measles, polio, tuberculosis, and more recently, COVID-19

At the same time, the number of children missing routine vaccinations has been increasing, even as countries try to catch up with vaccinations for children to make up for the lost pandemic years. In 2023, an estimated 14.5 million children missed all their routine vaccine doses – up from 13.9 million in 2022 and 12.9 million in 2019. Over half of these children live in countries facing conflict, fragility, or instability, where access to basic health services is often disrupted. Even in the U.S., there is a measles outbreak. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed that as of May 1, the measles case count is 935, more than triple the number seen in 2024. It had been considered eliminated from the U.S. since 2000.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said funding cuts to global health have put hard-won gains in jeopardy. "Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases are increasing around the world, putting lives at risk and exposing countries to increased costs in treating diseases and responding to outbreaks. Countries with limited resources must invest in the highest-impact interventions – and that includes vaccines," he said. "The global funding crisis is severely limiting our ability to vaccinate over 15 million vulnerable children in fragile and conflict-affected countries against measles," said UNICEF executive director Catherine Russell in the joint statement.

Continued investment in the 'Big Catch-Up initiative', launched in 2023 to reach children who missed vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, and other routine immunisation programmes will be critical, she noted.



A secure future: Pulse polio drops being administered to a child in Palakkad as part of the vaccination programme in Kerala in 2024. K. K. MUSTAFAH

Why is vaccination important?
WHO states that immunisation is a 'best buy' in health with a return on investment of $54 for every dollar invested and provides a foundation for future prosperity and health security. Over the last 50 years, essential vaccines have saved at least 154 million lives. That's six lives a minute, every day, for five decades, noted WHO. During this time, vaccination also accounts for 40% of the improvement in infant survival, and more children now live to see their first birthday and beyond than at any other time in human history. The measles vaccine alone accounts for 60% of those lives saved. While the world has eradicated smallpox and almost eradicated polio through vaccination, annually vaccines save nearly 4.2 million lives against 14 diseases.

India has also reaped the benefits of immunisation and improved health care, with senior health ministry officials stating that immunisation is one of the most effective and cost-efficient interventions for controlling and eradicating diseases.

According to a health ministry official, the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) is one of India's most comprehensive public health initiatives, aiming to provide life-saving vaccines to millions of newborns and pregnant women each year. Vaccines help protect individuals from diseases like measles, polio, tuberculosis, and more recently COVID-19. By reducing the incidence of infectious diseases, immunisation also builds herd immunity. According to UNICEF, in India every year, nearly 26 million newborns and 34 million pregnant women are targeted for immunisation, and over 13 million immunisation sessions are held nationwide to vaccinate children and pregnant women.

"Over the last two decades, India has significantly improved health outcomes, particularly child health and immunisation. The country was certified polio-free in 2014 and eliminated maternal and neonatal tetanus in 2015. New vaccines, including the Measles-Rubella, Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) and Rotavirus Vaccine (RVV), have been introduced and expanded nationwide," it notes. According to the National Family Health Survey-5, 2019-21, the country's full immunisation coverage stands at 76.1%, which means that one child out of every four is missing out on essential vaccines.

What is the way forward?
The WHO, UNICEF and Gavi urgently call for parents, the public, and politicians to strengthen support for immunisation. The agencies emphasise the need for sustained investment in vaccines and immunisation programmes and urge countries to honour their commitments to the Immunisation Agenda 2030. Gavi's pledging summit on June 25, 2025 seeks to raise at least $9 billion from donors to fund an ambitious strategy to protect 500 million children, saving at least eight million lives from 2026 to 2030.

Marxism, market and nationalism

Communist Party of Vietnam

The ruling party, which recently commemorated the 50th anniversary of the reunification of the country after the withdrawal of U.S. forces, draws legitimacy from both its historical role in liberation and ending occupation, and its continuing role as an economic moderniser

Srinivasan Ramani

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



Vietnam recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of its triumph against the United States and its success in re-unifying the country in April 1975. This victory marked the apogee of a long phase of revolutionary wars and struggles led by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and its different avatars against colonialism, French re-occupation, and later the U.S. intervention from 1925.

It was precisely in 1925 that the tallest leader of the CPV, Ho Chi Minh – then known as Nguyen Ai Quoc – established the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League or the Thanh Nien in Guangzhou, China, that aimed for national independence and a socialist government; these were the first organisational steps taken to form the Communist Party.

A 100 years later, today, the CPV governs Vietnam as a single party political system that is characterised by a strong market-based economy where, as its general secretary To Lam said in his speech at a massive parade commemorating the 50th anniversary of the reunification last week, the private sector remained the "most important driver of the national economy".

The Vietnamese experience of blending market reforms and communist leadership – it still terms this model "socialist-oriented developmentalism" – was a consequence of its experience during the decade that followed the end of the Vietnam War.

Till 1986, the CPV practised orthodox socialist policies, which included a centrally planned economy, nationalisation of industries (including those in the conquered South), collectivisation of agriculture into cooperatives, implementation of five-year plans focused on production targets and resource allocation, and an emphasis on heavy industry.

The devastation of its economy due to the war, the continued U.S.-led embargo, the Vietnamese invasion of neighbouring Cambodia – a consequence of the depredations of the Khmer Rouge regime – and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in the late 1970s all resulted in the economy remaining in doldrums. This situation was exacerbated by the inefficiencies of the planned model – the low productivity after collectivisation, the shortages of food and goods, and high inflation.

Economic transformation

This ultimately forced the hand of the CPV to undertake economic reforms, what it termed 'Doi Moi' or Renovation, featuring de-collectivisation of agriculture, price liberalisation, and allowing small-scale private enterprise in the first phase, followed by macroeconomic stabilisation, allowing foreign investment, international integration (including joining ASEAN), and state-owned enterprise (SOE) reform in Phase 2. By the late-1990s, the CPV promoted trade agreements, entry into the WTO, developed institutions to facilitate a functioning market economy, allowed the private sector to lead economic growth, and deepened SOE reforms which included "equitisation" or "partial privatisation".

These steps were consequential. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vietnam's poverty rate was close to 60%, its per capita GDP roughly $430, and its Human Development Index (HDI) value 0.492, all of which corresponded to a poor country with low human development. In 2023, Vietnam's GDP per capita was $4,347; the multidimensional poverty rate fell to just 1.9% by late 2024, and the HDI in 2022 was recorded to be 0.726, placing it in the "high human development" category and as a middle-income country.

Speaking to this writer in Ho Chi Minh City recently, Tuoc Huynh, a digital commerce expert who helped the entry of Google, and led Facebook in Vietnam, said how the reforms led to an "Ice hockey stick" nature of the growth curve in the country. Mr. Tuoc was himself born into a family of Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. and returned to the country to be part of the economic growth process.

But the rapid economic growth has not meant that it has been entirely inequitable – Vietnam's Gini coefficient (which measures inequality on a scale of 0 to 100) is 36, one of the lowest in Southeast Asia.

The transition of the country's communist party leadership since 1986 also provides an indication of the economic and political trends. The relatively doctrinaire Le Duan led the party during the war after the demise of Ho Chi Minh in 1969 and till 1986, before Truong Chinh took over and supported the reformist wing in the party that laid the stepping stones for Doi Moi. Nguyen Van Linh, a leader from the South associated with reform and pragmatism, took over in December 1986, decisively leading the shift towards a market economy.

The era of reformism ushered in by Nguyen Van Linh has generally been the norm in the CPV since, but Nguyen Phu Trong's regime between 2011 and 2024 also featured a sweeping anti-corruption programme (called the "blazing furnace") against senior party leaders and government officials.

To Lam, who succeeded him in 2024, was closely associated with the anti-corruption drive in the Ministry of Public Security but as his speech emphasised, he is also firmly committed to the Doi Moi path and towards Vietnam's quest of becoming an upper-middle income country by 2030.

Being a single party-state, Vietnam has also tightly restricted political freedoms related to association and civil liberties. This makes it imperative for the CPV to link its legitimacy as the ruling party to the outcomes of its economic policies and to the perception of its leadership.

Collective leadership

The CPV is distinguished from other peers – the Communist Party of China is today dominated by Xi Jinping – by its adherence to collective leadership and decision making driven by consensus and the distinct lack of any personality cult. The parade on April 30 showcased the different wings of the armed forces, party, and government of Vietnam; only the visage of Ho Chi Minh was ever-present among images of leaders.

It is not surprising why – Ho Chi Minh was inextricably linked to the vicissitudes of the communist movement in the country. He was a nationalist who sought independence from colonialism while being a socialist. He believed Marxism-Leninism offered the surest steps for the anti-colonial struggle and to build an egalitarian nation. He also played a key role in setting up the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) across Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The communists of the ICP dominated the Viet Minh that led and won the anti-colonial struggle against the French, and after the ICP's dissolution into constituent parties across the three countries, they formed the Workers Party of Vietnam (WPV), which ruled North Vietnam [before the reunification]. The WPV's southern wing was the Peoples' Revolutionary Party of South Vietnam, which led the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, more popularly known as the Viet Cong, which orchestrated the struggle against the South Vietnam regime and the U.S. forces in the war. Even after nearly 40 years of reform in a world where the socialist bloc no longer exists, Vietnam continues to pay tribute to Ho Chi Minh as its ideological fountainhead, mainly due to his foundational role in combining Marxism-Leninism and Vietnamese nationalism.

THE GIST

- In the second half of the 1980s, the Communist Party ushered in economic reforms ('Doi Moi'), featuring de-collectivisation of agriculture, price liberalisation, and allowing small-scale private enterprise in the first phase
- By the late-1990s, the CPV promoted trade agreements, entry into the WTO, developed institutions to facilitate a functioning market economy and allowed the private sector to lead economic growth
- These steps were consequential. In 2023, Vietnam's GDP per capita was $4,347, up from $430 in the late 1980s; the multidimensional poverty rate fell to just 1.9% and the HDI in 2022 was recorded to be 0.726, placing it in the "high human development" category

Between Israel and Islamists

The Druze

The small minority sect in Syria is caught between hostile Islamists who see them as heretics and an aggressive Israel, which is bombing Syria in the name of protecting them

Stanly Johny

PHOTO: AFP



Clashes first broke out in the southern outskirts of Damascus, Syria's capital, after an audio clip emerged on social media of a man criticising Prophet Mohammed. The audio was attributed to a Druze cleric (who later denied any role). Angry Sunni Islamists, aligned with the current government in Syria, started attacking Druze community members and armed Druze fighters fought back. Violence spread across Jaramana and Sahnaya near Damascus, and to Sweida, in southern Syria, the heartland of the Druze.

When Bashar al-Assad's regime fell in December, and the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham established its rule in Damascus, the Druze, like other minority communities in the country, called for their religious and political rights to be protected. Syria's new rulers promised that minority rights will be respected. But those assurances did little in preventing the outbreak of sectarian clashes. As violence spread, Israel carried out multiple air strikes against pro-government groups in Syria "to protect the Druze".

The Druze religion emerged out of Ismailism, which is an off-shoot of Shia Islam, in 11th century Egypt. But the Druze, a closely knit community for whom Arabic language and culture make the core of their identity, are not considered as Muslims. They recognise the major Abrahamic prophets, from Adam to Jesus and Mohammed, but also believe in reincarnation. The Koran is a sacred book, but the religious text for the Druze is Kitab Al Hikma (The Book Of Wisdom), which is a collection of books. The name Druze comes from one of the early preachers of Druze theology – Muhammad bin Ismail Nashtakin ad-Darazi.

Faith in reincarnation

The roots of Druze theology can be traced back to al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, the 11th century Fatimid Caliph, who ruled from Cairo. A section of al-Hakim's followers, including ad-Darazi, split away from Shia Ismailism, and started referring to al-Hakim as "a manifestation of God in His unity". Hamza ibn Ali ibn Ahmad, who is considered the founder of the Druze sect, and the primary author of the Druze scriptures, proclaimed that God reincarnated as man in al-Hakim. The Caliph, who mysteriously disappeared in February 1021, is a central figure in Druze beliefs. He is addressed as "Our Lord" in Druze prayers.

The Druze do not allow conversion, and marriages outside the community are rare. But over the years, the tenets of the Druze were shaped by the influence of other eastern religions – from Abrahamic Prophet to the idea of reincarnation and rebirth derived from Hinduism – as well as Greek philosophy. After the cycle of reincarnations, the Druze believe, the soul reunites with '*al-aaqal al kulli*', the Cosmic Mind (or God's Will).

Hardcore Islamists see them as heretics, and the community has survived persecution during the late medieval era. But over the years, they have also emerged as an influential sect in the Levant region.

Today, roughly 1 million Druze people are scattered across Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. In Syria, the Druze are concentrated in the southern suburbs of Damascus, the southern Sweida province and in the Golan Heights. When Israel captured most of the Golan Heights in 1967 and annexed it in 1981, the Druze community in the occupied region continued to live in their villages. Today, about 25,000 Druze are living in Golan – roughly 25% of them are estimated to be Israeli citizens. In total, there are about 1,50,000 Druze living in Israel.

During Syria's civil war, Israel had reportedly helped the Druze groups in Syria's south. After Islamists captured power in Syria, Israel has been more vocal about the protection of the Druze. Israel has also grabbed more Syrian territory in the Golan. By carrying out airstrikes in central Syria, Israel, whose ongoing war on Gaza has killed over 50,000 Palestinians – most of them women and children – are trying to position themselves as a protector of the Druze in the clashes-hit Syria.

For the Druze, the choice is between domestic Islamists and a foreign force that occupies parts of Syria. For now, they seem to lean towards the latter.

The monk who defied the mob

Chinmoy Krishna Das

The former ISKCON leader, who held rallies demanding protection for Bangladesh's religious minorities, has been in jail since October 2024

Kallol Bhattacherjee

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR



The case against Chinmoy Krishna Das goes back to October when, against the backdrop of attacks against growing mob violence, which often targeted minority religious communities in Bangladesh, he provided leadership and direction to the Bangladesh Sammilito Sanatani Jagaran Jote, an umbrella organisation of the Hindu community in the country.

A case against Mr. Das was lodged on October 31, days after three separate rallies were convened under his leadership in different parts of the country, where the national flag was reportedly disrespected.

Mr. Das was arrested in dramatic circumstances on October 25 from Dhaka's Shah Jalal International Airport, and the next day, while he was produced in a court in Chittagong, violent clashes broke out between hundreds of political activists and the police that left a young lawyer dead.

Ever since, the allegations against Mr. Das have compounded as he was also accused of encouraging the clashes on the court premises.

Mr. Das first shot to the limelight with his fiery speeches demanding protection for the Hindu community in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the fall of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's regime on August 5, 2024.

Bangladesh has an old history of anti-minority violence, dating back to its days as East Pakistan, which found its worst manifestation in the Operation Searchlight of March 25, 1971, when the Pakistan military began killing Hindus and progressives in Dhaka and other parts.

The Hindus and Buddhists of East Pakistan had begun mobilising themselves in the 1960s, when Gen. Ayub Khan was in power, leading to the formation of the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddho Oikyo Samiti (BHBOS). The BHBOS survived the 1971 crackdown by the Pakistan military and emerged as a political force in the 1980s when it participated in the pro-democracy protests that eventually overthrew the military regime of Hossein Mohammed Ershad.

But in the subsequent years, the BHBOS faced criticisms for alleged inaction when violence against the minority communities flared up, from time to time. One such incident took place during the Durga puja season of 2022, when a number of puja pandals were violated in Comilla, Brahmanbaria, Chittagong and Rangpur.

Chinmoy Krishna Das was at this time the leader of ISKCON [International Society for Krishna Consciousness] in Bangladesh. He emerged as a strong voice that supported the mobilisation of the minority community. Mr. Das, whose real name is Chandan Kumar Dhar, has overshadowed the older community leaders such as Rana Dasgupta and Manindra Kumar Nath.

Rise of Islamists

Though in jail since October 2024, he remains a crucial figure in the post-Hasina Bangladesh where there is a spike in the activities of the fundamentalist Islamist movements. On Saturday, Hezat-e-Islam held a major meeting in Dhaka's Suhrawardy grounds as a show of strength even as the interim government continues to argue that the bulk of the attacks that targeted the Hindu community members in August-September 2024 were "politically motivated" and not communal in nature.

An appellate court in Dhaka will take up the case of Mr. Das on Sunday.

The High Court in Bangladesh granted Mr. Das bail on April 30 in the case of sedition and his advocate Apurba Kumar Bhattacharjee expressed hope that his client would be released within a week. But The Supreme Court stayed the High Court decision immediately and fixed Sunday for further hearing. One factor that has worked in favour of Mr. Das is that, despite the promise of an investigation into the activities of Mr. Das and the rallies and the violence of October 26, 2024, the interim government has not carried out any probe so far. Mr. Das had earlier applied for bail in the High Court after a lower court rejected his plea on January 2.

The decision on the Vaishnav monk will be keenly watched in the region as he has emerged as an important figure in the political terrain of Bangladesh that is getting ready for election later this year.

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

Terror crosses borders, so must consequences

The need is to consolidate an economic, strategic, and geopolitical offensive against Pakistan and break the back of its sponsorship of terror



India must not only play defence but also script an audacious offensive across land, sea, and air. HT PHOTO



Abhishek Singhvi



Akash Kumar Singh

In the orchestra of global affairs, silence is complicity. John F Kennedy famously said, "Geography has made us neighbours. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners and necessity has made us allies. Those whom God has so joined together, let no man put asunder."

India needs to roar to teach a few strong and reverse lessons on geography, history, and economics to its neighbour. When violence, criminality, and bloodshed cross borders, no country can afford to remain a silent spectator. Enough of playing second fiddle to global laziness, it is time to draw the bow and create a symphony of consequences.

Firstly, Pakistan needs to be hit at its most vulnerable nerve — its economic underbelly. The economy is the spinal cord of any terror network, and Pakistan's is no exception. Instruments such as the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)+ status (European Union giving trade preferences to countries, including Pakistan) and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Grey List (penalising nations promoting terrorism) must be leveraged against Pakistan. Yet, the real rot lies deeper. The UN Drugs and Crime Office (UNODC) has underlined that close to 90% of the raw material for heroin originates from Afghanistan. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) transports this opium, processes it into heroin, and rakes in blood money — fortunes that are then laundered abroad and funnelled into terror coffers. India must declare an all-out war on this narcotics empire. A coordinated strike — with the Border Security Force, the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and other agencies — should choke the drug routes at sea and land, cutting off the oxygen supply to the ISI's terror tentacles. As is said, "Cut off the head of the snake, and the body will wither."

Secondly, it is imperative to keep Pakistan entangled on multiple fronts. Perpetually avaricious, Pakistan remains locked in a historical tussle with Afghanistan over the Durand Line, now bleeding profusely at the hands of the very Taliban it once fostered. India must seize the moment — deepen ties with Afghanistan, engage segments of the Taliban via trusted third parties, and widen fissures within Pakistan on this issue. By isolating the ISI-backed Haqqani Network, India can ensure that Pakistan continues to reap the whirlwind it sowed. A similar thing should be done with the help of Iran at the Baluchistan front.

Thirdly, at the global stage, we must redouble our efforts to hold Pakistan accountable under UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1373 — mechanisms designed to cripple terrorism at its source.

Fourthly, it is high time the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan be shown the door. If diplomatic eviction is not immediately feasible, India must ban its operations outright. This toothless tiger has prowled aimlessly for decades — now, it must kick the bucket once and for all.

Fifthly, Pakistan remains a cauldron of cruelty at the internal front. Ethnicities and communities like the Hazaras and Ahmadiyyas live under the sword arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances. India must extend a similar moral and diplomatic embrace to these groups as also to the Uyghurs in China, who have repeatedly stood shoulder to shoulder with India, including after Pahalgam. As the idiom goes, "Charity begins at home, but justice must travel far and wide."

Sixthly, another layer of danger emerging is the unholy trinity of Pakistan, Turkey, and Malaysia. This axis, masquerading as saviours of the *Ummah*, has historically left a trail of blood — from the Armenian genocide to the persecution of Greeks, Assyrians, and now Kashmiris.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and its allies have blossomed into India's strategic and cultural partners. India must not merely stand at the crossroads; it must take the high road by creating a coalition of civilisations — a league of nations that have been victims of genocides and terrorism, united not by grievances alone, but by a shared pledge to anti-terror memory and justice.

Seventhly, while the world erects grand memorials — the Holocaust Museum in Washington, the Armenian Genocide Museum in Yerevan — India remains amnesiac about the horrors inflicted upon it. The time is ripe for a Terror Museum in Srinagar — a living, breathing testimony to Pakistan's decades-long jihad against Kashmir and India. Let the world bear witness. Let history be etched in marble and memory.

PAKISTAN NEEDS TO BE HIT AT ITS MOST VULNERABLE NERVE — ITS ECONOMIC UNDERBELLY. THE ECONOMY IS THE SPINAL CORD OF ANY TERROR NETWORK, AND PAKISTAN'S IS NO EXCEPTION

Eighthly, India must actively support the dissident voices from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan. Those hounded out by Pakistan's Punjabi-dominated military elite must be empowered to establish governments-in-exile. If Jawaharlal Nehru could lay the groundwork for the Tibetan government-in-exile in the 1950s, the Narendra Modi government can surely walk in those footsteps today.

Lastly, India must unleash its digital warriors. Even more than human intelligence, we are among the best in technical intelligence. There is also a need to launch a digital strike. Without firing a single bullet, we can paralyse enemy infrastructure, leak military secrets, and confound adversary narratives. As the winds of digital warfare blow stronger, India must remember: When terror crosses borders, so must consequences — swiftly, silently, and surgically.

In this long-drawn chess game of survival and supremacy, India must think three moves ahead. We must not only play defence but also script an audacious offensive across land, seas, air, and public minds. For too long, Pakistan has mistaken our patience for passivity. It is time to break the illusion, hit hard wherever and whenever necessary, and exhibit the might of India. The process of these nine initiatives must be a continuous, ongoing process, not a reactive move against another Uri or Pulwama. History is unkind to those who stand at the water's edge, watching the tides of change pass by them. It rewards those who ride the storm and reshape the shoreline.

Abhishek Singhvi is a fourth term MP, jurist, former chair, Parliamentary Standing Committees on Commerce, Law and Home, and former additional solicitor general of India. He is also member, Congress Working Committee, senior national spokesperson, Congress, and chair of the party's department on law, human rights & RTI. Akash Kumar Singh is a PhD scholar at the Special Centre for National Security Studies, JNU and a former LAMP fellow. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



Portrait of Pope Francis: His life and his message

I wish I had met Pope Francis. I wouldn't say that of other famous people but of the Pope it's true. He had a warm, genial, happy face. He smiled a lot and each time his eyes would light up. His laughter was heartfelt and genuine, his affection for children sincere. He liked being with people. He saw himself as one of them.

Much of this was obvious from the pictures I saw during his lifetime. It's what I discovered after his death that's really endeared him. Today I want to share with you the picture of Pope Francis that I've been able to research.

In the style of St Francis of Assisi, whose name he took as his own papal name, the Pope lived very modestly. He shunned the grand papal home in the Vatican and chose instead a small two-room apartment in a guest house. He wore battered brown shoes. He would frequently invite his guards to breakfast and often dine in the Vatican workers' canteen.

Before he became a priest, Francis was a bouncer in Buenos Aires. Perhaps that's why his approach to the priesthood was very different to other priests. His central aim was to embrace the poor. He saw the Church and his faith through their eyes. Not surprisingly, they called him the Bishop of the Slums.

It probably also underlies one of the most amazing things he did which the world barely knew about. After the Israel-Hamas war broke out in October 2023, it's reported that "He would make nightly phone calls to the Holy Family Church, the only Catholic church in Gaza, to offer prayers and words of encouragement to both Christians and Muslims sheltering within its walls."

The fact so few knew of this is perhaps typical of Francis. He did it because he wanted to. Not because he was seeking credit or publicity. I'm more surprised the few who knew did not make a greater effort to ensure it was better known.

Francis was the first Pope to soften the Catholic Church's attitude to homosexuality. "Who am I to judge?", he famously asked. He was also the first to believe that divorced or re-married Catholics could receive the sacrament. Even though four conservative Cardinals publicly opposed him, he did not waver.

Of course, the Pope was traditional and conservative on issues like contraception, abortion, same-sex marriage and transgender recognition. As I was told, he was a very liberal Catholic Pope but he was still a Catholic Pope. That wasn't said to limit praise but to illustrate his willingness to push the boundaries.

All of this points to one simple fact. Pope Francis cared about people. The position he took on the issue of immigrants and refugees proves this. His first formal visit as Pope was to the island of Lampedusa to meet illegal migrants from North Africa. Weeks before he fell ill, he criticised United States President Donald Trump's policies linking illegal immigrants with criminality. I can't think of any other head of State who went so far.

The late Pope was also the first to formally enter into a dialogue with Islam. He held an open-air mass in the United Arab Emirates, the first ever on the Arabian peninsula. This act of inter-religious fraternity was attacked by conservatives. He simply ignored their position.

There are aspects of the Pope's life where, arguably, he failed. He was not particularly adept at handling allegations of corruption in the Vatican, even when they concerned the Secretariat of State. Cardinal Angelo Becciu may have been imprisoned in 2023, but the wider problem was not really tackled. But then none of his predecessors was any better.

POPE FRANCIS CARED ABOUT PEOPLE. THE POSITION HE TOOK ON THE ISSUE OF REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS PROVES THIS. HIS FIRST FORMAL VISIT AS POPE WAS TO THE ISLAND OF LAMPEDUSA TO MEET ILLEGAL MIGRANTS FROM NORTH AFRICA

However, Francis may have ensured the Catholic Church will continue as he left it. Of the 135 Cardinals eligible to vote for his successor, 108 were appointed by him. Of them, 53 are European but 82 are from Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Oceania. So, will his successor be another non-European? The odds suggest he could be.

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

America will have to pay for targeting campuses

For more than a century, the US has drawn some of India's brightest minds in pursuit of world-class education. From BR Ambedkar, who went on to draft India's Constitution, to business titans like Mukesh Ambani and Azim Premji, American universities have helped shape generations of Indian thinkers, builders, and changemakers. Today, however, under the Trump administration's increasingly hardline immigration policies, that legacy is being threatened. The consequences of these actions could reverberate for decades to come.



Frank F Islam

In recent weeks, reports from US campuses have sent a chill through the Indian student community. Thousands of international students on F-1 visas have been detained, deported, or denied re-entry for seemingly minor infractions. According to the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the records of more than 4,700 international students have been terminated by US Customs and Immigration Enforcement. Half of these students are estimated to be Indian nationals.

The reasons for these terminations range from immigration violations to allegations of advocating pro-Hamas positions. It appears though the majority of the cases stem from interactions with law enforcement. Sharvari Dalal-Dheini, senior director of government relations at AILA, told CNN-News18 last week, "Many of the so-called crimes they were charged with or picked up for are things that everyday Americans wouldn't even consider crimes, and certainly not college students."

In certain instances, students were deported for traffic offences, including speeding, sometimes just five to ten miles over the limit.

There are many troubling aspects to the current crackdown on F-1 visa holders.

Most of the students impacted, according to reports, are from Asia, West Asia, or Africa, with Indian students making up the majority of them. This is not surprising since nearly 30% of all international students enrolled in US universities are Indian nationals According to the Open Doors analysis, of the approximately 1.13 million international students on F-1 visas during the 2023–2024 academic year, nearly 332,000 were from India.

A recent AILA review of 327 visa revocation cases revealed that 60% involved Indian students. This disproportionate representation of Indian students is troubling. It suggests that these students are caught in the crossfire of an administration intent on restricting legal immigration, particularly from specific regions, under the guise of security and order. Much like the administration's tariff policies, the crackdown on F-1 visa holders could have long-term negative consequences.

It is quite possible that a significant number of Indian students will choose to stay home or seek opportunities in countries more welcoming to international talent. That would not only be a loss for the students, but a setback for the US as well.



The trust broken in classrooms today may take decades to repair. REUTERS

To grasp the gravity of the current crackdown, one needs to look no further than the US tech industry. Two of the most influential and consequential companies in the world — Microsoft and Google — are led by former F-1 visa holders: Satya Nadella and Sundar Pichai. In addition, tens of thousands of former international students now occupy leadership roles across the American economy, from senior engineers and startup founders to university presidents and deans, strengthening institutions that help define the nation's global edge.

The crackdown would not only have intellectual costs. It would also have economic costs for the US. International students contribute substantially to the US economy. According to research by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, these students added $43.8 billion to the US economy in the 2023–2024 academic year and supported 378,175 jobs across the country. Indian students alone might be contributing more than $10 billion annually to the US economy through tuition, housing, and living expenses.

Universities themselves are feeling the strain. Even before this latest crackdown, enrollment of Indian students in US universities had begun to decline due to tightening visa rules, hostile rhetoric, and rising costs. Now, as stories of raids, detentions, and revocations circulate across WhatsApp groups and social media forums, this damage is accelerating. With alternatives like Europe and Australia increasingly seen as safer bets, the US is losing its reputation as a welcoming destination for international talent.

What began as a broad campaign of hostility toward immigrants — from the mass deportations of undocumented families to the demonisation of H-1B visa holders — has now turned university campuses from havens of learning into frontlines of suspicion. Sadly, for the US this moment transcends universities. At stake is nothing less than America's identity. Historically, this immigrant nation — as John F Kennedy referred to the US — has flourished because of its openness to embracing immigrants of all types including the world's dreamers, scholars, and builders. That openness is now under siege.

Unless it is reversed America will pay an enormous cost for this shortsightedness. The trust broken in classrooms today may take decades to repair. And, when the world's brightest students stop knocking, the door may never open in quite the same way again.

Frank F Islam is an entrepreneur, civic leader, and thought leader based in Washington DC. The views expressed are personal

{ ANOTHER DAY }

Namita Bhandare



Justifying murder in the name of family honour

You might just miss it tucked away inside your newspaper. A few paragraphs that don't even begin to tell the story. The one of love, and dying for it. The one where choosing a partner is not just a radical act but also life-threatening.

The serious-looking bearded man, HM, tells me that he is a "survivor" of a painfully familiar tale. Falls in love with the "wrong" sort, as in wrong caste. There's another complication: She had been married off as a child, so, for her to fall in love as an adult with somebody else becomes a question of family honour; an honour vested in her and dependent on her toeing the line.

HM from Jaipur tells me about the whispered phone calls. The restrictions on her movements. The threats. The physical abuse from her family pressuring her to fulfil the terms of an illegal marriage. And then he learned she had died. Her family said by suicide. No police complaint was ever filed. No case registered. That was in 2018.

I met HM at a consultation on honour killings — the inappropriately named term for the murder of young people by their parents for marrying against caste and faith.

Organised by Dhanak of Humanity, a non-profit founded in 2004 by Asif Iqbal to help interfaith and inter-caste couples, the consultation coincides with a Supreme Court ruling earlier this week that confirmed the conviction of 11 people in the horrific 2003 Kannagi-Murugesan double murder where a Dalit man and Vanniyar woman in Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu were killed in public for their crime of falling in love. "At the root of this crime is the deeply entrenched hierarchical caste system in India, and ironically, this most dishonourable act goes by the name of honour-killing," the court noted.

In 2022, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 18 such killings. That number, say activists, is a massive underestimation as killings are often passed off as suicides or illnesses. When the father or brother is complicit, families are loath to report. And even when cases are reported, conviction is a problem with witnesses turning hostile. "This is a crime where the whole community colludes to cover up," a police officer in Hisar told me in June last year.

This week alone, two cases made it to the papers. One in Amreli, Gujarat, where the father of a Muslim woman strangled her after she fell in love with a Hindu man and refused to marry the man her father had picked for her. The second is in Jalgaon, Maharashtra where a retired CRPF officer shot dead his daughter and injured her husband. Two years had passed since their marriage, but the father had not been placated because his son-in-law wasn't as educated as his daughter.

Controlling the autonomy of adult daughters in the name of protecting them remains a concern of recent state laws that make it virtually impossible for interfaith couples to marry by conversion. Modern India's first uniform civil code has a clause that mandates registration by couples who cohabit. In the name of protection, the Maharashtra assembly in December 2022 set up a committee to track interfaith and inter-caste marriages. "Women are not seen as autonomous human beings," senior advocate Vrinda Grover said at the consultation. "Yet, they carry the honour of the family, the community, the nation."

The Supreme Court has, in the past, come out strongly against such killings with a slew of guidelines including safe houses in every district — a directive that only Haryana has followed. Maybe a modern society needs to revisit Periyar EV Ramasamy's 1925 advocacy of a "self-respect marriage". It was conducted without rituals, premised on the idea of equality and dignity. Above all, freedom for young people to love as they wish.

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

Financial freedom for women

This is with reference to "In Bihar, women script a story of empowerment" by Lalita Panicker (April 27). Making rural women empowered not only makes them financially independent but helps them improve their lifestyle and their families as well. This imparts financial freedom to women.

Abhilasha Gupta

After the Pahalgam attack

This is with reference to "After Pahalgam, a nation united in battling terror" by Gopalkrishna Gandhi (April 27). The article made me feel that we as nation can respond to such attacks by remaining united, empathetic and humane. Though this very hard to secure in a politically charged environment.

Dinesh Reddy

II.

The widespread condemnation of the Pahalgam attack by the Kashmiri public is a powerful message. It reflects a growing alignment with peace. This must be nurtured by ensuring that Kashmiris are treated with dignity.

Sanjay Chopra

Write to us at: **letters@hindustantimes.com**

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Across THE AISLE



P CHIDAMBARAM
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India applauds resolve, and waits

PRIME MINISTER'S *Mann Ki Baat* on Sunday last was devoted mainly to the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir and its aftermath. According to news reports, Mr Modi said, "*Every Indian holds deep sympathies for the affected families. No matter which State one belongs to, no matter which language one speaks, one is feeling the pain of those who have lost their loved ones in this attack. I can feel that the blood of every Indian is on the boil after seeing the pictures of the terrorist attack.*"

The prime minister captured the feelings of the entire country. He spoke about unity, solidarity and resolve of the people of India, and promised to demonstrate that India as a nation will demonstrate its strong will power. I applaud his resolute words.

Exaggerated Claims

But, I am afraid, not all that the PM said on the occasion was correct. On the situation in Kashmir before the attack, Mr Modi said, "*peace was returning to Kashmir; there was a vibrancy in schools and colleges; construction work had gained unprecedented pace; democracy was getting stronger; the number of tourists was increasing at a record rate; people's income was increasing, new opportunities were being created for the youth...*" Not all will agree, and in moments of deep reflection even Mr Modi will consider the claims an exaggeration:

- Peace is a distant goal in Kashmir. At the all-party meeting on April 24, 2025, the presentation made by the Ministry of Home Affairs said that, in the decade between June 2014 and May 2024, there were 1,643 terrorist-initiated incidents, 1,925 infiltration attempts, 726 successful infiltrations and 576 security personnel were killed.
- There was no vibrancy in schools: the ASER 2024 report revealed that enrollment in government schools had declined after 2018 and the percentage of students in higher classes who could read a Standard II text had worsened.
- The most contestable claim was that democracy was getting stronger. Since the reduction in the status of J&K to a union territory, democracy has been actually diminished. J&K is a half-democracy with the Lieutenant Governor enjoying vast powers that have been denied to the council of ministers and the elected representatives. The snatching away of statehood (and the unfulfilled promise of restoration after the elections) is a continuing humiliation that rankles the people.
- The official unemployment rate of J&K in 2023-24 was 6.1 per cent.
- The per capita income remains below the national average.
- It is, however, true that the number of tourists is on the increase but that has been rudely interrupted by the terrorist attack.

Consensus has Frayed

Immediately after the attack in Pahalgam all sections of the people spontaneously supported the government. The Congress and other parties made statements of unqualified support to any action that the government might take. If it appears that the consensus has since frayed, the government has to blame itself. There are many reasons: the government expressed shock but not contrition; no one in authority acknowledged the grave lapses in security; the prime minister cut short his visit to Saudi Arabia and returned to Delhi but did not visit Pahalgam or Srinagar; an all-party meeting was called but Mr Modi skipped it and instead chose to visit Patna for a rally.

Parties and individuals have since taken nuanced positions. The Congress Working Committee's resolution pointed to "the BJP (is) exploiting this grave tragedy through official and proxy social media platforms to sow further discord, mistrust, polarization and division at a time when unity and solidarity are most needed." The resolution also noted that Pahalgam was secured by a three-tier security arrangement and called for a comprehensive analysis "into the intelligence failures and security lapses that enabled such an attack." Among jingoistic calls for retribution, Mr A.S.Dulat, former chief of R&AW and an acknowledged expert on Kashmir bluntly said "war is not an option.....it is not just the last option but the last bad option." On the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty, Mr Sharat Sabharwal, former High Commissioner to Pakistan, told Mr Karan Thapar that he did not think this was a step that should be taken but he was willing to go along with the government. The U.N. Security Council did not blame the TRF or the LeT for the attack or call out the brazen targeting of non-Muslims; yet the government attempted to give the resolution a favourable spin. China was not subtle at all: Mr Wang Yi, the foreign minister, praised Pakistan's resolute action on terrorism, spoke of understanding Pakistan's legitimate security concerns and supported Pakistan in safeguarding its security interests.

India is Waiting

Ten days have passed since the Pahalgam attack. Military experts have pointed out that a 'surgical strike' may not have the element of surprise and bomber aircraft may be anticipated and intercepted. Besides, as Mr Ajay Sahni has pointed out (*The Road from Pahalgam, The Indian Express, April 24, 2025*), these have questionable operational or strategic consequences. Given India's military superiority, I am certain there are other options. In an officially released news report, the PM is believed to have given a 'free hand' to the defence forces. In a democracy, the decisions are the prime minister's, the military executes the decisions. India's response must have a decisive deterrent effect on the state and non-state actors who cause mayhem in Kashmir. India is waiting.

Fifth COLUMN
TAVLEEN SINGH
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We are already at war

THE HORROR of Pahalgam is hard to erase. So, a mood of hyper-nationalism continues to spread across the country. Everyone seems to be prepared for war with Pakistan and everyone seems to want this to happen, without noticing that we are already fighting an ugly, undeclared war against a cowardly enemy. An enemy that dares not show its face and prefers fighting unarmed civilians to soldiers, but we are not fighting terrorism. We are fighting a war. And as in wartime we need to ask if we are prepared.

The Prime Minister interrupted his Hindi speech, at a rally in Bihar, and warned the world after switching to English that India would 'identify, track and punish' those responsible for killing 26 Indians on that sunny meadow, on April 22, just because they were Hindu. Last week it was the turn of the Home Minister to make a stirring, passionate speech in which he vowed that the jihadi terrorists responsible for what happened in Pahalgam would be found and punished. There was 'zero tolerance' for terrorism under the leadership of Narendra Modi, he said, and so every one of the terrorists would be found and punished. It was this speech that made me reflect on the questions that we have not asked. The first of these is why was it so easy for the killers to disappear after the massacre?

When I listened to security experts expound on this question in endless TV debates, I discovered that the main reason was that they have the training and the technology to survive without cell phones. This is something that our security forces have known for a while. It was after an incident in Jammu, some months ago, that I first heard of this, and I remember wondering then what our intelligence agencies have done to get advanced technology of their own. In the search for the murderous jihadis in the forests of Pahalgam we seem not even to be using drones. Why?

This leads to another question. Why do these terrorists always seem to be a step ahead of our intelligence agencies? After the Pahalgam attack, we discovered that the killers had been in the area for some time and had managed to recce the Baisaran meadow before the attack. The planning was so professional and they were so sure of being able to escape that they had time to ask the men they killed their religion before shooting them. Some women report that their husbands were asked to recite the 'kalma' and were shot only when they failed to do this. Why did they have so much time? Why was the meadow so unprotected? Why was the recce not discovered in time?

When the massacre of Sikhs happened in Chattisinghpora 25 years ago, I went to that remote village to talk to survivors. As far as I remember there was just one man who survived and what he described to me was a much more amateur operation. He said that for a while they had seen men in Indian Army uniforms wandering about in the forest around the village and they recognized them as Pakistani and not Indian, but they had not realized that they were there to harm them until 35 Sikhs were lined up against the walls of a gurdwara and executed by being shot in the back. As far as I know nobody was punished because the killers vanished.

Those were times when the technology our security forces relied upon was less sophisticated. Is this true still? In the forests in which they are searching for the Pahalgam killers, are they shooting in the dark? Do they lack the technology needed to do a more effective job? If the killers have more sophisticated technology and weapons than our security forces, we need to know the reason why. Have those responsible for ensuring the nation's security been lulled into a state of false complacency?

After the Pahalgam massacre, security forces started blowing up homes in Srinagar that they said belonged to jihadis. Why did we only discover these jihadis after the attack? It is because there are so many unanswered questions that Pakistan has managed so far to get away with charging the 'Indian deep state' of conducting a 'false flag operation' simply to malign Pakistan. What happened on that meadow on that sunny April afternoon was so barbaric, so horrendous, that it has caused an outpouring of rage across the country. And it has caused famous TV anchors to concentrate so much on expressing their hyper-nationalism nightly that they seem to have forgotten their fundamental duty which is to investigate what happened.

Everyone agrees that behind the jihadis is the ISI (Inter-services Intelligence) which leads me to yet another question. If the Pakistani army can have an intelligence wing that is sophisticated enough to wage this undeclared war on us, why is the Indian Army not able to set up a special unit that counters the ISI at every step? Pakistan is never going to stop using jihadi groups to fight its war against India. Never. We must learn urgently how to better defend ourselves against this evil, cowardly enemy that hides in our forests and remains faceless. This war did not start with the attack in Pahalgam. It has been going on for at least two decades and may continue for decades. Are we prepared?

inside TRACK
COOMI KAPOOR



Work and Play

US V-P J D Vance's recent visit to India, accompanied by US government officebearers, including Ricky Gill, senior director, South and Central Asia, National Security Council, was a mix of official and unofficial engagements. India was disconcerted by the trip's timing, which was to discuss tariff tensions, since PM Modi was scheduled to leave India a day after Vance's arrival on April 21 for a scheduled visit to Saudi Arabia to discuss the modalities of the first meet of the India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council. The MEA, while releasing the V-P's programme in India, left most of his activities in Jaipur and Agra blank, suggesting that the US Embassy in New Delhi be contacted for information. In Jaipur, the Vances stayed at the exclusive Rambagh Palace and tourists who had already booked were asked to vacate for security reasons. The only guests permitted to remain was a small cloistered wedding party. The Rajasthan media speculated that the Vances might also be attending the wedding. Although Vance and his wife Usha were visiting India for the first time since their marriage a decade ago, they did not spend any time in South India, although Usha is the daughter of Telugu immigrants from AP. In fact, a nonagenarian aunt in Visakhapatnam, an eminent professor, was unaware of the impending visit until informed by a local official.

Reddy Hospitality

CM Revanth Reddy ordered Telangana officials to pull out all the stops for the global meet organised by the Samruddha Bharat Foundation in the state recently. Telangana provided the infrastructure and funds for the hospitality extended to 450 delegates. Officials were puzzled why a meet on global democracy attended by vague foreigners, many of whom did not have specific credentials, would help boost investment in the state. Reddy was keen to please the foundation's executive trustee Gurdeep Sappal, who is attached to Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's office and rumoured to be close to the Congress high command. A day before the meet wound up, Reddy discovered, to his horror, that the expected high-profile guests had bailed out. Kharge and Priyanka Gandhi stayed away, and a rather reluctant Rahul Gandhi was finally persuaded to come after his former mentor in the US, Sam Pitroda, spoke to him. Sappal's group is meant to be a Congress think tank counter to the BJP's Vivekananda Foundation, and most of the delegates were certainly not potential investors. Ironically, when in neighbouring Karnataka, Congress CM Siddaramaiah held an official foreign investors' summit in February, no one from the Gandhi family attended when Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated it.

Getting Clearance

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's visit on Tuesday to PM Modi's residence was very significant. A senior minister escorted Bhagwat from the RSS office in Jhandewalan to Lok Kalyan Marg. Modi was keen to ensure the BJP was on the same page as the RSS in view of public differences during the Lok Sabha campaign. The discussion was more about the caste census than the proposed response to the Pahalgam attack. Incidentally, the stalemate in announcing a new BJP chief reflects the ongoing power tussle between the RSS and the BJP.

Sensible Solution

The Modi government is sitting on Pandora's box on the issue of a delimitation exercise after the impending census. Previous governments had succeeded in deferring the contentious exercise. In 1976, an Emergency in place and PM Indira Gandhi pushed through the 42 Amendment since the main Opposition was in jail. In 2002, then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee artfully dodged the exercise. He called a Cabinet meeting to discuss a National Population Policy. At the fag end, he got into a huddle with L K Advani and M M Joshi, and simply announced that additionally the government would defer delimitation till 2026, a matter unrelated to the actual agenda. Cabinet clearance for the 84th amendment was done so swiftly that the RSS and others opposed had no time to react. Today, deferring delimitation can no longer be done under cover and a viable formula with the consent of the aggrieved states, mostly from the south, has to be arrived at. Former CEC N Gopalaswami suggests that an Amendment be passed freezing representation in Parliament. His point is that MPs are expected to concern themselves largely with policy issues, while localised problems concerning the constituency are dealt with by the local elective bodies. Whether an MP represents 10, 15 or 18 lakh constituents, he is physically incapable of handling their demands. Adding 200-odd more MPs to the existing strength of the Lok Sabha would be unwieldy and unproductive. The only advantage of more MPs is the edge it would provide to more populous states in electing a PM.

History HEADLINE
HARIKISHAN SHARMA



Somnath to Pahalgam: The Indus runs through it

THE SYMBOLISM of the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty by India, following the April 22 Pahalgam attack, goes beyond the fact that it is one of the rare pacts between India and Pakistan which has survived three wars and persistent hostility between them.

The river, lending its name to one of the world's oldest settlements as the Indus Valley Civilization, also played a significant — if little-known — role in a significant chapter in India's political history soon after Independence. That was the 1951 reconsecration of the Somnath Temple, which put the secular principles of the fledgling government of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to its first test.

The trust behind the consecration sought soil, flora and water from across the world to offer at the temple. This included 12 ounces of water of the Indus river from Pakistan. Documents preserved at the National Archives show what followed.

On February 20, 1951, the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar wrote to Khub Chand, the Acting Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, saying: "We have been advised that for the (Somnath) ceremony, not only waters, *vanaspati* (flora) and soils from all over India but… from all over the world (are needed). So far as Pakistan is concerned, we need — 12 ounces of water from the river Sindhoo (Indus)… The packet should be... sent by air mail, so as to reach me not later than the 15th March, 1951 (the day of the consecration)."

Acting promptly, Chand sent a packet containing Indus water a fortnight later to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in Delhi. "I enclose a copy of the correspondence exchanged with His Highness the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar regarding supply of some water from the river Sindhu (Indus) for ceremonies connected with the restoration of the Somnath Temple… Would you please have it sent to His Highness by air mail… Please treat this letter as IMMEDIATE," Chand wrote to MEA Deputy Secretary S K Banerji on March 7.

The same day, Chand wrote to the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar, informing him that he had sent the water, adding: "I take this opportunity to offer you my very best wishes for the success of the functions connected with the restoration of the Somnath Temple."

In Delhi, Banerji forwarded the Indus water packet to K M Munshi, then Minister of Food and Agriculture, and wrote to Jam Sahib telling him that the latter would carry the water for the installation of the Ling ceremony at the Somnath Temple.



The old Somnath temple. *Somnath Temple Trust.*

However, the archives show, a week after the Indus water packet was received in Delhi, Chand started worrying about how this may be received in Pakistan. "There must, under no circumstances, be any publicity to the effect that Sindhu (Indus) water was sent by the High Commission for India to Pakistan… (or its) utilization for the ceremonies. Such publicity is bound to cause much bitter comment in Pakistan," Chand wrote to Banerji on March 19, 1951.

Banerji forwarded Chand's no-publicity request to Munshi, even while asking Chand, in a letter on March 28, what possible objection could Pakistan have to Indus water being used in Somnath consecration.

Two days later, Chand replied: "The Pakistan Government is not going to take any objection but there is likely to be some comment in the Pakistan Press. This may be somewhat on the following lines:- (a) India 'pretends' to be a secular democracy. Yet She indulges in great pomp and ceremony connected with restoration of a temple destroyed by a Muslim conqueror. (b) India has not reconciled herself to Partition. The Indus is no longer an Indian river. It is the lifeblood of Pakistan. The use of Indus water shows that India still considers this river sacred to her."

Chand added: "This is, of course, a historic occasion for us to be able to restore the Somnath Temple. But I should personally much prefer if no mention is made of the fact that the High Commission sent the Indus water. That Indus water was used in connection with the celebration, along with water and earth from various other places in the world, may be modestly advertised if considered desirable… It is not so much the effect in Pakistan that is important but the effect on foreign opinion conditioned by observations in the Pakistan Press or by their propagandists."

The issue eventually reached Nehru, who expressed his disapproval via Foreign Secretary K P S Menon. Nehru had been opposed to any association of his government with the consecration, though many Congress leaders wanted it. Conveying his message, Menon wrote to Chand on April 25, saying that the PM wanted to convey that the request for Indus water by the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar "does not have his approval", and that "if any such request is received in the future, you should bring it to our notice before complying with it".

Chand wrote back to the MEA on April 30, 1951, saying: "We sent the Indus water through the Ministry of External Affairs so that proper screening of the request could be made if desired. IN this connection I may add that I have already made a request that no publicity should be given to the fact that the High Commission supplied Indus water for the consecration of the Somnath Temple."

Chand's concerns about negative publicity of the consecration ceremony proved valid. On May 21, 1951, a 12-page dossier for the MEA compiled by Deputy Principal Information Officer V R Bhatt detailed reports in the Pakistani Gujarati press accusing India of religious bias and revanchism. Bhatt noted that the Somnath ceremony had become a pretext for intense anti-Hindu and anti-India propaganda.

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On the LOOSE
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We plan our life amid its infinite danger

A GROUP of 17 sales executives from Bengaluru were celebrating meeting their targets on holiday in Kashmir and were driving to the meadows of Baisaran in Pahalgam, when they decided to stop for ice cream. A fortuitous decision, indeed, that quite possibly altered the course of their lives. En route just 15 minutes later, they realised something was wrong and turned back. Plain good luck? Likely, a mix of fortune and common sense that in no way takes away from the fact that life is inherently unpredictable. Consider the newly-wed couple whose first choice for their honeymoon was Switzerland, which didn't work out. Randomness shapes existence though we spend our lives striving to eliminate uncertainty. The enormous amount of pain that abounds everywhere has no clear explanation other than the Stoics' pessimistic world view, that human existence involves unbearable suffering. It is a sobering thought that whatever control we believe we have may so easily be undone by the whims of chance.

Luckily, human optimism and the humdrum of daily routine prevent such gloomy rumination from engulfing us; if chaos hasn't found us yet, life is hectic enough to prevent our dwelling on it. Every now and then, reality intrudes and unforeseen calamities jolt us into recognising that the spectre of death always looms large. Yet, most of us navigate our way to adulthood relying on the idea that one good choice leads to another. A good life, we tell ourselves, rests on the premise that the entire chain is linked, with enough of an effort, it holds together in the end. The point being, every choice matters. Students are encouraged to work hard to better their prospects and, as adults, even trivial decisions, are geared towards creating a secure future.

Gardening is a powerful metaphor for slow and steady growth; actions like watering, fertilising and providing sunlight to a plant ensures it thrives while neglect leads it to wither away. Similarly, we believe carefully nurturing relationships and planning a career should yield positive results. Till a violent disruption like Pahalgam exposes, we may do everything right but individual misfortune is part of life's infinite danger. The disaster of the present moment reveals that however disconnected our daily lives are from global events, past acts from long ago can't be erased. Like *Groundhog Day*, where the protagonist is condemned to reliving one particular day for eternity; there's a sense of deja vu that this is happening now, but it was always happening and perhaps, will always happen.

What does a 30-something, privately employed techie living in Karnataka have to do with the turbulent history of Kashmir that he should randomly die for it? Almost nothing. A heinous crime has occurred, 26 families' lives have changed forever and the hardest part is coming to grips with the fact that it wasn't even personal. It brings to mind the "butterfly effect", the theory that states that the flapping of the wings of a butterfly in Africa can cause a tornado in some other far-flung corner of the world. It's evocatively portrayed in the urgently jumbled and deeply compelling film *Babel*, when one man's decision to buy a gun in Morocco to protect his herd leads to two small children being stranded in a desert near California. The instinctive insight to glean from this is that much of what happens doesn't happen by choice at all. Disaster comes without warning and all attempts to manifest certainty fall apart when fate has to strike.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films



"To pick up a brush, to make a stroke on the canvas—I consider these acts of courage in this country

Tyeb Mehta

CASTE CENSUS CASTS QUESTIONS ON JOB CREATION



THE THIRD EYE

SHANKKAR AIYAR

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ALL economics, it is said, is about politics. And all politics is grounded in economics—effectively about public policies to enable access to opportunities.

This week, the Modi government announced the enumeration of caste in the forthcoming census. Typically, public discourse is riveted on the whataboutery of when who was for it and who was against. Beyond the claims and counterclaims, the inclusion of caste in the census underlines the omnipotence of caste in India's political matrix. It also underlines the chasm between the need for sustainable incomes and India's status rising in a decade from the 11th to the 5th largest economy.

The measure of aggregate progress in the past decade hides the stratification across India. The political geography of India's economy illustrates this divergence. India's per capita income is ₹2.15 lakh. Karnataka tops the list with ₹3.80 lakh and Bihar trails with ₹66,828; within Bihar, the district of Sheohar has a per capita income of ₹19,561. As Nobel laureate Angus Deaton observed, "averages are no consolation for those left behind".

It is not surprising that the move to enumerate caste originated from Bihar, or that the initiative is timed for the forthcoming polls. Bihar is home to around 12 crore of India's 142-crore population, and at ₹10.97 lakh crore, accounts for barely 3 percent of India's GDP of Rs 331.03 lakh crore. The distance between Karnataka and Bihar, or between Bengaluru and Sheohar, is about empowerment and employment.

The political class has presented the caste census as a panacea for an inclusive reservation system. Quota warriors cite the Rohini Commission's findings to point out that "97 percent of the reserved jobs and seats have gone to 25 percent of OBC sub-castes". Arguably, the formula of reservation must be backed by data. The caste census will at best a template for inclusion, not expansion in job creation. The momentum of public opinion backing the move clearly casts questions on job creation.

Take the IT services sector, which is one of the largest white collar employers. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, in its March 2025 report, cited data to note that "there is an unusual decline in placements in IITs and IIITs between 2021-22 and 2023-24". A TeamLease peport in October estimated that only 10 percent of engineering graduates would secure jobs this year. Indeed, another survey, published in March 2025, revealed that 83 percent of engineering graduates have no jobs.

Seven decades after independence, after numerous commissions and committees on shifting labour off fields into factories, barely 11 percent of workers are employed in manufacturing and 45.5 percent in agriculture. Manufacturing accounts for 14 percent, while agriculture accounts for 18 percent of GDP. Effectively, nearly half the workforce is dependent on a sixth of the national income. A blend of imperfect policies has made farming unviable. Unsurprisingly, every major land-owning caste—for instance, the Marathas in Maharashtra—is agitating for a quota.

The lack of opportunities haunting demographic dividend is reflected in the headlines. In Uttar Pradesh, over 48 lakh persons applied for 60,244 posts of constables. In Bihar, over 8 lakh applied for 15,000 home guard posts. In Rajasthan, over 24 lakh people applied for 53,749 peon positions—including some with PhD, MBA and law degrees. In Jammu and Kashmir, over 5.5 lakh aspirants applied for 4,002 posts in the police department. Over 36 lakh candidates applied for 17,727 posts in the central government.

A popular notion harboured by many is that the rush is driven by a craze for government jobs. The irony is that the freebies culture has left governments with fewer resources to fill vacant posts. It is estimated that there are nearly 2 million in the states—largely in the police, health and education departments. Madhya Pradesh has over 2.7 lakh vacant posts; Karnataka has over 55,000 teacher posts unfilled, while Delhi has over 8,000 police posts vacant. Even as courts labour with over 5 crore pending cases, 359 posts for judges in high courts and 5,238 posts for judicial officers in the lower judiciary are vacant.

The rush for government jobs is aggravated by the dearth of jobs in the private sector—particularly, in the most populous and least industrialised states. The crux is the lack of reforms for job creation. It is known that the majority of reforms are vested with states—modernisation of GST, land, labour, permits and regulations. Yet states, in their race to host investor summits, scarcely act on the reforms needed to translate memorandums into investments and jobs. Improved access to credit for smaller enterprises could boost both employment and exports. India can be a global bread basket, but it requires liberalisation of farm laws and enabling of farmers' collectives for export. Urbanisation is placed at the intersection of the rural and urban economies, and building new cities will create jobs and spur growth.

The global economy is being recast by economics and geopolitics. The emerging triad of disruptions—geopolitics, climate change and adoption of technology—will make job creation harder as capital will deploy technology to retrench labour. The tariff threats of the Trump administration is a wake-up call. There is much gush-gush about reforms to harvest the China+1 opportunity. Success calls for a shift from notions to action.

It is time the political class recognised that unless it sheds the strong consensus for weak reforms, the prescription of caste census will only deliver a placebo.

CANADA ELECTS, INDIA REFLECTS



POWER & POLITICS

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IN the annals of democratic theatre, few performances offer as much off-script intrigue as Canada's recent federal election. Held amid a backdrop of global economic tremors and nationalist tremolos, the contest culminated in a narrow but consequential victory for Mark Carney—the suave technocrat-turned-Liberal Party leader—who now finds himself not just prime minister, but accidental protagonist in a geopolitical *pas de trois* with India and the US.

Carney's ascent from spreadsheet sage to political steward is the stuff of Westminster whisperers. Dismissed until recently as an urbane interloper with the charisma of a mortgage bond, he confounded pollsters by securing 168 of 343 seats—as close to a majority as a layer of *mille-feuille*, but sufficient for governance. His background at the helm of the Bank of England and Bank of Canada gave him a veneer of macroeconomic gravitas that proved irresistible to voters weary of populist pyrotechnics and ideological slapstick.

Canada's 2025 vote was more than a domestic reset; it was a referendum on performative rage. The Conservatives, led by Pierre Poilievre, entered the fray with bombast, but exited in embarrassment. Poilievre's penchant for polemic, flirtations with fringe ideologies, and a mystifying attempt to align with Indian Hindutva currents alienated the centrist masses. His campaign, once billed as an unstoppable juggernaut, became a cautionary tale of ideological indigestion. A party once poised for power found itself dining alone—at the kids' table of Canadian politics, muttering about "freedom" while the adults passed policy.

But no political obituary is more poignant than that of Jagmeet Singh. The NDP's telegenic but pro-Khalistani leader, long accused of serving as the diaspora's grievance concierge, lost his own seat in Burnaby Central. His party, reduced from 25 seats to single-digits, also forfeited official party status for the first time since 1993. From power broker to political bystander, Singh's fall is less a footnote than a full-throated repudiation of identitarian overreach.

Singh's persistent tirades against India, including vocal advocacy for Khalistani separatism and a conspicuously theatrical outrage over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023 may have won applause in niche echo chambers—but proved electorally enervating. Canadian voters signalled a preference for peace over provocation, governance over grievance. For all his symbolic resonance, Singh failed the smell test of mainstream leadership. Burnaby didn't just reject his politics, it uninvited him from the party.

Enter the Indo-Canadian diaspora: a 1.4-million-strong mosaic of migrants, strivers and middle-class monarchs. In swing ridings across Ontario and British Columbia—Brampton, Mississauga, Surrey—their ballots tipped the scale in favour of Carney's centrist moderation. Of the record 65 Indian-origin candidates, around 20 were elected, mostly under the Liberal banner. Notable returnees include Anita Anand, Kamal Khera, Parm Bains and Sukh Dhaliwal—names that resonate in Ottawa's corridors and Delhi's drawing rooms alike. But this was no monolithic bloc. The Singh's rejection by voters of Indian origin suggests a maturing political identity. The message was subtle but unambiguous: stop using us as pawns in proxy battles. We are not your constituency of convenience. We are citizens first, sentiment second.



AFP

This evolution is not insignificant. For years, India's political class courted the diaspora as a soft-power tool, sometimes even as a battering ram. What this election reveals is a growing reluctance within that community to be instrumentalised. The Indo-Canadian voter now wields not just nostalgia but discernment. This is a seismic shift—a community turning from romanticism to realism.

No Canadian election in recent memory has been so thoroughly haunted by the ghost of Washington. Trump casts a long silhouette over North American geopolitics. His belligerent tariff threats and unpredictable rhetoric stirred Canadian anxieties, driving voters toward Carney's brand of cautious nationalism. The return of MAGA also made "nice" fashionable again in Ottawa—a virtue few expected to see weaponised so effectively.

This dynamic complicates the India-US-Canada triangle. India remains Trump's 'strategic sweetheart'—a role cultivated through arms deals, yoga diplomacy and mutual disdain for Chinese hegemony. But Ottawa under Carney may no longer serve as the pliant northern cousin in Washington's diplomatic soap opera. While the Quad alliance finds fresh relevance amid rising Indo-Pacific tensions, Canada's irritation with alleged Indian interference must be managed carefully—preferably without turning global strategy into dinner theatre.

For India, the election is less an endgame than a reset button. With Singh vanquished and the NDP defenestrated, the air is momentarily cleared of Indian immigrants-driven acrimony. The task now is to replace whispers with words, conjecture with commitment. A public reaffirmation of non-interference in Canadian affairs could go a long way in puncturing the narrative of meddling. The tools are already at hand. Bollywood festivals in Brampton, trade summits in Delhi, Indo-Canadian university fellowships—these are not frills, but foundations. India must out-charm the conspiracy theorists and out-*diplomate* the diaspora firebrands. Think less 'Twitter clapback', more 'Chanakya meets Canadian courtesy'. The road to a mature Indo-Canadian relationship may be paved with immigration fast lanes and dual-degree programmes, not diaspora theatrics.

Carney is no bomb-thrower. His temperament leans toward the incremental and the institutional, not the impulsive. This makes him an ideal counterpart for Modi, who prefers high-visibility diplomacy but is increasingly aware of the need for discretion in sensitive theatres. Carney's primary challenge will be managing Trump-era unpredictability without appearing either overly subservient or ideologically aloof. India's challenge will be navigating Carney's cautious centrism while jettisoning the shadowy diaspora brokers who have long acted as self-appointed ambassadors of outrage.

A hypothetical Carney-Modi handshake at the 2025 UN General Assembly could be more than symbolic. It could mark the beginning of a new diplomatic syntax—one rooted in climate cooperation, counterterrorism, cyber policy and clean tech. It would also send a message to Beijing: soft power is the new hard power, and Canada and India can flex it with velvet gloves.

Still, none of this will matter unless both nations resist the easy seductions of symbolism. Diplomacy is a muscle, not a mood. And in the months ahead, it will be tested by everything from refugee policy and AI regulation to agricultural trade wars. If Canada wants to be more than a polite spectator in Asia, and if India wants to graduate from diasporic theatrics to realpolitik maturity, both sides will have to do something rare: shut up and listen.

Carney's victory is not a coronation, nor is it a condemnation—it is a calibration. The electorate rejected extremism without embracing complacency. His mandate is thin but meaningful. For India, this is not the time for covert cables or diaspora *dramatis personae*. It is the time for plainspoken diplomacy and pragmatic statecraft. A bilateral relationship once dominated by suspicion now waits to be rewritten in the ink of mutual respect.

To paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of diplomacy's death have been greatly exaggerated. The maple leaf, the tricolour, and the stars and stripes may yet find harmony—if they stop shouting long enough to listen. After all, even in the bitter chill of northern politics, maple syrup still flows.

THE BUFFALO ROAMS OUR MYTHSCAPE



OPINION

NANDITHA KRISHNA

Historian, environmentalist and writer based in Chennai

MYTHOLOGY has it that Rambha, the demon son of Rishi Kashyapa and a danava, married a mahishi or buffalo-person. They had a son, Mahisha, who became king of the buffalo-people. Mahisha lived in the Vindhyas and, by practicing severe austerities, gained strength to drive the gods out of heaven. From energies directed by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva emanated Durga or Vindhyavasini, a 10-armed woman. Mahisha's warriors tried to fight the Devi. She killed each with a different weapon held in her hands. As Durga approached the Vindhyas, the demon attacked her in several forms, each of which was destroyed. Finally, he took the form of the buffalo, whom she pinned down and killed. The *Devi Mahatmyam* of the *Markandeya Purana* describes their battle as violent, although the buffalo is a gentle animal.

Along with the Puranic killing of Mahisha by Devi, we have the popular folk ritual of sacrificing male buffaloes to local forms of the Devi in India and Nepal. Rajasthani Charans sacrifice them to goddess Pithad. Kolis, Vaghir, Dharalar, Raharis and Ravalias of Maharashtra sacrifice them to goddess Khodyaayi. In eastern India, they are sacrificed to Kali, and in southern India to Kali and several local goddesses.

Buffaloes are killed in thousands at an annual festival at Bariyarpur, Nepal. The killings are terrible, suggesting an act of anger against the animal, reliving the mythic confrontation. The early sculptures of Mahisha-mardini depict a gory killing of the buffalo by throttling it to death, until the Pallavas, formerly Jains, sculpted the buffalo demon as an anthropomorphic figure, even cowering in fear on a Mahabalipuram relief.

Who was this buffalo demon? The earliest appearance of the buffalo is in the Indus civilisation seals, either alone or grazing, throwing around several people, or being speared by man. What is more striking is that the famous horned male seated in yogic *moolabandhana* pose on several seals wears buffalo horns. To some, he was a buffalo deity.

Says Asko Parpola, "Early Harappan cultures started moving toward the east and south in about 3,000 BCE... That the Harappan water-buffalo cult had reached peninsular India by the late Harappan or Chalcolithic times is suggested by the large bronze sculpture of a water buffalo discovered in 1974 at Daimabad in Maharashtra. Throughout south India, village goddesses have been worshipped through water-buffalo sacrifices."

The Vindhyas still have buffalo-totem worshippers like the Marias and Gonds, pastoral herders who wear buffalo horns on festive occasions and were gradually pushed into the forest by food-producers, probably goddess-worshipping Dravidians. The Marias also worship Danteshvari Devi—they worship both the victorious goddess and the defeated deity.

The mythic fight between Durga and Mahisha probably signifies a conflict between agriculturists and pastoralists over land. The lore lives among communities in the Vindhyas

Mysuru, formerly Mahisha-ur, is named after Mahisha. A huge statue of a moustachioed figure of Mahisha holding a sword and a snake stands at the foot of the Chamundeshwari Hill, at the top of which stands the temple of Durga as Chamundi. There is a sub-caste called Mahishi in Karnataka, whose followers still worship the buffalo and goddess Chamundi. Less than 100 km from Mysuru are the Nilgiri Hills, home to the pastoral buffalo-worshipping Toda tribe, whose origins are shrouded in mystery. The vegetarian Todas venerate the buffalo, whose horns adorn their temples. The cairns of the Nilgiris, deserted by the Todas, are called *moriarumane* or house of the Morias (Marias).

Mahishamati, south of the Godavari where Gonds live, is named after Mahisha. Founded by Mahishmat (meaning rich in buffaloes), the region was ruled by Nila of Dakshinapatha, whose subjects were called Mahishakas. In Maharashtra, the demon Mahsoba (Mahisha+*baa,* or father), killed by Parvati, is venerated by some castes.

The Van Gujjars are a vegetarian Muslim tribe who never eat their buffaloes or sell them for slaughter. Caring for the water buffaloes is the axis around which the tribe's world revolves. Bhils worship the buffalo as Bhainsaasur.

It's projected that the gentle buffalo god-king of the indigenous tribes was demonised by the food-producers who worshipped the mother goddess. The two came into conflict over land. Groups in Karnataka who worship the buffalo were for centuries compelled by landlords to kill the buffalo and drink its blood, till the high court stopped the practice.

Durga and Mahisha were deities of agricultural and pastoral peoples. Their mythic fight probably signified that of their followers.

(Views are personal)

QUOTE CORNER



The attacks are not random. They seem designed to intimidate those of us who serve in this critical capacity. The threats and harassment are attacks on our democracy, on our system of government. And they ultimately risk undermining our Constitution and the rule of law.

Ketanji Brown Jackson, US Supreme Court judge, on the dozen-odd judges who ruled against Donald Trump and their families facing threats

The lag effect of getting goods this country will not be felt for another two to four weeks. The last couple weeks of May you'll start seeing the effect here.

Gary Cohn, IBM vice chairman and former director of the US National Economic Council, on the effect of Trump tariffs on merchandise imports

They created a lot of problems—he created a lot of problems. He is a player I had not seen live before. Lamine Yamal is a phenomenon born every 50 years.

Filippo Inzaghi, Inter Milan manager, after facing Barca's 17-year-old prodigy

MAILBAG WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com

Resilient Kashmir

Ref: *Kashmir rings familiar notes in Northeast* (May 3). The brutal terrorist attack is a stark reminder of the threat terrorism poses to harmony. The cold-blooded targeting of non-Muslims is a heinous act that has sent shockwaves throughout the nation. To the terrorists and those who harbour them, we say this: the people of Kashmir and India will not be intimidated. Instead, we will work together to build a stronger, more resilient Kashmir, where tourism flourishes and the local economy grows.

Lawrence Vadukut, Thrissur

Himanshi's appeal

Ref: *We don't want people going against Muslims or Kashmiris: Pahalgam victim's widow* (May 2). While we are still struggling to come out of the sorrow of the gruesome murder of 26 innocent people, we are saddened to learn that some hardcore elements have started attacking Kashmiri students and hapless Muslim families who are in no way connected to the attack. It is really commendable that Himanshi, who lost her husband Lt Vinay Narwal, has appealed to stop spewing hatred against any community. Even though her loss is irreparable, Himanshi's expression of love for other innocent people is beyond appreciation. May her tribe increase.

Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

Growth correlation

Ref: *Rationalise rates, set up tribunal to streamline tax system* (May 3). The increase in GST revenues need not be construed as growth in the economy. Inflation and festive spends naturally increase the volume of money spent. Growth is better measured by the relief received by the poor, not by measuring the volume of goods consumed by the rich.

A G Rajmohan, Anantapur

Biopic picks

Ref: *Dramatising the lives of others* (May 3). Producing biopics is a sensitive exercise where there should be a balance between effective portrayal and absorbing narration. The turning points, strength of character and wading through controversial zones without provoking anyone are crucial. Mere storytelling will not captivate; it should be spiced with anecdotes and unknown aspects.

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Child's rights

Ref: *Girl, 3, youngest to 'take' Santhara fast unto death* (May 3). It is deeply disturbing to read that a 3-year-old girl died after being forced to observe a religious fast. No belief or tradition should justify denying food to a helpless child. Parents and religious leaders involved must be held accountable. In a civilised society, a child's right to life and protection must come before religious customs. Reform is urgently needed to prevent such tragedies. Common sense and humanity must prevail.

Sasi Narayan, Kannur

Digital economy

Ref: *Indian influencers shape $350-bn spending annually* (May 3). The WAVE summit in Mumbai has thrown up much information on the creative economy. The aplomb of Indian creators in creating a huge market should make us proud. The emerging artificial intelligence, animation, visual effects, gaming, comics and other allied fields can mark the Indian footprint in the digital sphere. At the same time, the spread of misinformation should be carefully monitored.

H Syed Othuman, Tirunelveli

Decentralise development

Ref: *Capital Amaravati: Restart of works, restoring faith* (May 2). The CM of Andhra Pradesh is committing the same mistake his predecessors did during 1956-95 by concentrating everything in Hyderabad. Now he is planning everything at Amaravati, for which he wants to procure even more land. The Sivaramakrishnan Committee had clearly indicated that Amaravati is not suitable. He did not locate the high court in Kurnool as per the Sribagh Pact. This politician from the backward Rayalaseema is openly neglecting its development.

Govardhana Myneedu, Vijayawada

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DECCAN Chronicle

4 MAY 2025



Shashi Warrier

Off the beaten track

Is Independence Day all that we have left?

An old friend, Sunil, and his wife, Madhu, came visiting from Bengaluru the other day. We were looking forward to that, for they both like to argue without venom so it's all good fun.

They arrived one evening a few days after Easter, and, when they had refreshed themselves, we settled them down with food and drink. The talk inevitably turned to the massacre at Baisaran, still fresh in all our memories, to the usual whodunit questions, and then to the possibility of all-out war with Pakistan.

Then the doorbell rang, and there stood Murthy. "I thought you'd be home," he said.

"I am," I replied. "With guests and conversation."

"What conversation?" he asked after the introductions.

"Baisaran," replied Sunil.

"And what do you think?" asked Murthy.

"We should hit their non-state actors," replied Sunil. "They should think twice before doing something like this again."

"No," said Madhu. "We should wipe out their army's ability to do something like this for the next generation. Twenty-five years of peace."

"No," said Sunil. "We should stay away from all-out war, and make ourselves more secure. Make sure we can deal with skirmishes and intrusions."

"And live on tenterhooks all our lives?" asked Madhu.

"If necessary," replied Sunil.

"But if we destroy their war machine we'll live in peace for some years, won't we?" asked Madhu.

"We've tried it in 1965," replied Sunil. "We couldn't. Bhutto talked about a thousand-year-war half a century ago. He said the people would eat grass but beat the Indians. It seemed like the Nazi thousand-year-Reich, but unlike the Reich, the regime goes on.

"And now they're jealous. We've been getting richer and more respected for some decades, while they've been going down. So they've returned to religious cleansing. Their army chief said so, and from the applause he got it looks as if most of the wealthiest Pakistani diaspora agree. But he also said something about Kashmir being Pakistan's jugular."



'What conversation?' Murthy asked after the introductions. 'Baisaran,' replied Sunil.

"What was that jugular thing about?" asked Madhu.

"Their water comes from the Indus river system which originates in Kashmir. We've kept to the Indus Water Treaty through all these wars and skirmishes, but they want more water because parts of Sindh are becoming desert. Breaking the treaty makes sense for us."

"But they've said that means war," said Madhu.

"They don't mean it," said Sunil.

"Why not?" asked Madhu.

"Because war will cost them dearly," replied Sunil. "More than anything else, war breaks economies. The only country that did well in World War II was the only big participant that didn't have to fight on its own land: the US. They did so well that they could finance Germany's recovery and Japan's afterwards, and became the sole superpower after the Soviet Union fell…

"Anyone who wants to keep growing doesn't go to war, no matter how good it seems."

"What do you mean, good?" I couldn't help asking.

"Pakistan is in a financial hole," replied Sunil. "They're short of money, arms, fuel, and ammunition. They have insurgencies in the west, and perhaps one in Sindh as well. And they might have lost control over their nukes. They've never been so weak."

"Then this is a good time to wipe them out!" I said.

"You might control when you start a war but you don't know how it'll end," said Sunil. "Look at Ukraine. Russia's 'limited military operation' that should have lasted weeks has been on for three years and shows no sign of ending."

I refilled their drinks and took advantage of the gap in the conversation to ask Murthy, "And what do you think."

"Oh," he said, "I don't really know, but there are questions that we haven't asked."

"What?" asked Sunil and Madhu unanimously.

"Don't the Pakistanis know they're in a hole?" he asked. "That they're at their weakest?"

"I suppose they do," said Sunil.

"Then why did they poke us in the eye?" asked Murthy.

"So their army can play hero?" asked Sunil. "They can bolster the pretence that they're keeping their public safe?"

"Or could it be that someone's paying them to do this?" asked Murthy.

"Who?" asked Madhu.

"The Chinese, for example," replied Murthy.

"But what do the Chinese get?" asked Madhu.

"They're our enemy," said Murthy. "Their biggest economic weapon is their manufacturing base, which they created over the years with lots of pain to their people and to their environment. Now, with a shrinking market for their products, they're in a hole, too. And who's likely to replace them as the factory of the world?"

"India might," said Madhu. "So what?"

"The best thing for the Chinese would be a war between India and Pakistan," replied Murthy, "with Bangladesh helping Pakistan. That would leave India broke."

"What about those things they've been saying about the dragon and the elephant dancing together?" asked Madhu.

"They know they're stronger," said Murthy, "but they're not battle-hardened. If they go to war with us they'll have to postpone their superpower dreams for decades, during which someone else might come up. So are they saying 'Hindi-Chini bhai bhai' and paying the Pakistanis to poke us?"

"But won't the Pakistanis suffer?" asked Madhu.

"Why should the Chinese care?" asked Murthy. "They could throw a few crumbs to the Pakistani army, and wait for us to go to war. They could support the Pakistanis if that'll extend the war."

"And where does that leave us and the Pakistanis?" asked Madhu.

"With Independence Day," replied Murthy.

"What do you mean?" asked Madhu, nettled.

"So we can persuade ourselves that at least we're better off than we were under the British, though that's probably no longer true for the Pakistanis."

__Shashi Warrier__ has written fairy tales, thrillers, a semi-fictional biography, satires, and a love story. Teaching is his favourite pastime.

Subhani



India must keep track of Pak's strategic faultlines



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

Pakistan's gamble on terrorism as a tool of statecraft has backfired. It has weakened its civil institutions, eroded the credibility of its diplomatic narrative and drawn sustained global censure.

The idea of Pakistan was conceptualised by a Muslim Gujur from the Gorsi clan named Rehmat Ali from Balachour that falls in my erstwhile Parliamentary Constituency of Sri Anandpur Sahib.

A "permanent student" at Cambridge University, he wrote a pamphlet at age 36 called "Now or never; are we to live or perish forever?" where he laid out the intellectual basis of a Muslim state to the northwest of India.

The name Pakistan comes from the first letters of Punjab, Afghania (NWFP), Kashmir, Sindh and the tan from the last letters of Baluchistan. An i was added later for ease of pronunciation. The name has nothing to do with the mythical gobbledygook that Pakistan means the land of the pure.

In the said leaflet, there was a sentence that must have caught the eye of some diehard imperialist for it provided the strategic rationale for such an entity. "This Muslim Federation of North-West India would provide the bulwark of a buffer state against invasion of India either of ideas or of arms from any quarter."

Initially, there were no takers for this harebrained scheme but by 1940 one of its early supporters became the wartime Prime Minister of Great Britain, Sir Winston Churchill.

By October-November of 1940 just after the Battle of Britan ended, Churchill was seriously discussing this idea with his colleagues in the war cabinet for he utterly distrusted the Indian National Congress that had resigned from all the provincial ministries in October-November 1939 to protest the decision of the then Viceroy Victor Alexander John Hope, 2nd Marquees of Linlithgow, to declare war on behalf of India against Germany on September 3, 1939, without as much as consulting the Indian leadership. By then the Pakistan Resolution had already been passed on March 23, 1940.

Churchill feared a Soviet Invasion of India as till the July of 1941 or Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi fascists and Soviet Communists were fighting on the same side and the second iteration of the Great Game in Central Asia was predicted to commence sooner than later.

Seven years later what became Pakistan was broadly the construct laid out by Rehmat Ali and embraced by Churchill in the nascent years of the Second World War. It was Churchill in 1947 as leader of Opposition who prevailed upon Jinnah to accept what Jinnah derisively called a moth-eaten Pakistan. West Pakistan was a strategic project of the victorious Anglo-American alliance as the Cold War had already begun in 1945. The future state of West Pakistan was supposed to be the buffer to stop the Soviet influence from expanding. Hence West Pakistan was set up by the Allies to succeed. It, therefore, got the rich irrigated lands of West Punjab and the flourishing mercantile cities of Lahore and Karachi.

Conversely, East Pakistan, as it had no strategic value because the British had enough equities in Burma, was set up to fail and was, therefore, mostly pastoral in character. However, in the past seven decades, while East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) has succeeded against all odds and West Pakistan (now Pakistan) has failed ever so spectacularly.

The myth of might: Pakistan is perhaps the only nation where the military has a country, not a country that has a military. It has nuclear weapons, a first strike doctrine, a client-patron relationship with China and was America's frontline ally in the Afghan Jihad from 1980-89 and again in the War on Terror from 2001-2021.

However, all this bombast subterfuges a fractured and unstable internal structure. The Pakistani Army may command the state, but it does not command a unified nation. Its dependence on semi-state militant outfits, once an asset in proxy conflicts, is now a serious liability. Pakistan's gamble on terrorism as a tool of statecraft has badly backfired. It has been weakening its civil institutions, eroding the credibility of its diplomatic narrative and drawn sustained global censure.

Cracks beneath the surface: Pakistan was born out of the two-nation theory based upon the erroneous belief that Hindus and Muslims can not not coexist. Yet more than 70 years later Pakistan's identity remains narrowly defined and deeply friable. A nation built solely on religious identity is inherently prone to internal fractures and existential insecurity. Does even Islam unite Pakistan? Even within its Islamic framework, Pakistan has failed to safeguard its own Muslim minorities. Shias, Ahmadis, Hazaras, Khojas and others face regular persecution, often branded as heretics. Sectarian violence is endemic, especially in Punjab and Balochistan where extremist groups like Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi flourish. The state's unwillingness to rein in such forces reveals a hollow ideological core and undermines its claim to defend Muslim causes, including its sanctimonious role in Kashmir.

Pakistan's over-centralised, military-heavy governance has alienated various ethnic and regional groups. Balochistan remains embroiled in insurgency, marked by disappearances and military repression. In Sindh, particularly among the urban Mohajir community, resentment festers against the Punjabi-dominated establishment. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) continue to suffer from economic neglect. Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, despite their strategic importance, remain disenfranchised and underdeveloped. Pakistan claims to be a federation where federalism is absent. Power is concentrated in a unitary structure dominated by the military and bureaucracy where political parties only play a peripheral role.

The Durand Line, drawn by colonial powers, remains a flashpoint, unrecognised by any Afghan regime, including the Taliban. The Pashtun communities on both sides reject this artificial divide, and Pakistan's long-held ambition of controlling Kabul for 'strategic depth' has not only failed again but bombed.

The rise of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), a civil rights platform challenging military excesses, reflects the growing unrest within. For India, tracking and amplifying such voices of internal resistance could become a potent tool in reshaping the strategic narrative.

India's strategic leverage: Pakistan's economy remains in chronic distress, propped up by IMF bailouts, Chinese loans, and remittances from the Gulf. In 2025 it is estimated to grow at a meagre 2.6 pc. Its financial structure is dominated by military-run conglomerates such as the Fauji Foundation and the Army Welfare Trust, while its civilian leadership is weak, divided and beholden to the military establishment in Rawalpindi. Corruption is entrenched, tax compliance is abysmal and the economic outlook grim. Even a robust black economy cannot mitigate this economic morass.

The Pakistan question? The prospect of Pakistan's disintegration is no longer confined to the realm of speculation. Its internal contradictions, ideological rigidity, ethnic unrest, economic fragility and political dysfunction have grown so deep that the collapse of the state, though not imminent, is no longer inconceivable and but a matter of time. This is the end game that India must focus upon by sharpening these contradictions. For as long as the Pakistani state exists in its current form its core behaviour will not change.

__Manish Tewari__ is a third-term Lok Sabha MP and former Union minister. Twitter handle @ManishTewari.

LETTERS

STOP CRITICIZING GOVT

Due to the never ceasing belligerence of Pakistan, India had suffered heavily ìn terms of human lives and money. A optimal point of tolerance towards the misdeeds of Pakistan has now been reached with the Pahalgam killings. The whole world knows that what Pakistan did through its proxies is a high point of crime and does not come under the purview of a military action. The criminals and their Pakistani political patrons are to be paid back in their own coin to propitiate the 26 lives abruptly extinguished for no fault of them. It is the duty of every patriotic Indian to extend all moral support to the Indian government in this hour of national tragedy. The least one can do in this regard is to desist from criticizing and commenting on the actions that the government intends to take against our enemies.

S.Nagarajan Iyer
Coimbatore

JUST EYEWASH

This refers to the Delhi Court notice to Congress leaders, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, in the National Herald money laundering case, which is dragging on for decades. It is shameful that cases like this are opened, on the eve of elections in our country to gain political points, by the ruling party. Why can't the ED / courts prove the case within a time limit - say a year or two? It is known fact that no political leader, who are caught in the web of investigating agencies, do get punished in our country. All these cases are nothing but an election gimmick and eyewash.

Capt. N. Viswanathan
Coimbatore

Mail your letters to
chennaidesk@deccanmail.com



Skand Tayal

Will unilateralism by Trump's US drive Japan, South Korea to 'nuclearisation'?

The unpredictable foreign policy of the Trump administration in its first 100 days has introduced a sense of unease in other Nato members. In the Indo-Pacific, America's major defence allies are Japan, South Korea and Australia. Japan and South Korea face a direct threat from a nuclear-armed North Korea and an indirect threat from China. President Donald Trump's recent moves in practically abandoning Ukraine to its own fate may force the strategists of the two Northeast Asian democracies to wonder whether a future US President would be ready to risk an attack on California to save Tokyo or Seoul. The intensifying rivalry between the US and China, North Korea's mercurial behaviour and the fate of non-nuclear nations like Iraq, Libya, Syria and Ukraine are likely to trigger a debate, for instance, about whether Japan should chart its own nuclear course.

The regional security environment has darkened since President Xi Jinping consolidated his power. China's assertiveness has moved beyond the realm of economic coercion such as restrictions on rare earth minerals to Japan to hard military posturing. Beijing's expanded naval presence near Japan's Senkaku Islands, live-fire exercises around Taiwan and a burgeoning blue-water navy signal a state preparing for territorial expansion. Simultaneously, North Korea's continued missile testing and unrelenting nuclear development intensify threats. Compounding this is the breakdown in the international rules-based order reflected in Beijing's defiance of UNCLOS in the South China Sea and Russia's "special military operation" against Ukraine.

Amidst this volatility, the credibility of the extended deterrence by the US, a cornerstone of Japanese security, is bound to come under scrutiny. The first Trump administration's transactional approach to alliances and public musings about troop withdrawals had seeded doubt in Tokyo. While the Biden administration had moved to reinforce alliance structures, the spectre of a return to American isolationism has again raised questions.

Despite this uncertainty, nuclearisation remains politically unpopular in Japan. Former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, a native of Hiroshima, had reaffirmed Japan's adherence to its three non-nuclear principles: not to possess, produce or permit introduction of nuclear weapons. Even conservative analysts who advocate revision of Japan's Constitution, expanding the definition of "self-defence" and increased military budgets, stop well short of calling for indigenous nuclear arms. The ruling side is testing the boundaries of Japan' s pacifist Constitution, doubling the defence budget and acquiring long-range strike capabilities, but it has not ventured into nuclear territory.

Tokyo's response to the deteriorating security environment in the Indo-Pacific in the face of an expansionist China has been robust, but not nuclear. Its National Security Strategy and 2024 Defence White Paper mark a decisive shift toward hardening its defence posture; acquiring counter-strike capability, strengthening missile defence and operationalising new domains like cyber and space. It is on course to become a strong *conventional* military power.

But this sentiment can change, just as it has changed in India. Japan possesses the technical capacity to build nuclear weapons. Its advanced civilian nuclear infrastructure, scientific base and delivery capabilities place it among the most prepared non-nuclear states in the world. Under the civil nuclear cooperation agreement with the US in 1987, Japan can reprocess spent fuel from its civil nuclear reactors. It, therefore, has a stockpile of plutonium, which can be diverted to form plutonium bombs.

On the other side of the East Sea, South Korean policymakers have been debating for decades its possible nuclearisation. In January 2023, former President Yoon Suk-yeol said that if Pyongyang's provocations intensify, "it is possible that our country will introduce tactical nuclear weapons or build them on our own". Responding to this pro-nuclear sentiment, in April 2023 the US signed the "US-ROK Washington Declaration" under the Biden Administration. The North Korean rhetoric has hardened, too. In October 2024, North Korea amended its constitution declaring South Korea a "hostile state", and gave up its long-lasting policy of "reunification" with South Korea.

Part of this complex riddle is the continuing US refusal to allow South Korea to reprocess its spent nuclear fuel from nuclear power stations. Under the 2015 "US-ROK Agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation", South Korea's reprocessing is subject to further negotiations with the US. South Korea has a huge and mounting stockpile of highly hazardous spent fuel. Its ambassador to the US had in October 2024 reportedly said this issue would again be discussed.

Much will depend on the Trump administration's future strategy. President Trump advocates "burden sharing" with its allies and has encouraged regional powers to take more responsibility for their own as well as regional security. But what are the limits of this approach? And how dependable are the assurances of the United States where the occupant of the White House changes every four or eight years?

The writer is a retired diplomat and has served as India's ambassador to South Korea

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DID THAT SURYAVANSHI BACHHA JUST DESTROY OUR NOTION OF ADOLESCENCE?

When a 14-yr-old boy-cricketer hits 101 in 35 balls in IPL, redefining the concept of maturity, you know he represents a serious chronological setback for humankind

CITIZEN KAUN?



MUDAR PATHERYA

Just when we were overcoming the roller-coaster of Trump-tariffs, wars in Europe and West Asia, and getting rational about India's response to the Pahalgam terrorist attacks, we have a 14-year-old hitting 101 in 35 balls in only his third IPL game. On Monday, Rajasthan Royals opener Vaibhav Suryavanshi smashed 11 sixes against Gujarat Titans on his way to scoring the second fastest century – and fastest century by an Indian – in IPL history in Jaipur. It seems that societal setbacks come camouflaged in strike rates of 289 these days.

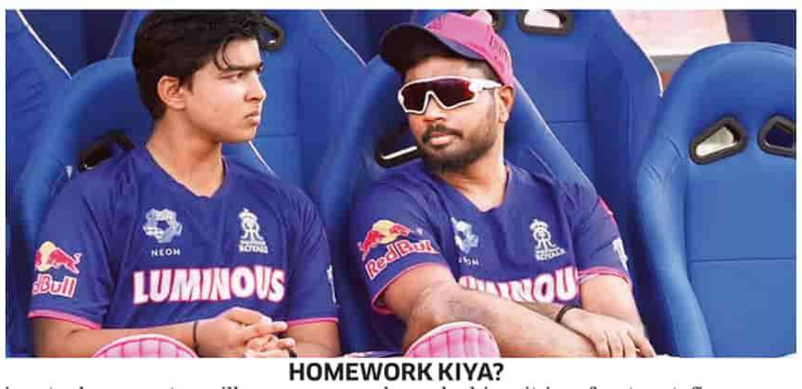
Here are a few reasons why a juvenile, generating 94% of his runs from boundaries, represents a *setback* for humankind:

· **Bye-bye innocence** With his single innings, India's teens have just lost their innocence. 'Ab chauda saal ke bachhe bachhe nahi rahe' (14-year-old kids are now no longer kids) is a refrain doing the rounds this week.

· **Greater expectations** After Suryavandhi's innings, the world will expect a 10-yr-old to climb Everest, a 9-yr-old to run the mile in less than 4 mins, and a 13-year-old to bring India an Olympic gold.

· **Brat race** For most children, whose parents or guardians watched/read/heard about *the* innings, the rat race – school-coaching-gym-studies, repeat – will begin at 6.

· **Changing diets** Diets for pregnant mothers will include 'Watching cricket for 2 hours each day'. More children will be named after cricketers. Toddlers will be monkey-trained to answer, 'IPL cricketer,' when anyone asks 'Beta, bade hokar kya banoge?' (Son, what will you be when you grow up?)



HOMEWORK KIYA?

· **Talent hunters** Talent scouts, pretending to be parents, will snoop around schools scrutinising score sheets, sidling up to umpires, and lurking behind the nets.

· **Coaches galore** A 9-yr-old will attend fielding coaching on Friday, batting coaching on Saturday, bowling coaching on Sunday, mental coaching on Monday, and captaincy mentorship on Tuesday.

· **Politickle capital** Some party secretary will invite the teenager to an election rally, make him sit in a front seat, fix an oversized badge on his chest, and ask him to wave to the crowd.

· **School's out** Most school principals will reconcile to a dip in school attendance and academic performance in Classes 7-8 – 'Time to select between taking cricket as a career, or a conventional naukri'.

· **National setback** Engineering giants like L&T can keep complaining about a dearth of engineers. After this VS innings, the paucity could only get worse.

· **Sacrificial lambs** There could be a spate of resignations by parents in their 40s to ferry their children to coaching, practice and matches, justified by the classic, 'We saw the talent early, and made a family sacrifice.'

· **Age inflation** 14 will be the new 18. Bryan Adams will have to rewrite his classic as '14 Til I Die'.

· **Minor major change** There will soon be a demand that 15-year-olds be allowed to vote, drive, and marry. Suryavanshi's one innings has made India seem so 1960 again.

· **Retirement adjustments** Burnout could happen after teenagers have made ₹50 cr by 19, put the dosh in debt mutual funds, and have decided to live happily ever after.

· **Chief guest fever** Suryavanshi will be invited to inaugurate Ram Leelas and Durga Pujas, make a statement on women's empowerment, become an inner-wear brand ambassador, and endorse mineral water carrying the same name as a liquor brand.

· **Posterboy for postermen** Some bureaucrat will highlight this innings as a success of Modi sarkar's child education programmes helping build a new India.

· **Success matlab...** After this one innings, the life mission of an entire country will be to play IPL, hit sixes, and be mentioned in headlines. An ordinary life will look way ordinarier.

· **Comparative studies** Everyone will be compared with the 'na-baaligh' 14-year-old, including the great Tendulkar – 'Was Sachin as good at 15 as Vaibhav is at 14?'

· **Bio-gradable** An official biography and a biopic should already be in the works.

P.S. Suryavanshi's duck in his next match against Mumbai Indians on Thursday, thankfully, eased some pressure on teens across the world. Let's see what he does against KKR tonight.

14 will be the new 18. Bryan Adams will have to rewrite his classic as '14 Til I Die'

The writer is CEO, Trisys

SEN & SENSIBILITY



RAJYASREE SEN

We Shall Fight, From Our Kitchens And Our Offices!

Social media soldiers are all out there to give Pakistan a fitting lesson – huzzah!

On any given day, even a few minutes on social media can be trying. But ever since the Pahalgam terrorist attack, social media-tors are cosplaying in fatigues and chalking out battle plans. Patriots have arisen – but from the most unlikely of corners. And for once it's not WhatsApp uncles and TV news anchors.

It's bad enough that social media influencers – a bona fide career option these days – started posting multiple reels and videos of their old holidays in Pahalgam within hours of the attack. But they were no match for the latest social media soldiers now out there. Move over Facebook reels, Instagram threads and Snapchat. There are new networks at play.

Earlier, LinkedIn used to be full of posts displaying the best of creative thinking and posturing by white collarwalas. There were executives sharing professional lessons they'd learnt from the homeless person they meet every day at the traffic light, with the mention of how much they donate to said panhandler. There were CEOs posting pictures of themselves swilling champagne while their own companies were laying off people in the hundreds.

But come April 22, the same people have 'pivoted'. Within minutes of the news of the Pahalgam attack airing, they all became master strategists of war, veritable Santa Clausewitzs and Sun Tzus. Each post explains how India has already sent troops into Pakistan, how we should throw out all non-Hindus, and interrogate Kashmiri Muslim students studying in India – in anticipation of them becoming terrorists.

Others waxed eloquent on how and when we should send in the military to 'wipe out' Pakistan. Political insights and war strategy on display, post after post, from people whose biggest achievement is to have managed to link different worksheets on Excel. Who knew that the first line of offence when we attacked Pakistan wouldn't be from the army, but from the ranks of general managers of MNCs, led by a commanding line of a band of startup brothers?



TOPPLING THE ENEMY: DOWN, DOWN, KASURI METHI!

The prize, though, for the most unexpected line of defence goes to the foodies. Since I'm always interested in the genesis of common herbs and ingredients, a long post on a recipe group commending the illustrious DNA and historical lineage of one of my favourite dried herbs, Kasuri methi (made from fenugreek leaves), caught my eye. The title should have prepared me for what follows – 'Stop calling dried methi leaves Kasuri methi!'

Frankly, I thought this was in the same vein as saying 'Stop calling tea, 'chai tea!'' But no. The patriotic foodie gave us a detailed history on how Kasuri methi refers to dried fenugreek leaves grown in the Kasur region in Pakistan. He went into the soil conditions, cultivation cycles – only to finally get to the point. That the methi available in Indian markets is grown in India. So post-Pahalgam, when the flavour of the season is to boycott anything Pakistani, 'let us stop calling dried methi as Kasuri methi and not give the name undue publicity'.

I applaud the gentleman for his commitment to the cause. His post certainly stood head and shoulders above those others telling us to stop using Shan masalas and eating Karachi halwa (but stopped short of shunning (vegetable) biryani). Even patriots have their priorities. Friday night chole bhature doesn't quite set the pulse racing.

Also, who will inform the patriotic gastronome that if we are to shun all food and ingredients introduced to us by marauders and conquerors, we will then have to remove tomatoes, chilis, Alfonso mangoes, potatoes, and the multifarious kebabs we love to eat, not to mention pulao, from our kitchens and plates?

Field Marshal Manekshaw and non-field marshal Churchill had nothing on these online soldiers who are promising to fight from the shared cubicle in their open-plan office space and their kitchen cabinets, one ingredient at a time. This is the stuff great military strategists could only dream of.

We shall fight from our air-conditioned offices. We shall fight on social media. We shall fight from our kitchens. Never surrender!

A VERY TALL SHADOW AND RAY OF LIGHT

Is Satyajit Ray finally coming out of a highbrow grotto and a Bengali ghetto for cosmopolitan Indian audiences?

CULTURE CLUB



RADHARANI MITRA

A summer afternoon in a Kolkata cul-de-sac in the early 70s. Two little girls waiting in a black Ambassador to pick up an aunt on their way back from school. That spot, that hour, that wait is quite routine.

It turns out to be different though. First, they see the shadow. Then, they see the man. Pacing up and down, lost in thought. The girls are beaming, their eyes shining with excitement. They know who this tall man is. He's the 'Bhooter Raja' (King of Ghosts).

Their father has explained how 'this man has used his big voice, distorting it through a machine to sound like the Ghost King' in Goopy Gyne, Bagha Byne, their favourite film. Later in the evening, he tells them that they indeed did see Satyajit Ray – that he uses an edit suite ('where he cuts the film rolls, puts them together to turn them into a story you'd watch in the cinema') at his friend, the documentary filmmaker Shanti Chowdhury's house down that lane.

Ray was never a remote figure in Bengal. Without Page 3, 24x7 TV, Google, YouTube, Facebook reels, Insta threads, Ray was somehow ever-present through his prolific creativity across media. His dialogues and music, movie posters he designed himself, actors he launched, and stories he told were indistinguishable from the Bengali way of life. His annual Professor Shonku (mad sci-fi protagonist) and Feluda (suave, cerebral detective) stories were as much a part of Durga Pujo as were new clothes.

Ray was Vamana, the avatar straddling many spheres: Rajasthani tappa to Mozart concertos; Jean Renoir to the Bengal Renaissance; nonsense literature to Henrik Ibsen. He took Indian cinema to the world, won at Bafta, Cannes, the Oscars, and Venice, was interviewed by the international media in his much photographed, atmospheric study. Many of his films ran to packed houses in New York and London.

The Russians thought Jalsaghar (The Music Room) was too decadent. But it showed in Paris for nearly a year. He collaborated with Ismail Merchant and James Ivory twice – writing the music for Shakespeare Wallah, and re-editing The Householder.

A very glamorous photograph featuring Indian stars Soumitra Chatterjee, Shashi Kapoor, and Madhur Jaffrey from the Berlin Film Festival 1965 surfaces on social media around this time of the year, his birthday on May 2.



EVER THOUGHT OF PLAYING A MAFIA BOSS?

While the world celebrated Ray, in India he remained a Bengali. Because Bengal held him, like Tagore before him, in too close an embrace

Ray is not in it, yet this B&W image signifies what he brought to Berlin that year – Charulata, a film steeped in all things Bengal, but universal in its humanism and relatability.

While the world celebrated Satyajit Ray, in India he remained a Bengali. Because Bengal held him, like Tagore before him, in too close an embrace. In their possessive exploration of his oeuvre, they created the 'Manikda syndrome'. Manik, his 'daak naam' (nickname) became code for an intimate exclusivity, turning Ray into a one-of-our-own, defies-translation, near-divine source of illumination.

His last film, Aguntuk (The Stranger) is a statement against this narrowing of definitions, a pushing back against the conventional framing of what civilisation is, and who is its flag-bearer. The film's protagonist (Utpal Dutt), given up for dead, turns up after decades and disrupts established values, scripted roles, and cultural constructs.

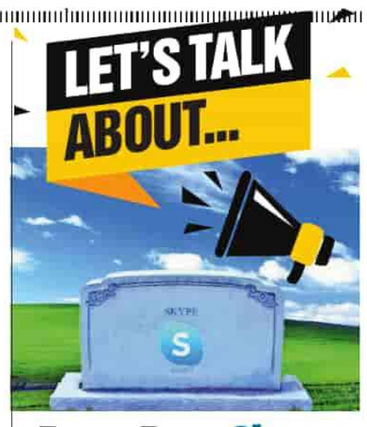
Ray's influence has been undeniable in shaping Indian cinema. Yet, he has not often been seen in cinemas outside Bengal – except during festivals or retrospectives. However, the tide is turning. Recently, Ray's 1966 film Nayak (The Hero), played in multiplexes across India. There is an emerging viewer base now.

Seven years ago, I rewatched some of my Ray favourites on YouTube. Today, several of his films are available on streaming platforms. Many Ray classics are being restored. Hopefully, cosmopolitan Indian audiences will watch more of Ray and get a sense of their own roots and wings.

During a recent visit to London's Museum of Moving Image, I wandered into the day's screening – Ray's Apur Sansar (The World of Apu). As the auditorium air filled with the fragrant chemistry between Apu and his bride, I went back to that summer afternoon with my sister in the car and felt ever so glad that there was no escaping Ray's very tall shadow.

The writer is former global creative advisor, BBC Media Action

LET'S TALK ABOUT...



Bye, Bye Skype

Is Skype shutting down?
Yes. After two decades of pixelated faces, frozen calls, 'Can you hear me now?' moments and the iconic ringtone, Skype is logging off from tomorrow, May 5.

Why now? Wasn't Skype 'the thing'?
In short – MS Teams happened. Microsoft has been gently nudging users from Skype to Microsoft Teams. Let's be honest, Skype has been lagging, especially with GenZ and their FaceTimes, Zooms, and IG Lives. But yes, for a whole generation, Skype was internet's first awkward attempt at long-distance intimacy – cousins in the US or Britain showing us snow over choppy video; long-distance couples crying pixelated tears....

But what happens to my Skype account now?
If you are still clinging to that Skype ID from 2008, don't panic. Microsoft says you can migrate your chats and contacts to Teams. But you won't be able to sign in to Skype or download it after May 5.

Will Skype be remembered fondly or be a tech fossil?
Bit of both. But it was revolutionary. Skype taught us to video call before it was cool (and before it was mandatory during pandemics). But it didn't keep up with the times.

So, what are my options now?
Many. There is Skype's official hier – Microsoft teams. Corporate's darling – Zoom and Google Meet. And then GenZ approved FaceTime, WhatsApp or Instagram video calls.

Any final words in memory of Skype?
Skype, you gave us bad lighting, frozen faces, and the thrill of hearing, 'I think you are on mute' before it was the pandemic trend. You were the 'call' before the call. Thanks for the memories – and for glitching through every important moment of the 2010s.

Text: Team Sunday ET

In the Name of OSV, May The Fourth With You Be

If you want – or, at least your words – to be taken seriously, speak in Yodanese

RED HERRING



INDRAJIT HAZRA

Sunday today is, again. Sleepy I am, still. Malfunctioning, my brain is after a night of heavy partying before you think, let me reassure you that neither is my dyslexia acting up, nor is this column hacked by someone who introduces himself to people by saying, 'Myself am Indrajit,' or, if on the phone, 'Indrajit this side.' With your first cup of coffee giving you Jedi clarity, you will have recognised that on Star Wars Day today, of Master Yoda thinking I am.

Yoda first appeared in the 1980 sequel to Star Wars (1977), The Empire Strikes Back as the green, pointy-eared, muppet-sized philosopher-teacher that the film's FX art director Joe Johnston described as a 'combination of a leprechaun, a troll, and a gnome' giving out, as Lucas saw him, 'little Dalai Lama' vibes. But more than his striking resemblance to my great-grandmother, what became part of pop cultural lore is the way Yoda spoke – his lopsided sentence constructions.

Like many humans for whom English is not their first go-to language, Yoda (species unknown) clearly translated in his head before speaking. We are never told which language he was translating into English. One presumes, if you live alone on the swamp planet Dagobah, where Luke Skywalker (and we) first meet him, speaking English – in Shashi Tharoorese or in post-Victorian English formats – is not much of a skill requirement.

But while Wren and Martinwallas may snigger at the likes of Hrundi V Bakshi or the man who drives you to office when they say, 'Excuse me, please,' Yoda's placement of the object-cart before the verb-horse with the subject as reins is not just cute, but has become an epic signature of his deep, cosmic 900-year-old wisdom.

Last month, Star Wars creator George Lucas revealed at the TCL Chinese Theatre (no Trumpist pushback here) on Hollywood Boulevard after a special screening of The Empire Strikes Back, that he had made Yoda speak that way to get people to pay attention to what the master Jedi said. 'Because if you speak regular English, people won't listen that much. But if he had an accent, or it's really hard to understand what he's saying, they focus on what he's saying.' Indeed, the riddle-me-this, riddle-me-that way of speaking adds to his mystique and mystical charm.



WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN, BUT TALK LIKE YODA

What Yoda does when speaking English is order his sentences differently from the way most of us do (subject followed by verb followed by object, SVO) and place them as object-subject-verb (OSV). So instead, 'You still have much to learn,' he says, 'Much to learn, you still have.' As Lucas explained to an audience belonging to a generation that has an Insta attention span of a gnat's wing flap, Yoda was 'basically the philosopher of the movie. I had to figure out a way to get people to actually listen — especially 12-year-olds.'

So, Yodaspeak can be an effective tool to up, if not one's information uptake rate (IUR, speed/amount of information a person absorbs and processes), but to increase one's information retention quotient (how deeply a person retains information). In other words, processing knowledge, as opposed to collecting information, power.

OSV constructions in the real world are rare. It does appear in specific contexts in Chinese and Finnish – and lines like 'Johny mera naam' in Hindi. They operate as the usual format in a few South American Indian languages, like Nadëb in Brazilian Amazonia. But Yoda-OSV can be also found in the heightened language of poetry that demands attention to be savoured – 'No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,/ More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring' (Gerard Manley Hopkins), 'For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered' (Shakespeare), and 'Dilli dur ast' – Delhi far away is (Nizamuddin Auliya).

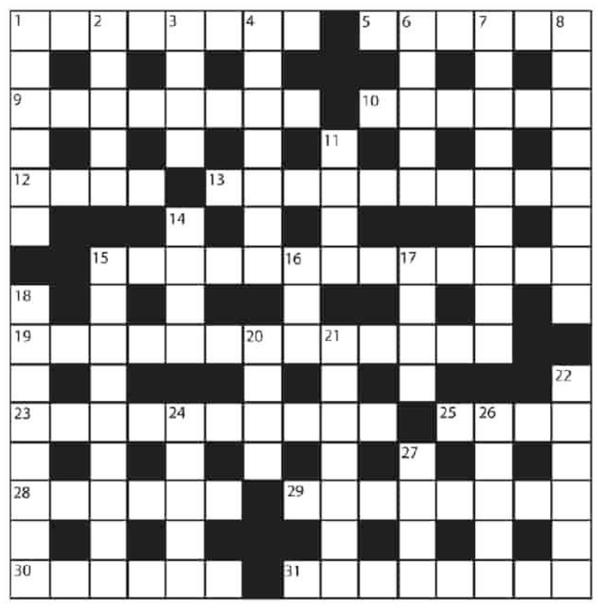
So, tomorrow at the office meeting, if you want your wise words to truly sink in, go with, 'To the next point let us move on' and 'Into a little more detail, could we go?' May the Fourth be with you. Or rather: The Fourth, with you may be. Or is it: Fourth be the May you with?

indrajit.hazra@timesofindia.com

NO OFFENCE — *Morparia*



ET Sunday Crossword 0114



ACROSS
1 Single chap took in 500, then 500 more, as required (2,6)
5 US spies returned carrying Cruise bomb? (6)
9 Old soldiers start to march on Turkey's ground ... (8)
10 ... where most Anzacs were overrun in lines (6)
12 Old songs belonging to woman duke abandoned (4)
13 Fly-by-night ruined TV-AM pair hiding core of debt (7,3)
15 Finally, Oscar forced Ann to dance in front of everybody (4,3,3,3)
19 Being a chancer, operator left new units in charge (13)
23 Someone in planning department changed its targets (10)
25 Tool appears in A-to-Zed by mistake (4)
28 Book departure en masse (6)
29 Silly old men consume American energy drink (8)
30 Dredge river enclosure (6)
31 Toil away in building yard with skill (8)

DOWN
1 Refurbish room with centre of column in gold leaf (6)
2 Springfield's obligation to protect school? (5)
3 Come across gathering of horses and hounds (4)
4 Five enter magical Narnia to find happiness (7)
6 Tory oddly has hired out eccentric teacher (5)
7 In France my white wine has time to reach its peak (4,5)
8 Talk on Terry's personal possessions (8)
11 A group of careless pedestrians moved fast (4)
14 Old wound's almost frightening (4)
15 Unit has endless support, possibly deliberately (2,7)
16 She takes part in Annunciation (3)
17 A hot liquid taken in court (4)
18 Noticed duke under throne? It still needs explaining (5,3)
20 Strongly recommend a mouthful of beefburger (4)
21 Sent aid abroad as an alternative (7)
22 After church, disabled rely on sticks perhaps (6)
24 Chinese leader impressed by genuine peace agreement (5)
26 Bought and sold wood at end of August (5)
27 Game in swimming pool (4)

SOLUTION TO No 0114:
ACROSS: 1 On demand. 5 Atomic. 9 Musketry. 10 Stanza. 12 Lays. 13 Vampire bat. 15 Once and for all. 19 Opportunistic. 23 Strategist. 14 Adze. 28 Exodus. 29 Lemonade. 30 Deepen. 31 Ardorlily.
DOWN: 1 Ormolu. 2 Dusty. 3 Meet. 4 Nirvana. 6 Tutor. 7 Mont Blanc. 8 Chattels. 11 Sped. 14 Scar. 15 On purpose. 16 Nun. 17 Oath. 18 Loose end. 20 Urge. 21 Instead. 22 Celery. 24 Truce. 26 Deal. 27 Polo.

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Opinion

SUNDAY, MAY 4, 2025



Gujarat Titans' players greet after the team won the IPL 2025 cricket match against Sunrisers Hyderabad, in Ahmedabad PTI

IPL, a glorious summer distraction

RINGSIDE VIEW



Tushar Bhaduri

IS THE INDIAN Premier League (IPL) a bona fide cricket tournament in its own right? How much prestige is attached to winning the trophy?

These may be considered silly questions to ask as the league goes through its 18th season, having long become a fixture in the Indian summer. The tournament's valuation, done from time to time by major multinational accounting firms, rank it among the biggest sporting properties in the world. But in pure sporting terms, how much does it really matter? November 19, 2023, has forever been seared into the collective consciousness of Indian cricket fans. The heartbreak suffered by the heavily-favoured hosts in front of more than a lakh home fans expecting nothing less than a coronation after the team's waltz through the World Cup unbeaten, will hurt for a long time. In the same vein, June 25, 1983, and April 2, 2011, will be remembered for the spontaneous euphoria and sense of pride they generated. In contrast, dates of IPL finals are hardly remembered even by fans of the teams competing.

One may argue that achievements at the international level will always be placed at a pedestal higher than those of a franchise, and playing and winning for the country still carries more resonance in cricket. That may be true, and the factor holding back IPL from being a sporting competition, where winning and losing cannot be brushed away so easily.

But a team's valuation often doesn't reflect its on-field performance. Kolkata Knight Riders had underwhelming results in the initial years of the league, but that didn't adversely affect its financials much. On the other hand, Sunrisers Hyderabad and Gujarat Titans won IPL titles not too long after entering the fray – the latter in its inaugural season itself – but didn't reap the financial windfall.

This is a far cry from a giant football club like Manchester United, sweating over whether it will make the UEFA Champions League next season – by winning the Europa League. Co-owner Jim Ratcliffe has put the estimated value of making the top tier of European club competition at between 80 to 100 million pounds. That puts every decision they take – in the boardroom, picking the manager and the players, and deciding the playing XI – under the microscope.

Star culture

On the other hand, a lot of the loyal fans of an IPL franchise wait with bated breath just for a glimpse of their ageing superstar, who is clearly not pulling his weight on the field. That franchise is said to be run like a family unit, but a professional sporting entity cannot procrastinate on crucial decisions even if they involve its biggest name.

Another franchise, headlined by arguably the biggest name in world cricket, has failed to get the trophy since the launch of the league in 2008, but that has scarcely hit its brand value. The fans may suffer regular heartbreaks, but have now learnt to treat them as badges of honour.

The champions in the first edition have garnered a reputation of grooming young Indian players, but that often comes at the expense of consistency and on-field results.

All this is possible largely due to the IPL being a closed league, without any danger of relegation. It allows teams that have consistently been in the bottom half of the points table breathing space with nothing to fear. There are no consequences of a poor season, just a few complaints from the faithful in the immediate aftermath of a debacle, with the hope that lessons will be learnt and next season will be better. With the possible exception of Mumbai Indians, the environment is quite forgiving.

With no avenue to qualify for a higher-level competition, once a team gets on a slippery slope, there may not be much to play for, except pride of performance. Consider the scenario in the English Premier League, the top sides vie for the title, with the other targets being the Champions League, Europa League, Conference League, or even just avoiding relegation.

Other concerns

That's the reason why the narrative is diverted to tangential questions – such as where MS Dhoni will bat and whether he will continue to play next season (even experts on TV calmly evade the elephant in the room as giving a frank opinion may result in the loss of a lucrative commentary gig) or whether a team will hit the 300-run mark in its 20 overs (even when a devil-may-care approach may be inimical to its on-field prospects). Broadcasters often set the narrative and then happily play along once it has been bought by fans and the television audience. In a personality-based environment, there's reluctance to do away with underperforming assets, as long as the bottom line is not impacted. The owners hardly ever feel the heat when results don't go their way, in sharp contrast to what happens in top-level football.

It's this star-driven culture that has prompted the Indian cricket board to bar its golden geese from appearing in other domestic T20 leagues. It knows that the crowds that flock to the stadiums and in front of the TV generally come for the stars and not the teams. That explains the 'Thala' banners, not just in Chennai but throughout the country, and the 'Kohli' chants everywhere.

Whether to extend contracts to key players at a football club is a much-debated topic, not just among the top brass but among the fans too, who organise themselves into pressure groups to make their voices heard. That a club of the stature of Manchester United has struggled in the Premier League and will finish at its lowest position this season is the cause of much angst. In the IPL, such a debacle may just prompt a shrug of the shoulder.

A legendary football manager like Carlo Ancelotti may not be a certainty to coach Real Madrid next season after a - relatively – disappointing season, despite winning the Champions League in two of the previous three seasons, but one of the most successful IPL teams will think several times before changing their coach who has been with them almost from the inception of the league, despite two consecutive underwhelming campaigns.

With a match — sometimes two — every day, hardly any IPL match has much recall value after a couple of days. The stakes, and often the quality of cricket, never get as high as in international cricket, unlike in football when elite club competition may be the pinnacle in terms of level of play. As things stand, the IPL is an attractive distraction and an enticing summer pastime.

ACROSS THE AISLE



P Chidambaram

The Congress and other parties made statements of unqualified support to any action that the government might take. If it appears that the consensus has since frayed, the government has to blame itself. There are many reasons: the government expressed shock but not contrition; no one in authority acknowledged the grave lapses in security; the prime minister cut short his visit to Saudi Arabia and returned to Delhi but did not visit Pahalgam or Srinagar; an all-party meeting was called but Mr Modi skipped it and instead chose to visit Patna for a rally



The deserted Attari-Wagah border, near Amritsar, closed due to heightened security measures following a terror attack in Pahalgam in which 26 people were killed PTI

India applauds resolve, and waits

PRIME MINISTER'S *MANN Ki Baat* on Sunday last was devoted mainly to the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir and its aftermath. According to news reports, Mr Modi said, "*Every Indian holds deep sympathies for the affected families. No matter which State one belongs to, no matter which language one speaks, one is feeling the pain of those who have lost their loved ones in this attack. I can feel that the blood of every Indian is on the boil after seeing the pictures of the terrorist attack.*"

The prime minister captured the feelings of the entire country. He spoke about unity, solidarity and resolve of the people of India, and promised to demonstrate that India as a nation will demonstrate its strong will power. I applaud his resolute words.

Exaggerated claims

But, I am afraid, not all that the PM said on the occasion was correct. On the situation in Kashmir before the attack, Mr Modi said, "*peace was returning to Kashmir; there was a vibrancy in schools and colleges; construction work had gained unprecedented pace; democracy was getting stronger; the number of tourists was increasing at a record rate; people's income was increasing, new opportunities were being created for the youth...*" Not all will agree, and in moments of deep reflection even Mr Modi will consider the claims an exaggeration:

- Peace is a distant goal in Kashmir. At the all-party meeting on April 24, 2025, the presentation made by the Ministry of Home Affairs said that, in the decade between June 2014 and May 2024, there were 1,643 terrorist-initiated incidents, 1,925 infiltration attempts, 726 successful infiltrations and 576 security personnel were killed.
- There was no vibrancy in schools: the ASER 2024 report revealed that enrollment in government schools had declined after 2018 and the percentage of students in higher classes who could read a Standard II text had worsened.
- The most contestable claim was that democracy was getting stronger. Since the reduction in the status of J&K to a union territory, democracy has been actually diminished. J&K is a half-democracy with the Lieutenant Governor enjoying vast powers that have been denied to the council of ministers and the elected representatives. The snatching away of statehood (and the unfulfilled promise of restoration after the elections) is a continuing humiliation that rankles the people.
- The official unemployment rate of J&K in 2023-24 was 6.1%.
- The per capita income remains below the national average.
- It is, however, true that the number of tourists is on the increase but that has been rudely interrupted by the terrorist attack.

Consensus has frayed

Immediately after the attack in Pahalgam all sections of the people spontaneously supported the government. The Congress and other parties made statements of unqualified support to any action that the government might take. If it appears that the consensus has since frayed, the government has to blame itself. There are many reasons: the government expressed shock but not contrition; no one in authority acknowledged the grave lapses in security; the prime minister cut short his visit to Saudi Arabia and returned to Delhi but did not visit Pahalgam or Srinagar; an all-party meeting was called but Mr Modi skipped it and instead chose to visit Patna for a rally.

Parties and individuals have since taken nuanced positions. The Congress Working Committee's resolution pointed to "the BJP (is) exploiting this grave tragedy through official and proxy social media platforms to sow further discord, mistrust, polarization and division at a time when unity and solidarity are most needed." The resolution also noted that Pahalgam was secured by a three-tier security arrangement and called for a comprehensive analysis "into the intelligence failures and security lapses that enabled such an attack." Among jingoistic calls for retribution, Mr AS Dulat, former chief of R&AW and an acknowledged expert on Kashmir bluntly said "war is not an option.....it is not just the last option but the last bad option." On the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty, Mr Sharat Sabharwal, former High Commissioner to Pakistan, told Mr Karan Thapar that he did not think this was a step that should be taken but he was willing to go along with the government. The UN Security Council did not blame the TRF or the LeT for the attack or call out the brazen targeting of non-Muslims; yet the government attempted to give the resolution a favourable spin. China was not subtle at all: Mr Wang Yi, the foreign minister, praised Pakistan's resolute action on terrorism, spoke of understanding Pakistan's legitimate security concerns and supported Pakistan in safeguarding its security interests.

India is waiting

Ten days have passed since the Pahalgam attack. Military experts have pointed out that a 'surgical strike' may not have the element of surprise and bomber aircraft may be anticipated and intercepted. Besides, as Mr Ajay Sahni has pointed out *(The Road from Pahalgam, The Indian Express, April 24, 2025)*, these have questionable operational or strategic consequences. Given India's military superiority, I am certain there are other options. In an officially released news report, the PM is believed to have given a 'free hand' to the defence forces. In a democracy, the decisions are the prime minister's, the military executes the decisions. India's response must have a decisive deterrent effect on the state and non-state actors who cause mayhem in Kashmir. India is waiting.

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INSIDE TRACK



COOMI KAPOOR

Work-cum-play

US V-P J D Vance's recent visit to India, accompanied by US government office-bearers, including Ricky Gill, senior director, South and Central Asia, National Security Council, was a mix of official and unofficial engagements. India was disconcerted by the trip's timing, which was to discuss tariff tensions, since PM Modi was scheduled to leave India a day after Vance's arrival on April 21 for a scheduled visit to Saudi Arabia to discuss the modalities of the first meet of the India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council. The MEA, while releasing the V-P's programme in India, left most of his activities in Jaipur and Agra blank, suggesting that the US Embassy in New Delhi be contacted for information. In Jaipur, the Vances stayed at the exclusive Rambagh Palace and tourists who had already booked were asked to vacate for security reasons. The only guests permitted to remain was a small cloistered wedding party. The Rajasthan media speculated that the Vances might also be attending the wedding. Although Vance and his wife Usha were visiting India for the first time since their marriage a decade ago, they did not spend any time in South India, although Usha is the daughter of Telugu immigrants from AP. In fact, a nonagenarian aunt in Visakhapatnam, an eminent professor, was unaware of the impending visit until informed by a local official.

Reddy hospitality

CM Revanth Reddy ordered Telangana officials to pull out all the stops for the global meet organised by the Samruddha Bharat Foundation in the state recently. Telangana provided the infrastructure and funds for the hospitality extended to 450 delegates. Officials were puzzled why a meet on global democracy attended by vague foreigners, many of whom did not have specific credentials, would help boost investment in the state. Reddy was keen to please the foundation's executive trustee Gurdeep Sappal, who is attached to Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's office and rumoured to be close to the Congress high command. A day before the meet wound up, Reddy discovered, to his horror, that the expected high-profile guests had bailed out. Kharge and Priyanka Gandhi stayed away, and a rather reluctant Rahul Gandhi was finally persuaded to come after his former mentor in the US, Sam Pitroda, spoke to him. Sappal's group is meant to be a Congress think tank counter to the BJP's Vivekananda Foundation, and most of the delegates were certainly not potential investors. Ironically, when in neighbouring Karnataka, Congress CM Siddaramaiah held an official foreign investors' summit in February, no one from the Gandhi family attended when Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated it.

Getting clearance

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's visit on Tuesday to Modi's residence was initiated by the PM himself. A senior minister escorted Bhagwat from the RSS office in Jhandewalan to Lok Kalyan Marg. Modi was keen to ensure the BJP was on the same page as the RSS in view of public differences during the Lok Sabha campaign. The discussion was more about the caste census than the proposed response to the Pahalgam attack. Incidentally, the stalemate in announcing a new BJP chief reflects the ongoing power tussle between the RSS and the BJP.

Sensible solution

The Modi government is sitting on Pandora's box on the issue of a delimitation exercise after the impending census. Previous governments had succeeded in deferring the contentious exercise. In 1976, an Emergency in place and PM Indira Gandhi pushed through the 42 Amendment since the main Opposition was in jail. In 2002, then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee artfully dodged the exercise. He called a Cabinet meeting to discuss a National Population Policy. At the fag end, he got into a huddle with L K Advani and M M Joshi, and simply announced that additionally the government would defer delimitation till 2026, a matter unrelated to the actual agenda. Cabinet clearance for the 84th amendment was done so swiftly that the RSS and others opposed had no time to react. Today, deferring delimitation can no longer be done under cover and a viable formula with the consent of the aggrieved states, mostly from the south, has to be arrived at. Former CEC N Gopalaswami suggests that an Amendment be passed freezing representation in Parliament. His point is that MPs are expected to concern themselves largely with policy issues, while localised problems concerning the constituency are dealt with by the local elective bodies. Whether an MP represents 10, 15 or 18 lakh constituents, he is physically incapable of handling their demands. Adding 200-odd more MPs to the existing strength of the Lok Sabha would be unwieldy and unproductive. The only advantage of more MPs is the edge it would provide to more populous states in electing a PM.

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Decoding the second biggest legislative and decolonising fraud



M. NAGESWARA RAO

THE Parliament enacted three major criminal laws in December 2023: the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), replacing the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC); the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA), superseding the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (IEA); and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), succeeding the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC).

Union Home Minister Amit Shah championed these laws as a decisive break from the country's "colonial past," promising a criminal justice system rooted in Indian values and traditions. However, a meticulous analysis reveals that these laws are largely copies, replicating their predecessors with minimal substantive changes, masked by Sanskrit nomenclature and nationalist rhetoric.

This article argues that these laws constitute a profound legislative fraud under the guise of decolonisation. Furthermore, it contends that the Constitution of India, enacted in 1950, is a derivative instrument based on the Government of India Act, 1935, marking it as the foundational legislative fraud of independent India.

By examining the historical, philosophical, legal, and sociopolitical dimensions of these legislative frameworks, this article exposes the continuity of colonial paradigms, critiques the failure to engage with India's ancient juridical traditions, and proposes a path toward genuine decolonisation grounded in indigenous legal principles.

The country's legal history is a tapestry of sophisticated indigenous systems, disrupted by external invasions and colonial impositions.

Ancient Hindu texts like the Manu Smriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti, Brihaspati Smriti, and Kautilya's Arthashastra provided comprehensive frameworks for justice, balancing retribution, deterrence, and societal harmony. These systems were disrupted by Islamic invasions from the 8th century and later by the British colonial rule, which introduced codified laws like the IPC, IEA, and CrPC.

While the IPC and IEA synthesised indigenous jurisprudence with colonial administrative needs, the CrPC's Anglo-Saxon framework created a profound misalignment with India's cultural ethos. The BNS, BSA, and BNSS, despite their decolonising rhetoric, fail to address this disconnect, replicating colonial structures with superficial changes. Similarly, the Constitution mirrors the Government of India Act, 1935, perpetuating a colonial governance model.

This article examines each law's historical origins, critiques their superficial indigenisation, and advocates blending the Dharmashastras' principles with modern innovations to achieve juridical sovereignty.

I. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023: It is a rebranded Indian Penal Code, 1860.

India's criminal justice system has deep roots in the sophisticated legal traditions of ancient Hindu civilisation, articulated in the Dharmashastras. These texts provided a holistic framework for justice, addressing crimes against property, persons, reputation, society, and the state.

Manu Smriti categorises offences like theft, murder, defamation, public nuisance and treason, prescribing punishments—gentle admonition, severe reproof, fines, or corporal penalties (including imprisonment and capital punishment)—based on the proportionality and the offender's context (age, sex, occupation, wealth).

Yajnavalkya Smriti emphasises intent, ensuring punishments reflect the crime's circumstances, while Brihaspati Smriti refines procedural aspects like evidence collection.

Kautilya's Arthashastra introduces a utilitarian perspective, advocating punishments that deter future crimes and promote state stability. Together, these texts offer a nuanced, adaptable system that balanced individual accountability with societal harmony, suitable for India's diverse society.

The Dharmashastras' intellectual rigour is evident in their detailed taxonomies and principles of justice. For instance, the Manu Smriti's individualisation ensured a thief's punishment varied by socio-economic status, preventing disproportionate penalties. The Arthashastra's emphasis on swift investigations maintained public trust, unlike modern judicial delays.

These texts were dynamic frameworks, allowing flexibility within the universal principles of dharma (righteous duty) and nyaya (justice), fostering equitable outcomes without sacrificing fairness.

The imposition of Hanafite law under Muslim rule from the 8th century introduced practices like amputation for theft and stoning for adultery, which clashed with Hindu customary laws. Despite this, Hindu practices persisted among the majority, creating a dual legal framework that varied by region and community. This

PART-I



Recognising the predominance of Hindu customary laws, the Company consulted Sanskrit scholars, regional administrators, and local elite, studying texts like Manu Smriti and Arthashastra. The Indian Penal Code, 1860, spearheaded by Sir Barnes Peacock and Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay, was the culmination of these efforts.

fragmentation posed challenges for governance, as punishments differed widely, undermining consistency.

When the British East India Company assumed control after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, it encountered a chaotic legal landscape. Hanafite law was deemed inconsistent, with punishments either excessively cruel (mutilation) or overly lenient (fines for serious crimes), conflicting with British Enlightenment ideals.

Recognising the predominance of Hindu customary laws, the Company consulted Sanskrit scholars, regional administrators, and local elite, studying texts like Manu Smriti and Arthashastra.

The Indian Penal Code, 1860, spearheaded by Sir Barnes Peacock and Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay, was the culmination of these efforts.

The First Law Commission (1834–1837) conducted extensive consultations, as documented in the British Library's India Office Records. The IPC's taxonomy of offences, graded punishments, and emphasis on proportionality resemble the Dharmashastras. For example, Section 304A (causing death by negligence) distinguishes culpable and non-culpable acts, mirroring the Yajnavalkya Smriti's nuanced liability. The IPC's similarities to Hindu jurisprudence are not coincidental. British scholars like William Jones and Henry Thomas Colebrooke translated Manu Smriti and Arthashastra, enabling pragmatic engagement with Hindu legal traditions to govern a diverse population with minimal resistance. The IPC's precision and comprehensiveness reflect the Dharmashastras' rigour, making it a synthesis of indigenous and colonial elements rather than a purely alien imposition. Its stability, with only 76 amendments in 163 years, underscores its alignment with India's sociolegal ethos, rendering it the most enduring substantive law in modern India.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, was introduced as a decolonising reform to replace the "colonial" IPC. Amit Shah claimed that it would eradicate the "shackles of our colonial past."

However, a comparative analysis reveals the BNS as a near-verbatim reproduction of the IPC, with minor rearrangements and cosmetic changes. For instance, Section 103 (murder) retains Section 302's wording with slight rephrasing, and Section 4 introduces community service for minor offences, but these do not alter the IPC's foundational framework.

The redefined "organised crime" (Section 111) codifies existing practices without innovation. Section renumbering (e.g., murder from Section 302 to 103) creates confusion without substantive purpose. The BNS's legislative process, as documented in Lok Sabha debates, lacked consultation with experts or civil society, unlike the Dharmashastras' community-driven approach.

The Sanskrit title "Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita" (Justice Code) misrepresents its penal focus (danda), as nyaya implies a broader philosophical framework. By mischaracterising the IPC's indigenous roots as colonial, the BNS uses cultural symbolism to deceive, constituting a legislative fraud.

II. The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023- A repackaged Indian Evidence Act, 1872:

The law of evidence is pivotal to a judicial system's ability to uncover truth and deliver justice. Ancient Hindu jurisprudence, articulated in the Dharmashastras and Darsanas (philosophical schools including Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta), developed a sophisticated epistemology centered on satya (truth).

This framework, emphasising rational and empirical methods over supernatural practices like trial by ordeal, distinguished Hindu legal traditions from contemporaneous systems in Mesopotamia, Greece, or medieval Europe.

The Dharmashastras, informed by the Darsanas, outlined six pramanas (sources of knowledge) for evidence collection: pratyaksha (direct perception), shabda (reliable testimony), anumāna (inference), upamana (comparison), arthapatti (postulation), and anupalabdhi (non-apprehension). The Yajnavalkya Smriti required corroboration of testimony, akin to modern cross-examination, while the Brihaspati Smriti prioritised pratyaksha in criminal trials, ensuring logical rigour and equitable outcomes.

Islamic invasions from 712 CE introduced Hanafite law, creating a fragmented judicial landscape. Hindu practices persisted among the majority, but evidentiary inconsistencies hindered uniform justice. British rule post-1757 found Hanafite rules inequitable and manipulable, prompting the codification of evidence laws.

The Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (IEA), under Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, synthesised Hindu epistemological principles with colonial administrative needs. Drawing on translations of the Manu Smriti and Yajnavalkya Smriti by scholars like William Jones and Henry Thomas Colebrooke, and consultations with local elites as documented in the Second Law Commission's reports (1853–1861), the IEA reflected India's socio-legal realities.

The IEA's framework aligns closely with the Darsanas' pramanas, recognising admissible evidence types: direct (Section 60, akin to pratyaksha, e.g., eyewitness testimony), oral/documentary (Sections 59–66, shabda, e.g., contracts), primary/secondary (Sections 62–63, pratyaksha/upamana), and circumstantial (Sections 6–55, anumāna). Its burden of proof rules (Sections 101–114) echo Mimamsa's textual interpretation. With only 23 amendments in 161 years, the IEA's versatility for civil and criminal trials, adopted in Malaysia and Singapore, underscores its synthesis of Hindu and Western thought.

Labelling it purely colonial ignores its indigenous roots, as its pramāna-based structure transcends linguistic form.

The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA), enacted to replace the IEA, claims to indigenise evidence law but replicates its predecessor. Core provisions, such as evidence definition (Section 2 vs. Section 3), relevancy rules (Sections 4–50 vs. 5–55), and burden of proof (Sections 76–90 vs. 101–114), remain substantively identical. Section 63 (electronic evidence) merely codifies practices under the Information Technology Act, 2000, and Supreme Court rulings (e.g., Anvar P.V. v. P.K. Basheer, 2014), lacking innovation. Section renumbering and rephrased terms create confusion without substantive gain. The BSA's legislative process, criticised in Parliament for its haste and lack of expert consultation, contrasts with the Dharmashastras' collaborative approach.

The Sanskrit title "Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam" (Law of Evidence) adds no value, as the IEA's framework is inherently indigenous. The BSA's cosmetic changes and Sanskrit title misrepresent the IEA as colonial, perpetuating a legislative fraud. This reliance on cultural symbolism to deceive the public reflects a broader trend of feigned indigenisation.

III. The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS)-A missed opportunity:

Hindu jurisprudence, rooted in the principle of dharma, offered a flexible, contextual justice system designed to regulate human conduct equitably. Unlike rigid legal codes, it emphasised adaptability within the universal ideals of rita (cosmic order) and satya (truth).

(The writer is a retired IPS officer and a former Director of CBI. Views expressed are his personal)

Miss World event amplifies Telangana tourism

VANAM JWALA NARASIMHA RAO

THE stage is all set for the prestigious 72nd Miss World Contest that is being hosted in Telangana from May 10 with the crème de la crème, the grand finale slated to be held at Hyderabad HITEX Exhibition Centre on May 31.

With a touch of Telangana tradition, the 140 contestants from 120 countries, representing the best of their accomplished, talented, beauty pageant winners, drawn from diverse backgrounds, including Rajasthan beauty queen Nandini Sharma, will be warmly welcomed at RGIA by government representatives.

As part of the glittering event, Telangana will showcase its exclusive narrative of ancient traditions coupled with modern aspirations, besides the 'role model' all-round development since its formation. Special themes and tourist circuits have been created to introduce Telangana culture, history, tourist attractions, medical, safety tourism, and the Telangana growth story to the world, paving way for strategic investment in Telangana tourism.

Venezuela (6) and India (6) top the winners list followed by UK (5) as of now.

It was way back in 1966 that Reita Faria became the first Indian and Asian to win the title heralding a Commendable Legacy in Miss World Title. Aishwarya Rai in 1994, Diana Hayden in 1997, Yukta Mookhey in 1999, Priyanka Chopra in 2000, and Manushi Chhillar in 2017 continued the legacy. Sushmita Sen, Lara Dutta and Harnaaz Sandhu in 1994, 2000, and 2021 respectively, won the Miss Universe Title.

'Miss World Pageant' was conceived as 'Bikini Contest' by Eric Morley in UK in 1951. The winner Sweden's Kiki Hakansson was crowned in a Bikini. Contestants wearing bikinis led to criticism, and hence, bikinis were banned, and the contest was renamed as 'Miss World' beauty competition featuring women from different countries. Contestants started wearing evening gowns.

The Miss World contest evolved into a more respected international beauty pageant, moving beyond physical appearance. Contestants were judged on beauty, intelligence, talent, humanitarian work, and social commitment.

The first official Miss World pageant was held on November 14, 1952 in UK. May-Louise Flodin from Sweden was the winner.

Gradually gaining prominence during 1960s and 70s, the 'Beauty with a purpose' theme was introduced in 1980s. Since 2000s it eventually evolved into a multi-faceted competition, and Eric Morley's widow, Julia Morley, co-chaired the pageant. Miss World, Miss Universe, Miss International, and Miss Earth, became the Big Four beauty pageants. UK hosted more number (37) of times, including the inaugural editions. China hosted the coveted event eight times, and South Africa seven times.

Concerted efforts by former Tourism Secretary Smita Sabharwal, is helping the Miss World 2025 to emerge as a significant milestone for India in the Miss World legacy.

Three decades after Bangalore (46th Contest on November 23, 1996) and one year after Mumbai (71st Edition on March 9, 2024) India is hosting the event for the third time. The Bangalore Contest, where Irene Skliva from Greece was the winner, became slightly controversial due to protests against beauty pageants in India. Krystyna Pyszkova from Czech Republic was crowned in Mumbai.

Any country winning maximum number of times has valid reasons. Venezuela had a strong beauty pageant training industry and dedicated academies. Specialised schools prepare contestants in walk, speech, posture, fitness, and etiquette from young age. India's focus has been on intelligence and social impact, backed by the advantage of a strong educational background. Many Indian winners are well-educated and confident speakers. The country's contestants blend traditional and modern values, which resonates with the judges. There is also another advantage of having a Miss India Platform with a well-structured national competition that helps in preparing contestants for global contests.

UK had the advantage of historical and strong early presence and presentation skills. Miss World originated there, allowing it to shape early beauty standards. UK contestants consistently performed well in interviews and social projects. For a better performance and to win the title, countries may consider establishing structured training in beauty, speech, and confidence; emphasize education and social projects; and provide government plus corporate support for pageantry. By learning from Venezuela, India, and UK, other nations can increase their chances of winning the Miss World title.



Miss World contests serve as a global celebration of beauty, intelligence, and social responsibility by providing young women with a global platform to showcase their confidence, talents, commitment to humanitarian causes, and dedication to meaningful causes.

Miss World contests serve as a global celebration of beauty, intelligence, and social responsibility by providing young women with a global platform to showcase their confidence, talents, commitment to humanitarian causes, and dedication to meaningful causes. The 'Beauty with a Purpose' initiative elevates the competition beyond aesthetics, transforming contestants into ambassadors for positive change. These events support vital humanitarian projects, funding education, healthcare, and women's empowerment initiatives worldwide.

By fostering cultural exchange, personal growth, and leadership development, these events help break stereotypes and inspire future generations, blending elegance with social consciousness to remain relevant and aspirational in modern society. While the Miss World platform has embraced progressive values, further expanding inclusivity and redefining beauty standards can reinforce the idea that true beauty is multifaceted and deeply connected to purpose.

Encouraging diversity in representation, along with integrating long-term mentorship and leadership programs, would create a more empowering experience for participants while ensuring they become lifelong advocates for positive change. Taking this vision forward, a Global Women's Impact Forum may well complement beauty contests by recognizing excellence in education, entrepreneurship, leadership, and social service, amplifying the influence of women who drive transformation in society. When beauty, purpose, and achievement come together on a global stage, it fosters an environment where women are celebrated not only for their appearance but also for their intellect, resilience, and lasting contributions to humanity.

Telangana Government is all set to leverage the opportunity of hosting 72nd Miss World 2025 event through several key initiatives, like Safety and Comfort for Visitors; Infrastructure and Connectivity; Curated Experiences by way of showcasing the Best of Telangana; Cultural Promotion through Arts, Crafts, and Cuisine; Discover Telangana's Healthcare excellence meeting Global standards with personalised care; Sustainable Eco-Tourism through Building a Lasting Legacy; portraying Telangana's diverse spiritual traditions and architectural heritage; Give a Boost to Film and Entertainment Tourism; Amplifying Telangana's Narrative through Digital Storytelling; Cultivating Global Ambassadors as part of Media Engagement; and Expanding Reach and Impact through Partnerships and Collaborations. And many more.

Telangana's reputation as a safe and tourist-friendly destination will be further enhanced through dedicated measures. The state's reputation for safety, tourist-friendliness, and hospitality further strengthens its case as a preferred destination for international events, encouraging long-term tourism growth. Telangana's cultural and tourism highlights into the Miss World program itself. From featuring local artisans and their crafts to showcasing traditional dance and music performances, every aspect will reflect the essence of Telangana. The opening and grand finale and associated events are planned to utilize iconic Telangana backdrops, creating visually stunning moments that resonate globally.

Telangana's spiritual destinations, traditions and architectural heritage offer an opportunity to put forth the state's tremendous tourism potential and cultural depth, promoting ancient and unique spiritual destination of Telangana as a global tourism hub. The Government plans to facilitate exclusive media tours and familiarization trips for international journalists, bloggers, and travel writers.

There are several advantages for Telangana's Tourism Brand Story. Miss World will place Telangana firmly on the global tourism map, attracting attention from potential visitors and investors worldwide.

Telangana will reinforce its image as a progressive, culturally rich, and tourist-friendly state. The tagline 'Telangana, Zarur Aana' (Please do come to Telangana) will resonate globally, inviting tourists to experience a land where beauty is reflected in its land, people, culture, and traditions. It boosts tourism, global visibility, and economic opportunities while enhancing cultural prestige, infrastructure, and international investment prospects for the region.

Hosting the event, may increase chances of winning due to home-ground, cultural representation, logistical ease, and greater familiarity with the event. Telangana would not have been able to host this magnificent global event, but for Sabharwal's vision.

A Cong triumph for social justice in India



RACHAMALLA SIDDESHWAR

The Telangana government, for instance, used the caste census to introduce legislation granting 42 per cent reservations for BCs.

THE long-standing demand of the Indian National Congress (INC) to conduct a nationwide caste census is finally being realized, albeit belatedly with the Central Government's recent decision to initiate the process.

This marks a significant moral and political victory for Congress, a party that has consistently championed the rights and welfare of the marginalised and underprivileged sections of society.

Recognising that a substantial proportion of India's population belongs to the backward and disadvantaged communities, the Congress party has relentlessly advocated scientific enumeration of castes to ensure equitable social justice. Rather than merely confining its advocacy to rhetoric, the Congress has demonstrated political will by implementing caste census exercises in the states where it holds power.

In Telangana, for instance, the Congress-led government under the leadership of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has successfully conducted a caste census in a methodical and scientific manner delivering on a major pre-poll promise. This achievement not only sets a precedent for other states but also exerts moral pressure on the Central Government. The Modi administration's recent announcement to commence a nationwide caste census is thus a welcome and necessary development, albeit one that comes under increasing public demand and political compulsion.

Historically, the BJP-led Union Government has repeatedly deferred the population census under various pretexts, sidestepping Congress's calls to incorporate caste enumeration within it. Instead of addressing the core issue, BJP leaders often accused Congress of engaging in divisive caste politics. However, Telangana's success in not only in conducting the caste census but also extending 42 per cent reservations to Backward Classes in local elections, education, and employment. This has significantly shifted the narrative and applied national pressure.

The Congress party, led by Rahul Gandhi, played a pivotal role in bringing this issue to the forefront of national consciousness. His 4,000-kilometre Bharat Jodo Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir was not merely a political outreach but a campaign for social unity and justice. During this yatra, Gandhi recognised the gross inequalities persisting in Indian society and vociferously demanded caste enumeration from Parliament and public platforms alike. The party's electoral promises in Telangana and Karnataka explicitly included caste census, which were swiftly implemented upon assuming power.

Telangana's exercise, backed by an allocation of Rs. 160 crore, was launched on February 24, 2024 and completed by December 25, in the same year. It gathered data from 98 pr cnt of the state's 3.7 crore population without disruption. Over 1.03 lakh government employees and 76,000 data entry operators participated in this historic process, making it one of the most comprehensive and peaceful exercises of its kind in independent India.

Predictably, this success has been met with resistance from the opposition. The BRS and BJP leaders in Telangana launched baseless attacks, questioning the veracity of the data and alleging inflated or deflated figures when compared to the previous 'Integrated Household Survey' conducted by the BRS government. Ironically, the same survey results were never officially disclosed during BRS's decade long rule.

Ultimately, the Congress has proven that caste enumeration is not a divisive ploy but a necessary corrective mechanism in a society plagued by deep-rooted inequalities.

If our country is to move towards true social equality, the caste census will serve as both a mirror and a map—reflecting existing disparities and guiding future policy. In this context, the Congress party's foresight, resilience, and execution of caste census in Telangana stand as a beacon for the rest of India.

(The writer is Chairman, Rajiv Gandhi Panchayati Raj Sanghatan, Telangana)



"To pick up a brush, to make a stroke on the canvas—I consider these acts of courage in this country

Tyeb Mehta

CASTE CENSUS CASTS QUESTIONS ON JOB CREATION



THE THIRD EYE

SHANKKAR AIYAR
Author of *The Gated Republic*, *Aadhaar: A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit Revolution*, and *Accidental India*
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ALL economics, it is said, is about politics. And all politics is grounded in economics—effectively about public policies to enable access to opportunities.

This week, the Modi government announced the enumeration of caste in the forthcoming census. Typically, public discourse is riveted on the whataboutery of when who was for it and who was against. Beyond the claims and counterclaims, the inclusion of caste in the census underlines the omnipotence of caste in India's political matrix. It also underlines the chasm between the need for sustainable incomes and India's status rising in a decade from the 11th to the 5th largest economy.

The measure of aggregate progress in the past decade hides the stratification across India. The political geography of India's economy illustrates this divergence. India's per capita income is ₹2.15 lakh. Karnataka tops the list with ₹3.80 lakh and Bihar trails with ₹66,828; within Bihar, the district of Sheohar has a per capita income of ₹19,561. As Nobel laureate Angus Deaton observed, "averages are no consolation for those left behind".

It is not surprising that the move to enumerate caste originated from Bihar, or that the initiative is timed for the forthcoming polls. Bihar is home to around 12 crore of India's 142-crore population, and at ₹10.97 lakh crore, accounts for barely 3 percent of India's GDP of Rs 331.03 lakh crore. The distance between Karnataka and Bihar, or between Bengaluru and Sheohar, is about empowerment and employment.

The political class has presented the caste census as a panacea for an inclusive reservation system. Quota warriors cite the Rohini Commission's findings to point out that "97 percent of the reserved jobs and seats have gone to 25 percent of OBC sub-castes". Arguably, the formula of reservation must be backed by data. The caste census will at best a template for inclusion, not expansion in job creation. The momentum of public opinion backing the move clearly casts questions on job creation.

Take the IT services sector, which is one of the largest white collar employers. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, in its March 2025 report, cited data to note that "there is an unusual decline in placements in IITs and IIITs between 2021-22 and 2023-24". A TeamLease peport in October estimated that only 10 percent of engineering graduates would secure jobs this year. Indeed, another survey, published in March 2025, revealed that 83 percent of engineering graduates have no jobs.

Seven decades after independence, after numerous commissions and committees on shifting labour off fields into factories, barely 11 percent of workers are employed in manufacturing and 45.5 percent in agriculture. Manufacturing accounts for 14 percent, while agriculture accounts for 18 percent of GDP. Effectively, nearly half the workforce is dependent on a sixth of the national income. A blend of imperfect policies has made farming unviable. Unsurprisingly, every major land-owning caste—for instance, the Marathas in Maharashtra—is agitating for a quota.

The lack of opportunities haunting demographic dividend is reflected in the headlines. In Uttar Pradesh, over 48 lakh persons applied for 60,244 posts of constables. In Bihar, over 8 lakh applied for 15,000 home guard posts. In Rajasthan, over 24 lakh people applied for 53,749 peon positions—including some with PhD, MBA and law degrees. In Jammu and Kashmir, over 5.5 lakh aspirants applied for 4,002 posts in the police department. Over 36 lakh candidates applied for 17,727 posts in the central government.

A popular notion harboured by many is that the rush is driven by a craze for government jobs. The irony is that the freebies culture has left governments with fewer resources to fill vacant posts. It is estimated that there are nearly 2 million in the states—largely in the police, health and education departments. Madhya Pradesh has over 2.7 lakh vacant posts; Karnataka has over 55,000 teacher posts unfilled, while Delhi has over 8,000 police posts vacant. Even as courts labour with over 5 crore pending cases, 359 posts for judges in high courts and 5,238 posts for judicial officers in the lower judiciary are vacant.

The rush for government jobs is aggravated by the dearth of jobs in the private sector—particularly, in the most populous and least industrialised states. The crux is the lack of reforms for job creation. It is known that the majority of reforms are vested with states—modernisation of GST, land, labour, permits and regulations. Yet states, in their race to host investor summits, scarcely act on the reforms needed to translate memorandums into investments and jobs. Improved access to credit for smaller enterprises could boost both employment and exports. India can be a global bread basket, but it requires liberalisation of farm laws and enabling of farmers' collectives for export. Urbanisation is placed at the intersection of the rural and urban economies, and building new cities will create jobs and spur growth.

The global economy is being recast by economics and geopolitics. The emerging triad of disruptions—geopolitics, climate change and adoption of technology—will make job creation harder as capital will deploy technology to retrench labour. The tariff threats of the Trump administration is a wake-up call. There is much gush-gush about reforms to harvest the China+1 opportunity. Success calls for a shift from notions to action.

It is time the political class recognised that unless it sheds the strong consensus for weak reforms, the prescription of caste census will only deliver a placebo.

CANADA ELECTS, INDIA REFLECTS



POWER & POLITICS

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IN the annals of democratic theatre, few performances offer as much off-script intrigue as Canada's recent federal election. Held amid a backdrop of global economic tremors and nationalist tremolos, the contest culminated in a narrow but consequential victory for Mark Carney—the suave technocrat-turned-Liberal Party leader—who now finds himself not just prime minister, but accidental protagonist in a geopolitical *pas de trois* with India and the US.

Carney's ascent from spreadsheet sage to political steward is the stuff of Westminster whisperers. Dismissed until recently as an urbane interloper with the charisma of a mortgage bond, he confounded pollsters by securing 168 of 343 seats—as close to a majority as a layer of *mille-feuille*, but sufficient for governance. His background at the helm of the Bank of England and Bank of Canada gave him a veneer of macroeconomic gravitas that proved irresistible to voters weary of populist pyrotechnics and ideological slapstick.

Canada's 2025 vote was more than a domestic reset; it was a referendum on performative rage. The Conservatives, led by Pierre Poilievre, entered the fray with bombast, but exited in embarrassment. Poilievre's penchant for polemic, flirtations with fringe ideologies, and a mystifying attempt to align with Indian Hindutva currents alienated the centrist masses. His campaign, once billed as an unstoppable juggernaut, became a cautionary tale of ideological indigestion. A party once poised for power found itself dining alone—at the kids' table of Canadian politics, muttering about "freedom" while the adults passed policy.

But no political obituary is more poignant than that of Jagmeet Singh. The NDP's telegenic but pro-Khalistani leader, long accused of serving as the diaspora's grievance concierge, lost his own seat in Burnaby Central. His party, reduced from 25 seats to single-digits, also forfeited official party status for the first time since 1993. From power broker to political bystander, Singh's fall is less a footnote than a full-throated repudiation of identitarian overreach.

Singh's persistent tirades against India, including vocal advocacy for Khalistani separatism and a conspicuously theatrical outrage over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023 may have won applause in niche echo chambers—but proved electorally enervating. Canadian voters signalled a preference for peace over provocation, governance over grievance. For all his symbolic resonance, Singh failed the smell test of mainstream leadership. Burnaby didn't just reject his politics, it uninvited him from the party.

Enter the Indo-Canadian diaspora: a 1.4-million-strong mosaic of migrants, strivers and middle-class monarchs. In swing ridings across Ontario and British Columbia—Brampton, Mississauga, Surrey—their ballots tipped the scale in favour of Carney's centrist moderation. Of the record 65 Indian-origin candidates, around 20 were elected, mostly under the Liberal banner. Notable returnees include Anita Anand, Kamal Khera, Parm Bains and Sukh Dhaliwal—names that resonate in Ottawa's corridors and Delhi's drawing rooms alike. But this was no monolithic bloc. The Singh's rejection by voters of Indian origin suggests a maturing political identity. The message was subtle but unambiguous: stop using us as pawns in proxy battles. We are not your constituency of convenience. We are citizens first, sentiment second.



AFP

This evolution is not insignificant. For years, India's political class courted the diaspora as a soft-power tool, sometimes even as a battering ram. What this election reveals is a growing reluctance within that community to be instrumentalised. The Indo-Canadian voter now wields not just nostalgia but discernment. This is a seismic shift—a community turning from romanticism to realism.

No Canadian election in recent memory has been so thoroughly haunted by the ghost of Washington. Trump casts a long silhouette over North American geopolitics. His belligerent tariff threats and unpredictable rhetoric stirred Canadian anxieties, driving voters toward Carney's brand of cautious nationalism. The return of MAGA also made "nice" fashionable again in Ottawa—a virtue few expected to see weaponised so effectively.

This dynamic complicates the India-US-Canada triangle. India remains Trump's 'strategic sweetheart'—a role cultivated through arms deals, yoga diplomacy and mutual disdain for Chinese hegemony. But Ottawa under Carney may no longer serve as the pliant northern cousin in Washington's diplomatic soap opera. While the Quad alliance finds fresh relevance amid rising Indo-Pacific tensions, Canada's irritation with alleged Indian interference must be managed carefully—preferably without turning global strategy into dinner theatre.

For India, the election is less an endgame than a reset button. With Singh vanquished and the NDP defenestrated, the air is momentarily cleared of Indian immigrants-driven acrimony. The task now is to replace whispers with words, conjecture with commitment. A public reaffirmation of non-interference in Canadian affairs could go a long way in puncturing the narrative of meddling. The tools are already at hand. Bollywood festivals in Brampton, trade summits in Delhi, Indo-Canadian university fellowships—these are not frills, but foundations. India must out-charm the conspiracy theorists and out-*diplomate* the diaspora firebrands. Think less 'Twitter clapback', more 'Chanakya meets Canadian courtesy'. The road to a mature Indo-Canadian relationship may be paved with immigration fast lanes and dual-degree programmes, not diaspora theatrics.

Carney is no bomb-thrower. His temperament leans toward the incremental and the institutional, not the impulsive. This makes him an ideal counterpart for Modi, who prefers high-visibility diplomacy but is increasingly aware of the need for discretion in sensitive theatres. Carney's primary challenge will be managing Trump-era unpredictability without appearing either overly subservient or ideologically aloof. India's challenge will be navigating Carney's cautious centrism while jettisoning the shadowy diaspora brokers who have long acted as self-appointed ambassadors of outrage.

A hypothetical Carney-Modi handshake at the 2025 UN General Assembly could be more than symbolic. It could mark the beginning of a new diplomatic syntax—one rooted in climate cooperation, counterterrorism, cyber policy and clean tech. It would also send a message to Beijing: soft power is the new hard power, and Canada and India can flex it with velvet gloves.

Still, none of this will matter unless both nations resist the easy seductions of symbolism. Diplomacy is a muscle, not a mood. And in the months ahead, it will be tested by everything from refugee policy and AI regulation to agricultural trade wars. If Canada wants to be more than a polite spectator in Asia, and if India wants to graduate from diasporic theatrics to realpolitik maturity, both sides will have to do something rare: shut up and listen.

Carney's victory is not a coronation, nor is it a condemnation—it is a calibration. The electorate rejected extremism without embracing complacency. His mandate is thin but meaningful. For India, this is not the time for covert cables or diaspora *dramatis personae*. It is the time for plainspoken diplomacy and pragmatic statecraft. A bilateral relationship once dominated by suspicion now waits to be rewritten in the ink of mutual respect.

To paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of diplomacy's death have been greatly exaggerated. The maple leaf, the tricolour, and the stars and stripes may yet find harmony—if they stop shouting long enough to listen. After all, even in the bitter chill of northern politics, maple syrup still flows.

THE BUFFALO ROAMS OUR MYTHSCAPE



OPINION

NANDITHA KRISHNA
Historian, environmentalist and writer based in Chennai

MYTHOLOGY has it that Rambha, the demon son of Rishi Kashyapa and a danava, married a mahishi or buffalo-person. They had a son, Mahisha, who became king of the buffalo-people. Mahisha lived in the Vindhyas and, by practicing severe austerities, gained strength to drive the gods out of heaven. From energies directed by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva emanated Durga or Vindhyavasini, a 10-armed woman. Mahisha's warriors tried to fight the Devi. She killed each with a different weapon held in her hands. As Durga approached the Vindhyas, the demon attacked her in several forms, each of which was destroyed. Finally, he took the form of the buffalo, whom she pinned down and killed. The *Devi Mahatmyam* of the *Markandeya Purana* describes their battle as violent, although the buffalo is a gentle animal.

Along with the Puranic killing of Mahisha by Devi, we have the popular folk ritual of sacrificing male buffaloes to local forms of the Devi in India and Nepal. Rajasthani Charans sacrifice them to goddess Pithad. Kolis, Vaghir, Dharalar, Raharis and Ravalias of Maharashtra sacrifice them to goddess Khodyaayi. In eastern India, they are sacrificed to Kali, and in southern India to Kali and several local goddesses.

Buffaloes are killed in thousands at an annual festival at Bariyarpur, Nepal. The killings are terrible, suggesting an act of anger against the animal, reliving the mythic confrontation. The early sculptures of Mahisha-mardini depict a gory killing of the buffalo by throttling it to death, until the Pallavas, formerly Jains, sculpted the buffalo demon as an anthropomorphic figure, even cowering in fear on a Mahabalipuram relief.

Who was this buffalo demon? The earliest appearance of the buffalo is in the Indus civilisation seals, either alone or grazing, throwing around several people, or being speared by man. What is more striking is that the famous horned male seated in yogic *moolabandhana* pose on several seals wears buffalo horns. To some, he was a buffalo deity.

Says Asko Parpola, "Early Harappan cultures started moving toward the east and south in about 3,000 BCE... That the Harappan water-buffalo cult had reached peninsular India by the late Harappan or Chalcolithic times is suggested by the large bronze sculpture of a water buffalo discovered in 1974 at Daimabad in Maharashtra. Throughout south India, village goddesses have been worshipped through water-buffalo sacrifices."

The Vindhyas still have buffalo-totem worshippers like the Marias and Gonds, pastoral herders who wear buffalo horns on festive occasions and were gradually pushed into the forest by food-producers, probably goddess-worshipping Dravidians. The Marias also worship Danteshvari Devi—they worship both the victorious goddess and the defeated deity.

The mythic fight between Durga and Mahisha probably signifies a conflict between agriculturists and pastoralists over land. The lore lives among communities in the Vindhyas

Mysuru, formerly Mahisha-ur, is named after Mahisha. A huge statue of a moustachioed figure of Mahisha holding a sword and a snake stands at the foot of the Chamundeshwari Hill, at the top of which stands the temple of Durga as Chamundi. There is a sub-caste called Mahishi in Karnataka, whose followers still worship the buffalo and goddess Chamundi. Less than 100 km from Mysuru are the Nilgiri Hills, home to the pastoral buffalo-worshipping Toda tribe, whose origins are shrouded in mystery. The vegetarian Todas venerate the buffalo, whose horns adorn their temples. The cairns of the Nilgiris, deserted by the Todas, are called *moriarumane* or house of the Morias (Marias).

Mahishamati, south of the Godavari where Gonds live, is named after Mahisha. Founded by Mahishmat (meaning rich in buffaloes), the region was ruled by Nila of Dakshinapatha, whose subjects were called Mahishakas. In Maharashtra, the demon Mahsoba (Mahisha+*baa,* or father), killed by Parvati, is venerated by some castes.

The Van Gujjars are a vegetarian Muslim tribe who never eat their buffaloes or sell them for slaughter. Caring for the water buffaloes is the axis around which the tribe's world revolves. Bhils worship the buffalo as Bhainsaasur.

It's projected that the gentle buffalo god-king of the indigenous tribes was demonised by the food-producers who worshipped the mother goddess. The two came into conflict over land. Groups in Karnataka who worship the buffalo were for centuries compelled by landlords to kill the buffalo and drink its blood, till the high court stopped the practice.

Durga and Mahisha were deities of agricultural and pastoral peoples. Their mythic fight probably signified that of their followers.

(Views are personal)

QUOTE CORNER



The attacks are not random. They seem designed to intimidate those of us who serve in this critical capacity. The threats and harassment are attacks on our democracy, on our system of government. And they ultimately risk undermining our Constitution and the rule of law.

Ketanji Brown Jackson, US Supreme Court judge, on the dozen-odd judges who ruled against Donald Trump and their families facing threats

The lag effect of getting goods this country will not be felt for another two to four weeks. The last couple weeks of May you'll start seeing the effect here.

Gary Cohn, IBM vice chairman and former director of the US National Economic Council, on the effect of Trump tariffs on merchandise imports

They created a lot of problems—he created a lot of problems. He is a player I had not seen live before. Lamine Yamal is a phenomenon born every 50 years.

Filippo Inzaghi, Inter Milan manager, after facing Barca's 17-year-old prodigy

MAILBAG WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com

Resilient Kashmir

Ref: *Kashmir rings familiar notes in Northeast* (May 3). The brutal terrorist attack is a stark reminder of the threat terrorism poses to harmony. The cold-blooded targeting of non-Muslims is a heinous act that has sent shockwaves throughout the nation. To the terrorists and those who harbour them, we say this: the people of Kashmir and India will not be intimidated. Instead, we will work together to build a stronger, more resilient Kashmir, where tourism flourishes and the local economy grows.

Lawrence Vadukut, Thrissur

Himanshi's appeal

Ref: *We don't want people going against Muslims or Kashmiris: Pahalgam victim's widow* (May 2). While we are still struggling to come out of the sorrow of the gruesome murder of 26 innocent people, we are saddened to learn that some hardcore elements have started attacking Kashmiri students and hapless Muslim families who are in no way connected to the attack. It is really commendable that Himanshi, who lost her husband Lt Vinay Narwal, has appealed to stop spewing hatred against any community. Even though her loss is irreparable, Himanshi's expression of love for other innocent people is beyond appreciation. May her tribe increase.

Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

Growth correlation

Ref: *Rationalise rates, set up tribunal to streamline tax system* (May 3). The increase in GST revenues need not be construed as growth in the economy. Inflation and festive spends naturally increase the volume of money spent. Growth is better measured by the relief received by the poor, not by measuring the volume of goods consumed by the rich.

A G Rajmohan, Anantapur

Biopic picks

Ref: *Dramatising the lives of others* (May 3). Producing biopics is a sensitive exercise where there should be a balance between effective portrayal and absorbing narration. The turning points, strength of character and wading through controversial zones without provoking anyone are crucial. Mere storytelling will not captivate; it should be spiced with anecdotes and unknown aspects.

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Child's rights

Ref: *Girl, 3, youngest to 'take' Santhara fast unto death* (May 3). It is deeply disturbing to read that a 3-year-old girl died after being forced to observe a religious fast. No belief or tradition should justify denying food to a helpless child. Parents and religious leaders involved must be held accountable. In a civilised society, a child's right to life and protection must come before religious customs. Reform is urgently needed to prevent such tragedies. Common sense and humanity must prevail.

Sasi Narayan, Kannur

Digital economy

Ref: *Indian influencers shape $350-bn spending annually* (May 3). The WAVE summit in Mumbai has thrown up much information on the creative economy. The aplomb of Indian creators in creating a huge market should make us proud. The emerging artificial intelligence, animation, visual effects, gaming, comics and other allied fields can mark the Indian footprint in the digital sphere. At the same time, the spread of misinformation should be carefully monitored.

H Syed Othuman, Tirunelveli

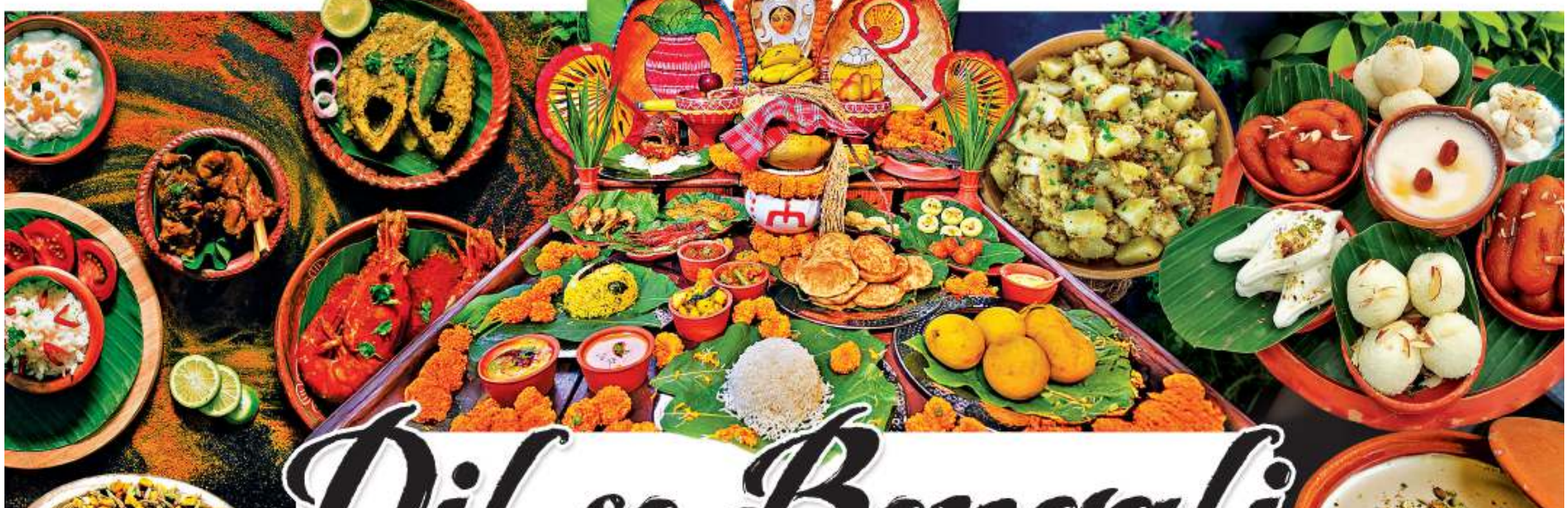
Decentralise development

Ref: *Capital Amaravati: Restart of works, restoring faith* (May 2). The CM of Andhra Pradesh is committing the same mistake his predecessors did during 1956-95 by concentrating everything in Hyderabad. Now he is planning everything at Amaravati, for which he wants to procure even more land. The Sivaramakrishnan Committee had clearly indicated that Amaravati is not suitable. He did not locate the high court in Kurnool as per the Sribagh Pact. This politician from the backward Rayalaseema is openly neglecting its development.

Govardhana Myneedu, Vijayawada

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"YOU DON'T NEED A SILVER FORK TO EAT GOOD FOOD"
— PAUL PRUDHOMME



Dil se Bengali



The Heartbeat of Bengali Cuisine



BY CHEF ANANYA BANERJEE

Bengali cuisine holds a deep and emotional connection with non-vegetarian food, woven intricately into the very fabric of its culture and traditions. Unlike many other Indian cuisines, where vegetarian dishes often take centre stage, Bengalis have historically celebrated an extraordinary love for fish, meat, and seafood. Yet, vegetarian dishes, too, are an essential and cherished part of the daily Bengali menu, offering balance and comfort. In fact, every Bengali meal, be it at home or on celebrations start with vegetarian preparations like bhajas, sukto, dal, etc, which are then followed by the Bengali's favourite non-vegetarian offerings.

Fish, especially, is revered — there's a saying in Bengal: *Maachhe Bhaate Bangali* (Bengalis are made of fish and rice). From preparations like *Shorshe Ilish* (Hilsa in mustard gravy) to hearty *Macher Jhol* (light fish curry) and *Paturi* (fish steamed in banana leaves), fish is not just sustenance, but an emotional and personal experience often linked with festivities, seasons and the lovely family memories.

Beyond the fish, Bengali cuisine boasts a remarkable variety of non-vegetarian dishes featuring mutton, chicken, prawns, and crabs. Dishes like *Kosha Mangsho* that is the slow-cooked spicy mutton curry, *Chingri Malai Curry* that has prawns in coconut gravy, and *Dim'er Dalna* (egg curry) showcase their love for rich and flavourful spicy preparations.

This deep-rooted connection is also historical: Bengal's riverine geography, fertile land, and coastal stretch naturally led to an abundance of fish and fresh produce. Over centuries, influences from Mughal, British, Portuguese, and Nawabi cuisines further enriched the meat dishes.

It is this legacy — full of flavour that makes Bengali non-vegetarian cuisine an heirloom passed down through generations.

— The author is a Celebrity Chef from Mumbai

BY CHEF BIDYUT SAHA

My journey began far from the lush landscapes of Uttarakhand — it started in the warmth of a modest Bengali kitchen, where I learnt to appreciate the magic of food under the loving guidance of my mother. The gentle simmer of curries, the heady aromas of mustard oil, and the intricate dance of five-spice blends laid the foundation for a lifelong passion for gastronomy.

Our home would transform during celebrations such as Durga Puja, Bhai Phota, Nobanno, Pohela Boishakh, Saraswati Puja, Dol Purnima, and even during the festivities of Rath Yatra. I vividly remember how, during Durga Puja, I would grate as many as 15 to 20 coconuts to create an assortment of "nado" — delicate sweet treats served to our cherished guests during the puja and on Bijaydasami. These moments in the home of every Bengali kitchen are more than cooking lessons; they are immersive experiences that intertwined culture, emotion, and tradition into every recipe.



The flavours of Bengali cuisine, with their unique balance and depth, became my greatest muse. I remember the defining moment when I perfected the *PanchPhoron tadka* — a quintessential Bengali spice blends that marries five different spices. That experience marked a turning point in my culinary journey, opening my eyes to the possibility of blending tradition with innovation. My early forays into the culinary world were humble yet heartfelt, as I began mastering beloved classics such as *Bengali fish curry*, *aloo sedho* (simple boiled potatoes), *masoor dal fry*, *steamed rice*, and a cool, refreshing, healthy green salad. Each dish conveyed a story of home and heritage and instilled in me a deep respect for the art of cooking.

During my college years, I dedicated myself to refining my skills and preserving the culinary legacy that had been passed down through generations. Classic dishes like *sukto* — a delicate medley of bitter and sweet flavours, *kosha mangsho* (slow-cooked spicy mutton), *chingri malai curry* (prawns in a rich, creamy sauce), and *aloo posto* (potato in a poppy seed paste) quickly became the cornerstones of my repertoire. Equally memorable were the festive treats such as *luchi* served with *spicy aloo dum*, and the comforting sweetness of *misti doi*. Bengali cuisine, with its extensive array of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian delights, continuously inspired me to celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of every recipe I encountered.

Fish is more than just a staple in the diet — it is an emotion that embodies our cultural identity. Among the many treasures of Bengali cuisine, *Doi Ilish* stands out as a personal favourite of mostly all the food lovers of this cuisine and even more. This delicacy, prepared with the exquisite *hilsa fish* in a luscious sauce of curd and mustard, perfectly encapsulates the complexity and refinement of Bengali flavours. Each bite of *Doi Ilish* takes me back to those early days in my mother's kitchen, filled with memories of festive gatherings and heartfelt conversations. This deep emotional resonance is at the core of my culinary philosophy:

I strive to create food that radiates authenticity, nostalgia, and above all, love.

One of my proudest professional achievements at *Taj Corbett Resort & Spa* was the creation and orchestration of the Bengali food festival for the people as my love for Bengali cuisine, "Sarodiya" held during Durga Puja. Over the course of four immersive days, guests were invited to experience an adventure of taste, where every dish told a story of tradition and celebration. *Sarodiya* was much more than a mere food event — it was a carefully curated journey that transported visitors to the bustling, vibrant streets of Kolkata. Every dish, from the spicy and aromatic starters to the sweet, delicate desserts, was an ode to the rich culinary heritage of Bengal. Organising this festival allowed me to share the stories behind the Bengali festival foods and to connect with people through the universal language of food.

Now, with over two decades of culinary experience behind me, the passion for *Bengali cuisine* remains as vibrant as ever. The ingredients favoured — *mustard oil*, *curd*, and *poppy seeds* — serve not only as essential components in my recipes but also as symbols of my cultural identity. These ingredients enhance every dish with layers of flavour and history, offering guests a taste that is as authentic as it is evocative. For me, cooking is not merely about following recipes; it is a heartfelt tribute to my origins, homage to my mother, and a continuous celebration of a culinary tradition that has shaped every aspect of my life.

Every meal prepared is a dialogue between the old and the new — a reflection of a journey from a small Bengali kitchen to the refined, contemporary setting where still people can savour the traditional flavours. Whether it is an exquisitely plated Bengali dish or an innovative fusion creation, the goal is to evoke treasured memories and foster new culinary adventures for every guest. This is a reflection of Bengal itself — a land where love, culture, and food are inseparably woven together. The Bengali people are rich in tradition because every celebration, memory and emotion is expressed through their cuisine. From the festive feasts to everyday meals, food is not just nourishment but an expression of identity. This deep-rooted connection makes Bengal's culinary heritage timeless — where every dish carries the warmth of community, the pride of culture, and the soul of a people savouring life. A journey that began with humble beginnings in a Bengali kitchen and blossomed into a celebrated career as an ambassador of Bengali cuisine. It is a legacy built on the timeless pillars of authenticity.

— The author is a Bengali and the Executive Chef of Taj Corbett Resort & Spa, Uttarakhand



The Magic of Bengali Mithai

BY TEAM AGENDA

The Bengali's are always sweet positive like they are food positive. Unlike everyone else they are even very particular about the sweets they have. So, this summer, you can savour a specially thought out range of Bengali mithai from *Khoya Mithai*. At the heart of this range is the majestic *Rajbhog* — soft, saffron-hued, and filled with a medley of premium dry fruits, offering royal indulgence in every bite.

The *Mango Rasgulla*, a refreshing seasonal twist, captures the sweetness of Alphonso mangoes wrapped in the airy softness of rasgulla.

For purists, the *Classic Rasgulla* delivers that perfect balance of lightness and syrupy comfort.

The lush *Pista Rasmalai* features pillowy dumplings soaked in a creamy pistachio-infused milk bath, while the *Chenna Toast*, with its dense, chewy texture, is a nostalgic nod to Kolkata's old-school sweet shops.

Craving something richer and more sweet? Try the delicate *Raskadam*, its khoya-coated exterior hiding a rasgulla within, or the luxurious *Malai Cham Cham*, layered with cream and hints of saffron and pistachio.

You should definitely not miss the *Kheer Kadam*, a double-layered delight that perfectly unites texture and tradition. Each piece reflects the precision, purity, and passion *Khoya Mithai* is known for — an invitation to savour Bengal's legacy of mithai with a seasonal freshness for summer.





From Bhog to Mishti

BY CHEF AMBAPALI ROY

In Bengal, every festival weaves food into devotion. Durga Pujo, the grandest celebration, is not just the worship of a Goddess — it is the homecoming of strength, love and renewal.

The spirit of the pujo shines through in the *bhog* — a sacred meal of ghee-scented rice and golden moong dal cooked into a hearty khichuri, served with *labra* (a warm medley of spiced vegetables), *crisp beguni* (batter-fried eggplant), tangy tomato chutney, and creamy, cardamom-scented *gobindobhog rice payesh*.

Rare delicacies like *chhanar dalna* (cottage cheese curry) or *dhokar dalna* (spiced lentil cakes) occasionally grace the feast, enriching it with warmth, nostalgia, and reverence.

During *Narayan Pujo*, the humble shinni — a rustic blend of wheat flour, ripe bananas, sugar, and milk — is lovingly mixed by hand, embodying deep, simple faith passed down generations.

Kojagori Lokkhi Pujo fills homes with the soft glow of alpana — intricate rice-paste motifs drawn on the floors to welcome the goddess of prosperity. Offerings include *narkel naru*, *crisp puffed rice*, *tender chandrapuli*, and rare *manohara sweets*, their sweetness echoing hope and devotion. The goddess of prosperity is welcomed with the purest produce. In Bengal, festive food springs from an agrarian soul, where to feast is to offer, and to eat is to remember.

— The author is a Chef at Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi

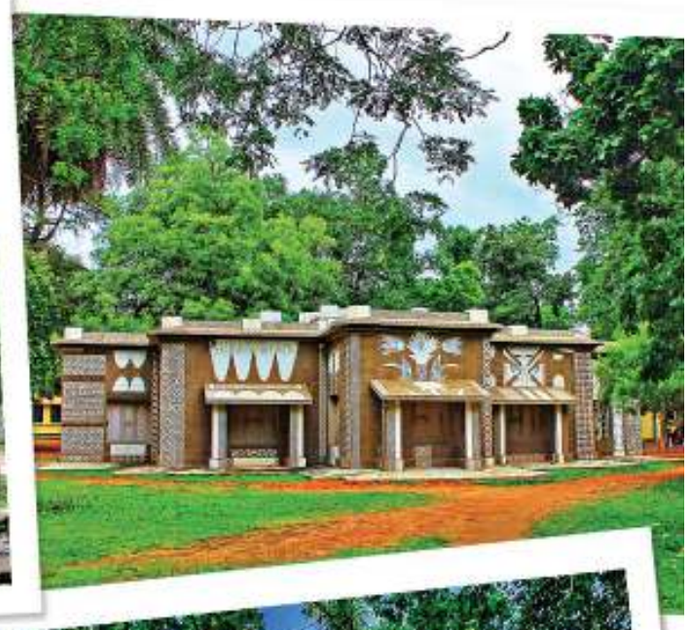
DO YOU KNOW?

- Each region in Bengal has its speciality: Sundarbans' chui jhal spice, North Bengal's iconic sweets like mishti doi, and Sylhet's citrusy meat dishes like beef hatkora.
- The Bengali concept of *adda* — casual, lengthy chats over snacks and tea — highlights food's role in community bonding and social life.
- Bengali drinks range from fruity shorbot to spiced borhani and the famous Seven Colour Tea of Srimangal.
- Bengalis prize freshwater fish like hilsa, rohu, and catla, cooked in mustard gravies, steamed, or fried — making fish a cultural symbol.






BOLPUR, SHANTINIKETAN



Ekla Chalo Re...


RABINDRA SADAN

BY UTTARA GANGOPADHYAY

If you happen to be in **Kolkata** in early May, you will come across innumerable cultural programmes, organised by well-known institutions to small neighbourhood clubs, most with free entry too. Because this is the time when the city gears up to celebrate the birth anniversary of one of the greatest poets of India, *Rabindranath Tagore* (May 7, 1861 — August 7, 1941). Called 'ponchise baisakh' (25 Baisakh) in accordance with the Bengali date and month when he was born, it is a day of paying homage to 'kobiguru' or 'gurudev' as he is popularly known as. And even if you happen to miss the birthday celebration, you may visit the various places associated with his memories, whenever you are in the city.

Tagore's Birthplace

Tucked away in a corner of north Kolkata is the palatial ancestral home of the Tagore family where the great poet — the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize, in 1913, and the first non-European to win it in Literature — was born. Although much has changed over the years, the complex situated in the *Jorasanko* neighbourhood still retains the aura of the yesteryears. The main building is now the *Rabindra Bharati University* (established in May 1961).

A part of the building complex has been converted to a museum. Apart from galleries depicting the life and times of the poet's famous family members, there are galleries devoted to the poet himself, galleries showcasing the poet's relationship with various countries around the globe, a gallery on the Bengal School of Art, etc.

Information: The museum is open on all days (except Mondays and government holidays) from 10.30am to 5.30pm in summer and 10am to 5pm in winter. Entry fees apply. Photography inside the museum is prohibited but you may take pictures from outside and in the garden.

There is also a light and sound show (separate entry ticket) held here during the evening but the timings vary according to the season. For more details about the museum, latest entry fees, group bookings and details of the light and sound show, you may call on 033-2269 6601 (Address: 6/4, Dwarakanath Tagore Lane, Kolkata 700007)





This ancestral home of Tagore family is the birthplace of Rabindranath Tagore and now houses Rabindra Bharati University

Cultural Hub of Kolkata

Named after the poet, *Rabindra Sadan* (an auditorium built between 1961 and 1967) in the heart of the city, is the hub of Kolkata's cultural activities. Next to the *Maidan*, it is surrounded by art galleries, exhibition centres, and theatre and cinema halls. It is the best place to rub shoulders with the culturally minded crowd. Round the year, especially in winter, several fairs are organised in the premises.

Tagore's Vision of Education

But your quest for Tagore cannot be complete without a visit to the famous university township, *Bolpur*, which has developed around the school (and later university) founded by Rabindranath Tagore. It is interesting to note that during his childhood, Tagore found it difficult to adjust to formal education. He not only refused to answer questions put to him by his teachers but also bunked school on every pretext. One of his favourite games at home was to play 'teacher' — a row of wooden bars of a railing along a corridor at home would be his students and he would take a cane and beat them heartily, apparently mimicking some of the school teachers. So when he decided to open a school at the site of an 'ashram' founded by his father and named 'Santiniketan', he drew inspiration from the ashram schools of the Vedic age, where education was imparted in the midst of nature and children were allowed to study at their own pace. The school that started with five students gradually developed into a global university which Tagore named Viswa Bharati. With special permission, visitors are allowed to tour the grounds. Although many buildings have come up here, you will still find open — air classes being held in the campus. *The Uttarayan complex houses* a museum, and the many quaint homes built with indigenous material and where Tagore lived at different times. In a corner of the main grounds is *Chhatimtala*, or the place where Tagore's father, Maharshi Debendranath, founded the ashram and established his meditation centre. Apart from the university and the museum complex, you may also visit Sriniketan (founded by Tagore's son Rathindranath for rural development and studies), the *Sonajhuri Haat* (a rural market organised every weekend where you may buy local souvenirs, eat home-cooked local delicacies, take a lesson from the artisan-musicians, or join the many dance groups who come to perform here), and the *Ballavpur Deer Park*. Bolpur town, which has developed around the university, is the main tourist hub.

Information: The town is about 162km from Kolkata by road. The Bolpur railway station is about two km away from the centre of the town.


RABINDRA BHARATI UNIVERSITY


BALLAVPUR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

— The author is a Kolkata based writer who earlier worked with Outlook Traveller, contributing to its guidebooks and features on West Bengal and Odisha

KALIMPONG AND MUNGPOO — TAGORE IN THE HILLS

While most people are aware of Tagore's travels across the globe, not many are aware about his visits to the Darjeeling hills of West Bengal. Kalimpong, a hill town about 50km from Darjeeling by road, was a favourite destination. According to scholars, during his visits, Tagore would stay at the Gouripur House, owned by *Brajendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury* of Mymensingha (now in Bangladesh), the landlord of Gouripur estate. The poet recited his own composition over the telephone from Kalimpong and it was broadcast by All India Radio, quite a technical feat during that time. The house remained under neglect for a long time and is now under the care of the West Bengal Heritage Commission. Around the same time (1938-40), he would also visit Mungpoo, a hamlet about 35km from Kalimpong. Here he would be the guest of Manmohan Sen and his wife Maitreyi Debi. Sen was the chief chemist at the cinchona plantation for which the place is famous even today. Tagore his prolific pen finding many expressions inspired by the beauty of the Himalayas. Interestingly, the main bungalow has been turned into a Tagore museum and visitors may see some of the furniture and other objects used by the poet.


MONGPU-HILLSTATION


SONAJHURI HAAT BOLPUR

RABINDRA SAROBAR AND CULTURAL HUBS

Located in the southern part of Kolkata, Rabindra Sarobar — originally known as Dhakuria Lake — surrounded by tree-lined walkways, gardens, and a collection of cultural institutions. Renamed in honour of Rabindranath Tagore, it is a recreational area that also serves as a cultural landmark in the city. During Ponchishe Baisakh and Baishe Srabon, several open-air performances are held around the lake, particularly on the southern banks near Nazrul Mancha and in the vicinity of cultural clubs such as the Calcutta Rowing Club and Lake Kalibari. These include renditions of Rabindra Sangeet, recitations and dance dramas adapted from Tagore's works. The performances often draw large gatherings and are organised by cultural societies, residents' associations, and independent theatre groups.

Sunday Pioneer
HYDERABAD | SUNDAY | MAY 4, 2025

MONEY MATTERS

ICAI to help Sebi in tackling financial fraud

Chartered accountants' apex body ICAI will be preparing a research paper to help markets watchdog Sebi in dealing with financial frauds. ICAI President Charanjot Singh Nanda on Saturday said the institute will set up a working group and hold discussions with Sebi to finalise the various aspects that will be looked into with respect to tackling financial fraud. The working group will submit a research paper to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in this regard, Nanda said. Nanda had a meeting with Sebi Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Friday. "India is a very favourable investment destination. People want to invest in India and normal people have diverted their savings to the markets such as Systematic Investment Plans," Nanda said at a briefing in the national capital.



Goldsikka unveils Gold melting ATM

Hyderabad-based 'Goldsikka' on Saturday unveiled an AI-powered Gold Melting ATM offering users the ability to buy, sell, exchange, lease, digitize and monetize gold and gold jewellery. Goldsikka which launched India's first real-time Gold ATM in 2022, is introducing the next-generation ATM which incorporates advanced features that redefine gold transactions, the company's CEO Sy Taruj told reporters here. The machine offers an integrated Augmented Reality (AR) experience, allowing users to virtually try on jewellery before making a purchase, he said. "This is an Automated Teller Machine, with zero human interference. Through this ATM one can buy gold and also sell gold. In the process of selling gold, when the customer deposits gold in the machine it will be melted, purity of that gold will be tested, and the value of the pure gold will be displayed on the machine.



SBI Q4 profit declines 10 pc to Rs 18,643 crore

State Bank of India (SBI) on Saturday reported 10 per cent fall in standalone net profit at Rs 18,643 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2025. The country's biggest lender had earned a profit of Rs 20,698 crore in the January-March period of 2023-24. Total income increased to Rs 1,43,876 crore in March quarter from Rs 1,28,412 crore in the same period a year ago, SBI said in a regulatory filing. During the quarter, the bank earned an interest income of Rs 1,19,666 crore as against Rs 1,11,043 crore a year ago. The bank saw an improvement in asset quality, with gross non-performing assets (NPAs) declining to 1.82 per cent of the total advances in the fourth quarter from 2.24 per cent as at March-end 2024. Similarly, net NPAs eased to 0.47 per cent as against 0.57 per cent. On a consolidated basis, SBI's net profit in the quarter fell 8 per cent to Rs 19,600 crore as against Rs 21,384 crore in the same period a year ago. Total income, however, increased to Rs 1,79,562 crore from Rs 1,64,914 crore.

India bans direct, indirect imports from Pakistan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has banned direct or indirect import of all goods from Pakistan with immediate effect in the interest of national security and public policy, following the Pahalgam terror attack last month which killed 26 tourists, according to a government order.

The decision will completely halt all inbound shipments of goods from Pakistan to India. India's exports to Pakistan in April-January 2024-25 stood at USD 447.65 million, while imports were meagre USD 0.42 million.



A provision in this regard has been added in Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023 "to prohibit direct or indirect import or transit of all goods originating in or exported from Pakistan with immediate effect until further orders", the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification dated May 2.

It added this restriction is imposed in the interest of national security and public policy. Any exception to this prohibition will require approval of Government of India, the order said.

Inserting the provision under the heading "Prohibition on Import from Pakistan" in the FTP, it said: "Direct or indirect import or transit of all goods originating in or exported from Pakistan, whether or not freely importable or otherwise permitted, shall be prohibited with immediate effect, until further orders".

Main imports from the neighbouring country during April-January 2024-25 included fruits and nuts (USD 0.08 million), certain oil seeds and medicinal plants (USD 0.26 million), and organic chemicals.

The decision follows a terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22, in which 26 people were killed.

Following the terror attack, India took a series of measures including immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post, used for movement of certain kinds of goods. Besides, India has announced expulsion of Pakistani military attaches, and suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960.

INDIA-US TRADE TALKS

Comm min holds industry consultation; seeks suggestions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



India and the US are exploring opportunities for an interim trade arrangement in goods to secure an "early mutual wins" ahead of finalising the first phase of the proposed bilateral trade agreement by fall of this year

The commerce ministry on May 2 held a comprehensive consultation with the domestic industry on the proposed India-US trade agreement and sought suggestions to further deepen bilateral trade ties in a mutually beneficial manner, an official said.

The stakeholder consultation was chaired by Special Secretary in the ministry Rajesh Agrawal. He is also India's chief negotiator for the India-US bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

During the meeting, Department of Commerce briefed the industry representatives on recent developments related to India-US trade ties and solicited their views and suggestions to further expand them in a mutually beneficial manner, the official added.

The special secretary assured the industry that their inputs would be factored in the ongoing trade negotiations.

Senior representatives from industry bodies including Confederation of Indian Industry, FICCI, PHDCCI, India Cellular and Electronics Association and Assocham participated in the deliberations.

The first in-person meeting between India and the US after finalisation of terms of references (ToRs) for the BTA concluded last month.

India and the US are exploring opportunities for an interim trade arrangement in goods to secure an "early mutual wins" ahead of finalising the first phase of the proposed bilateral trade agreement by fall of this year.

Both the countries have initiated sectoral level talks and more engagements are planned from May end.

To give an impetus to the talks, India's chief negotiator Rajesh Agrawal, additional secretary in Department of Commerce, and Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch held a three-day meeting last month in Washington.

During the meetings in Washington, the teams deliberated on wide-ranging subjects including tariff (related to goods) and non-tariff matters.

These deliberations assume significance as the US has suspended the additional 26 per cent tariffs on India till July 9. Both nations want to take advantage of this window to push the trade talks. However, the 10 per cent baseline tariff imposed on the countries will continue to remain in place.

India is seeking duty concessions for labour-intensive sectors like textiles, gems and jewellery, leather goods, garments, plastics, chemicals, shrimp, oil seeds, chemicals, grapes and bananas in the proposed pact with America.

On the other hand, the US wants duty concessions in sectors like certain industrial goods, automobiles (electric vehicles particularly), wines, petrochemical products, dairy, agriculture items such as apples, and tree nuts, they said.

The US remained India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25 with bilateral trade valued at USD 131.84 billion. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total goods exports, 6.22 per cent in imports, and 10.73 per cent in the country's total merchandise trade.

SC rejects JSW Steel's resolution plan for BSPL

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Orders liquidation



In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Friday set aside a resolution plan submitted by JSW Steel Limited for Bhushan Steel and Power Limited (BSPL), holding it illegal and in violation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

A bench comprising Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma ordered the liquidation of BSPL under the IBC.

The top court criticised the conduct of all key stakeholders in the resolution process -- the resolution professional, the Committee of Creditors (CoC) and the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) -- for enabling what it termed a "flagrant violation" of the IBC.

Writing a 105-page judgment for the bench, Justice Trivedi criticised multiple stakeholders, including successful resolution applicant (SRA) JSW Steel Limited, for procedural lapses and failure to uphold the objectives of the IBC.

"Having thoroughly examined the entire matter factually and legally, we arrive at the following irresistible conclusions: the resolution professional had utterly failed to discharge his statutory duties contemplated under the IBC and the CIRP regulations during the course of the entire CIR proceedings of the corporate debtor, BPSL," the verdict said.

The bench held that the CoC failed to exercise its commercial wisdom while approving JSW's resolution plan, which was in absolute contravention of the mandatory provisions of the IBC and CIRP regulations.

"The CoC also had failed to protect the interest of the creditors by taking contradictory stands before this court and accepting payments from JSW without any demurer, and supporting JSW to implement its ill-motivated plan against the interest of the creditors," it held.

"The SRA JSW Steel Limited, after securing the highest score in the evaluation matrix in the 18th meeting of the CoC, submitted the revised consolidated resolution plan with an addendum under the garb of complying with the amendments made in the CIRP Regulations, 2016 and got the same approved from the CoC," it said.

However, even after the approval of its resolution plan by the NCLAT, JSW wilfully contravened and not complied with the terms of the approved resolution plan for about two years, which frustrated the very object and purpose of the IBC, it said.

Indian Bank profit soars 32% to Rs 2,956 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Indian Bank on Saturday reported a 32 per cent jump in net profit to Rs 2,956 crore for the March quarter of 2024-25, helped by a decline in bad loans and a rise in core income.

The Chennai-based lender had earned a net profit of Rs 2,247 crore in the year-ago period.

During the quarter, the bank's total income increased to Rs 18,599 crore from Rs 16,887 crore a year ago, Indian Bank said in a regulatory filing.

Interest income grew to Rs 15,856 crore from Rs 14,624 crore in the fourth quarter of the previous financial year. Net Interest Income (NII) in the quarter also improved to Rs 6,389 crore from Rs 6,015 crore in the same period a year ago.

On the asset quality front, the bank's gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) moderated to 3.09 per cent of gross advances as compared to 3.95 per cent by the end of March 2024.

Godrej Properties aims 10pc growth, says Pirojsha

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Buoyed by record sales bookings last fiscal, Godrej Properties has set a target to increase its pre-sales by 10 per cent in 2025-26 to Rs 32,500 crore as housing demand continues to be strong.

Godrej Properties sale bookings rose 31 per cent to a record Rs 29,444 crore during 2024-25 from Rs 22,527 crore in the preceding year.

In an interview with PTI, Godrej Properties Executive Chairperson Pirojsha Godrej noted that housing demand continues to be strong despite global economic uncertainties.

"We have given a conservative guidance of achieving a sales bookings of Rs 32,500 crore for the current fiscal. Hopefully, we will do better than that," he told PTI.

Pirojsha said the company had given a guidance of Rs 27,500 crore for the last fiscal but it beat the target and did pre-sales of around Rs 29,500 crore.

He said the company has inventory in existing under-construction projects, besides strong launch pipeline of housing projects across major cities.

Godrej Properties is likely to become the largest listed realty firm in terms of sales bookings for 2024-25.

On Friday, the company reported 19 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 381.99 crore for the latest March quarter despite higher income.

Its net profit stood at Rs 471.26 crore in the year-ago period.

Total income increased to Rs 2,681.06 crore in the fourth quarter of the last fiscal year from Rs 1,914.82 crore a year ago.

During March quarter, the company's tax outgo rose to nearly Rs 190 crore while it incurred a loss of Rs 35.36 crore in some joint ventures. However, Godrej Properties' net profit rose 93 per cent to Rs 1,399.89 crore during 2024-25 from Rs 725.27 crore in the preceding fiscal. Total income grew to Rs 6,967.05 crore last fiscal from Rs 4,334.22 crore in 2023-24.

Netflix generated $2 billion economic impact in India: Ted

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Netflix created USD 2 billion of economic impact from its Indian productions, the streaming plaftorm's co-CEO Ted Sarandos said on Saturday.

At the inaugural World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES), held at the Jio Convention Centre here, Sarandos said the company created 20,000 cast and crew jobs from its projects in the country.

"Since 2021 through 2024, especially after COVID, when things got back to normal, we've invested in India in a way that has created USD 2 billion of economic impact from our productions, over 20,000 cast and crew jobs from our productions in India," Sarandos said.

He noted that globally three billion hours of Indian content was watched last year, with at least one Indian title in the global top 10 every week.

"In those productions, we have 150 original films and series that were filmed in 100 different towns and cities in India," he added.



Sarandos was speaking at the session "Streaming the New India: Culture, Connectivity & Creative Capital", moderated by Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan, who headlined Netflix's first Indian original series "Sacred Games" in 2018 and recently starred in the streamer's heist movie "Jewel Thief".

"We've been operating in India now for nine years. But we took our big swing seven years ago with 'Sacred Games'...And I knew that India would be a very important part of our journey. "What we found with 'Sacred Games' is that great stories could transcend borders, languages and cultures, and really talk to the world. 'Sacred Games' proved that.

'JioStar investing USD 10 bn in content in 3 years'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Streaming platform JioStar is investing USD 10 billion in content in India over a three-year period, its vice chairman Uday Shankar said on Saturday.

Speaking at a session at the first World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) here, he also said the industry needs to focus on 2-3 big drivers, including creating more content, which is tailored and customised to the Indian needs. "In FY2024, the two companies spent Rs 25,000 crore on content alone. In FY2025, it went to Rs 30,000 crore and the number for the FY26 will be over Rs 32,000-33,000 crores," Shankar said.

"So, in three years alone, we have spent more than USD 10 billion," he said.

He said the domestic screen entertainment or video entertainment industry is currently pegged at USD 30 billion while in the US its size is around USD 200 billion and in China USD 75 billion. Stating that the value, the space or rate at which the growth has taken place over the last 30 years, in the next 15 years also it will continue to grow but there are two or three big drivers that are needed to focus on. Besides creating more content and which is customised, tailored for Indian needs, he said we have to take distribution even deeper.

ITC leveraging AI for supply chain efficiency

PNS ■ KOLKATA

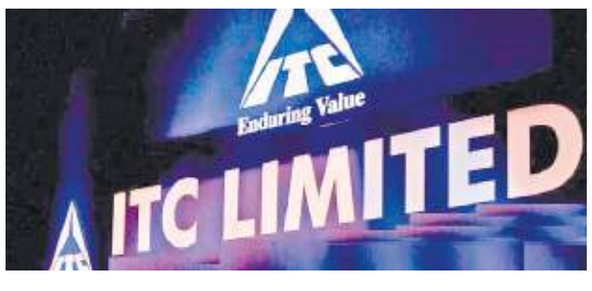
ITC Ltd on Saturday said it is leveraging artificial intelligence and a robust digital backbone to accelerate product innovation, respond to emerging consumer trends and efficiently serve diverse retail channels.

The Kolkata-headquartered company's digital transformation journey began around six years ago, he said.

"We started with the Sixth Sense Centre to monitor social media conversations, identify consumer trends and translate them into actionable insights. Today, we have AI tools that can extract themes such as dietary shifts — like growing millet consumption — and recommend product ideas based on ingredients and recipes people are talking about," ITC Executive Director Sumant Bhargavan said.

Bhargavan said it has also developed a fully integrated digital supply chain that supports multiple retail formats — general trade, modern trade, e-commerce and quick commerce.

Each channel has unique demands, especially in terms of inventory management and speed of delivery, requiring tailored supply chain models and demand-sensing tools, he said.



The company has built pilot plants for various categories, enabling rapid prototyping and testing of products based on these insights. "That's how we launch over 100 products a year," Bhargavan noted.

"Quick commerce, for example, demands higher inventory buffers and predictive tools due to erratic consumer behaviour and short shelf life of food products," he said.

On the marketing front, ITC is increasingly shifting to in-house content creation and digital-first strategies.

"We use AI engines to dynamically generate and serve personalised ads to consumer cohorts. If one version of an ad doesn't get a click, another one is served until we know what works," Bhargavan said at an MCCI event here.

"Each retail format — from 'kiranas' to online to modern trade has a role to play. The key is to minimise channel conflict and serve every format appropriately," the senior company official said.

Meanwhile, Reliance Grocery Retail CEO Damodar Mall said nearly 72-75 per cent of retail is still physical, amid a sharp traction in digital commerce.

He said quick commerce is accelerating consumption by narrowing the gap between desire and purchase, but wondered about its sustainability.

"Quick commerce turns a wish into consumption instantly — it's reshaping habits and boosting consumption. However, the service is subsidised by investor capital.

"Consumers are not paying for the service; they are having a free lunch.

The question is, when services must be paid for, how many will continue?" Mall said without elaborating.

He expects the segment to eventually stabilise with only a few dominant players.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
PUBLIC HEALTH AND MUNICIPAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
'E' - PROCUREMENT NOTICE
No. 841/TUFIDC/Unit-1/PKL,BHPL&KMM/2025-26, dt: 02.05.2025
Infrastructure developmental works in Parkal, Bhupalpally & Kammam Municipality at an estimated cost of Rs.1425.50 Lakhs. Download start date: 05-05-2025 and download end dates as per uploaded bid document. Further details can be seen @ www.tender.telangana.gov.in.
Sd/- Superintending Engineer (PH)
DIPR R.O.No: 1305-PP/CL/ADVTI/2025-26, Date: 03-05-2025 Unit-I, TUFIDC, Warangal.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
PANCHAYATH RAJ WANAPARTHY
TENDER NOTICE
NIT No. TO/Tender/73 to 76/2025-26 dt:03.05.2025
No. of works (04) CRR, MRR & Sand Management Tax Grants in Nagarkurnool & Wanaparthy Districts, Estimate Cost Rs.1981.00 Lakhs Tenders Schedules can be had from e-procurement market from 09.05.2025 for each tender with minimum (07) days to participate from date of upload. Other details can be had from e procurement market place @ https://tenders.telangana.gov.in; email Id: seprwanaparthy@gmail.com. Further details can be had from the office of the Superintending Engineer/ Regional office PR Circle Wanaparthy.
DIPR R.O.No: 1305-PP/CL/ADVTI/2025-26, Date: 03-05-2025 Sd/- Regional Officer, PR Wanaparthy

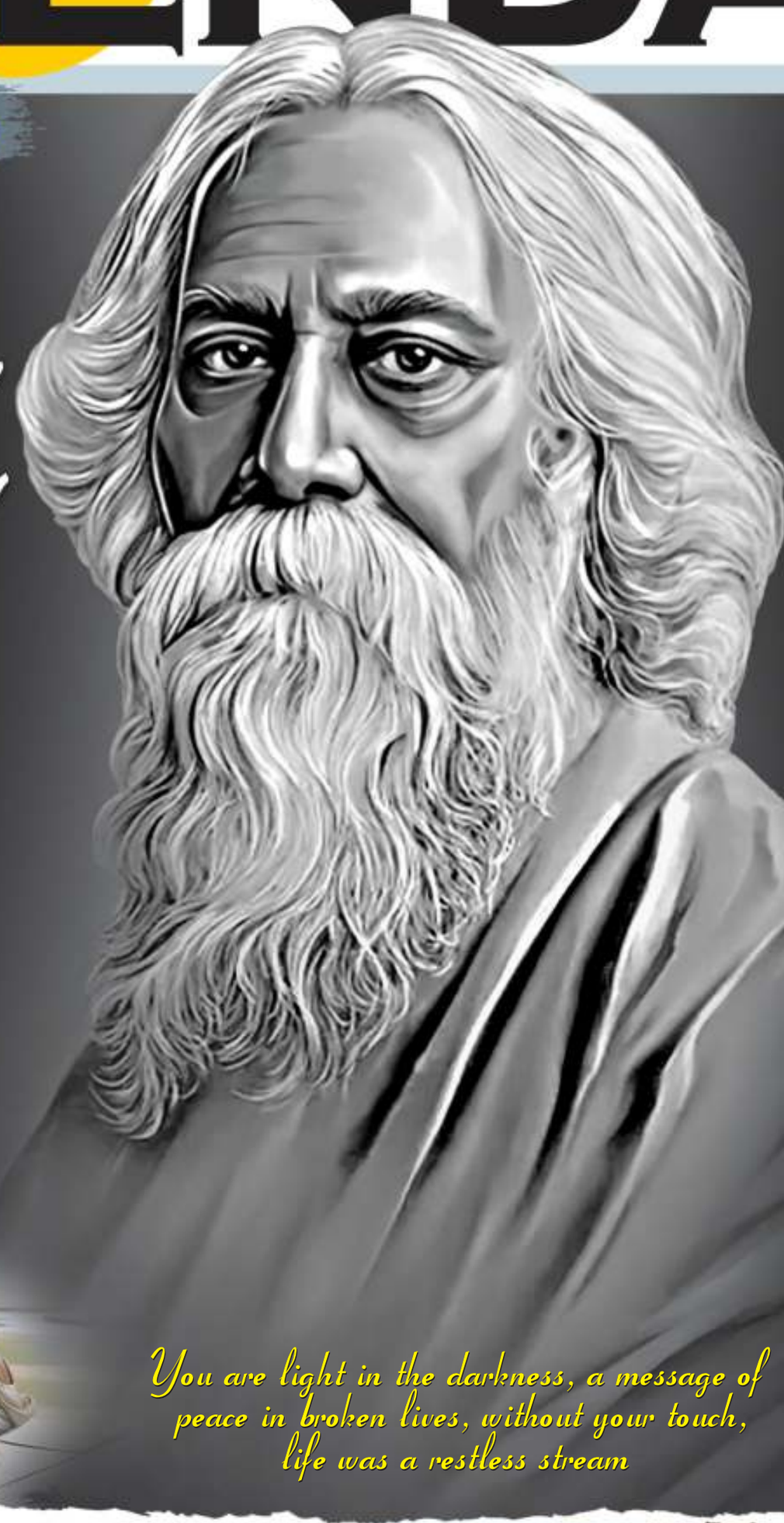
sunday magazine
Hyderabad, May 4, 2025

The Pioneer
AGENDA

"Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark"
— Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore:

The Ultimate Guru



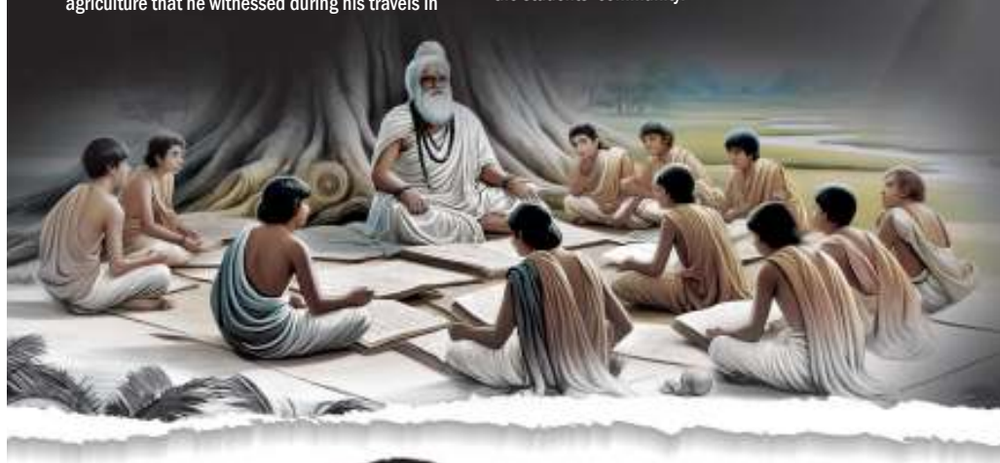
As India celebrates Tagore's 164th anniversary, his contributions beyond poetry often go unnoticed

BY UTSAV CHATTERJEE

In the autumn of 1924, Raktakarabi (Red Oleander) was published in the then famous Bengali magazine Prabasi. A tale of desperation of the underground gold miners in a dark city ruled by a greedy King, Tagore's novel sent ripples of reaction across the world of literature, not only in homeland but also across Europe and the Orient. Three years later, Metropolis by Fritz Lang released to the world audience and reflected the same imageries of a fictional dystopian city with aggressive industrialisation. Though Tagore did not have had any audience with Lang, it is quite evident that they had some similarities in their views on the onslaught of the advances of mindless mechanised industrialisation. It was this want of freedom — the need of breaking the chains of slavery — the need of integrating demands of the time with the soul of a country — that defines Rabindranath Tagore.

However, that does not mean that Tagore was not open to industrialisation. On the contrary, he was much more open to the use and integration of technology and modern science in Indian education, agriculture as well as art and culture. In fact, his consideration for welcoming machines into the arena of development was much more pronounced than many other political thinkers and philosophers of his time. Russiar Chithi (Letters from Russia, 1931) in fact, expresses his admiration for the use of industries and technology for mass education and agriculture that he witnessed during his travels in Russia. He had just one condition: machines should not create discord — they should not destroy unity - rather they are to be integrated into the social consciousness of the country. He had been constantly promoting the same in Santiniketan and Sriniketan, where he was integrating global knowledge with his profound understanding of the traditional Indian Ashram Shiksha.

In his series of essays (mostly speeches at various occasions and gatherings) on education, he had time and again presented his ideas of a new Indian method of teaching and learning. Sikshar Herfer (Vagaries of Education, 1892) is one such critical observation by Tagore where he openly criticises the imposition of a foreign language — based education system upon the Indian culture. While he was all praise about British literature and poetry, he was one of the strongest critics of the colonial education system as promoted in India. That, according to him, was nothing but a process of creating a line of servants who would toil for the sustenance of the colonial rule in India. It, according to him, had no contribution towards the creation of thoughtful individuals who would contribute to social development. It is interesting to note that the current National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, being implemented in India bears a strong reflection of the Tagorean views of a holistic education. On one hand it emphasises interdisciplinary learnings, trying to integrate science with arts and commerce — on the other hand it is also trying to improve skills among the students' community.



You are light in the darkness, a message of peace in broken lives, without your touch, life was a restless stream

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7 May 1861 in Calcutta (now Kolkata), India, into the distinguished Tagore family, known for its contributions to literature, art and social reform. His father, Debendranath Tagore, was a prominent philosopher and religious reformer associated with the Brahmo Samaj movement.

Tagore's early education was unconventional; he was tutored at home in a variety of subjects, including literature, mathematics, and music. At the age of 11, he accompanied his father on a tour of India, which exposed him to various cultures and philosophies, influencing his worldview.

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS & VISVA-BHARATI UNIVERSITY

Tagore was a visionary educationist who founded an experimental school in 1901 at Shantiniketan, which later became Visva-Bharati University in 1921.

He aimed to blend the best of Eastern and Western educational philosophies, promoting holistic learning in a natural environment.

Classes were held outdoors, encouraging creativity and critical thinking. The university attracted students and scholars from around the world and became a centre for cultural exchange and intellectual discourse.

ARTISTIC ENDEAVOURS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL ANTHEMS

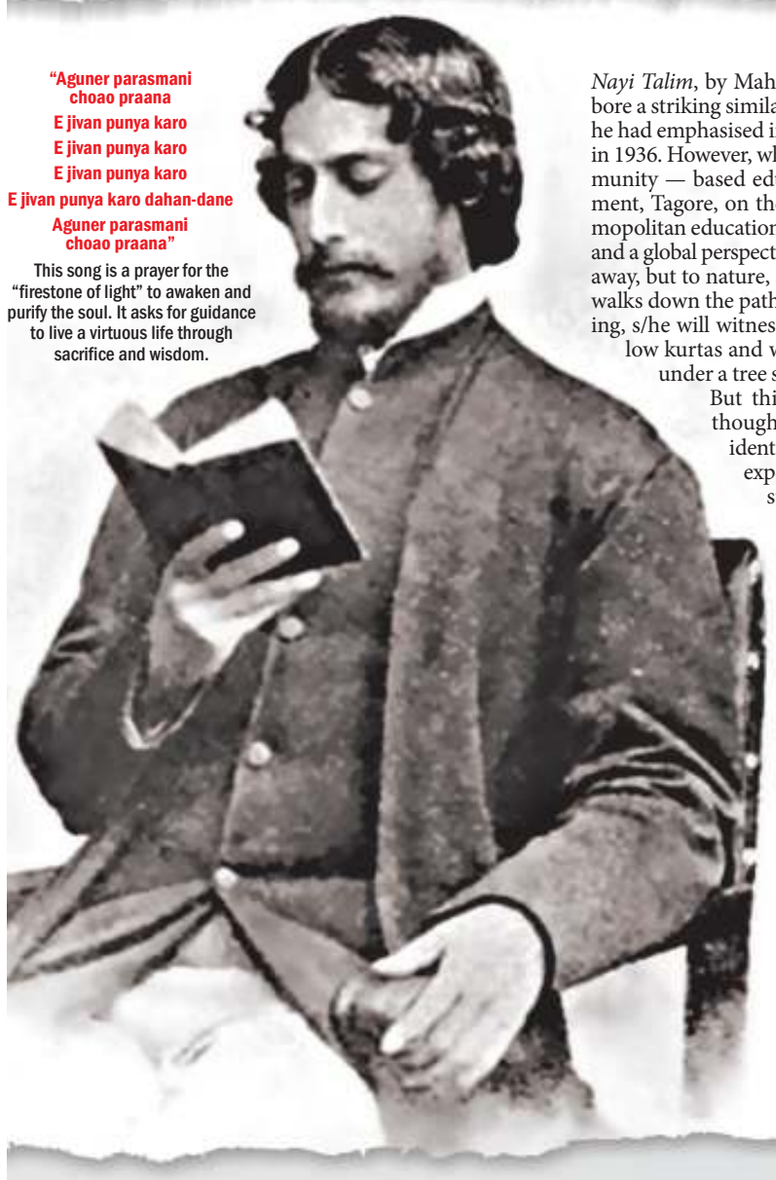
In his later years, Tagore turned to visual arts, creating thousands of paintings characterised by bold forms and lively colours. His artworks reflected his philosophical beliefs on harmony between humanity and nature. Tagore's philosophy centred on universal humanism, advocating for spiritual freedom.

Tagore's influence extended to national symbols; he composed the national anthems of two countries. "Jana Gana Mana," written in 1911, was adopted as India's national anthem. "Amar Shonar Bangla," penned in 1905 during the partition of Bengal, became the national anthem of Bangladesh in 1971.

LEGACY FOR THE WORLD

Rabindranath Tagore passed away on 7 August 1941 in Calcutta, after a prolonged illness. His legacy endures through his extensive body of work, which continues to inspire generations.

Visva-Bharati University remains a testament to his educational vision. Tagore's contributions to literature, music, art, and education have left an indelible mark on Indian and global culture, embodying the spirit of a true polymath.



"Aguner parasmani choao praana
E jivan punya karo
E jivan punya karo
E jivan punya karo
E jivan punya karo dahan-dane
Aguner parasmani choao praana"

This song is a prayer for the "firestone of light" to awaken and purify the soul. It asks for guidance to live a virtuous life through sacrifice and wisdom.

Nayi Talim, by Mahatma Gandhi, published in 1937 in Harijan, bore a striking similarity to Rabindranath's ideas of Education that he had emphasised in Asramer Siksha (Education of the Ashram) in 1936. However, while Gandhiji focused more on practical, community — based education for self-reliance and national upliftment, Tagore, on the other hand, promoted a more liberal, cosmopolitan education that fostered creativity, intellectual freedom, and a global perspective. Children are not introduced to books right away, but to nature, soil, birds and to the joy of exchange. As one walks down the paths of the university campus in an early morning, s/he will witness a joyous scene where children, clad in yellow kurtas and white pyjamas, are flocking around a teacher under a tree shade. Well, they are classes that are going on! But this oneness with nature — this globality in thought and application — is probably the simplest identity of an otherwise diverse character. With his experiments with education as well as rural reconstruction in the hot, arid terrain of rural Bengal, **he was trying to create a soul of the country by integrating science and philosophy of the West and the East.** It saw the arrival and prolonged stay of international personalities, successive establishments of various departments on oriental studies and a direct contribution towards rural reconstruction in India.

However, his outgoing approach to embrace the world community had once fallen in an embarrassing mud hole as well. This was when Benito Mussolini had tried to use Tagore's persona to improve his image before the world community. After meeting Mussolini in Rome in 1926, Tagore — not much aware about the deeds of the great dictator — was so impressed by his charms and warm hospitality that he publicly expressed his appreciation for the fascist dictator. Though later, after meeting *Romain Rolland* and *Giacinta Salvadori* (wife of the exiled professor Guglielmo Salvadori), his opinions shifted. He wrote two letters to Charles Andrews (published in Manchester Guardian) where he openly expressed his embarrassments and criticised the exercise of brute force to conquer the voice of dissent. He toured more than thirty countries. Met people that ranges from *Albert Einstein* to *Victoria Ocampo*. Back home, he denounced nationalism as propagated by the European culture, as he firmly believed it was not inclusive and would only promote violence and social divisions. He even distanced himself from the Swadeshi movement. For him, the Charkhawas absolutely not the route to freedom — and the forceful burning of foreign goods was nothing but inflicting violence on the poor. Tagore is a personality that cannot be described with a few sketches. While the global community tries to identify him as the ultimate Indian guru of art and poetry, it is nothing but toning down an otherwise vast and complex machinery of multiple discourses into a small and safer compartment. He was otherwise, a radical. He was the biggest critic of himself too. In his last public address *Sabhyatar Sankat* (Crisis of Civilisation, 1941), a few months before his death, he held no bar in stating how he had grown up in a time, an environment and under a leadership that was going soft about the colonial rule in India. He then goes on to express in unequivocal terms the extent of damage that the colonists have caused to India (and also to other colonies). He forecasts, 'The wheels of fate will someday compel the British to give up their Indian empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind? What stark misery? When the streams of their centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth will they leave behind them?'

Not just an educator or social scientist, but a political commentator disguised in the form of an author — a radical dressed up in the feathers of a diplomat — **Tagore was a light at the end of a long bleak tunnel, that India could not utilise.**

— The author is an Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata

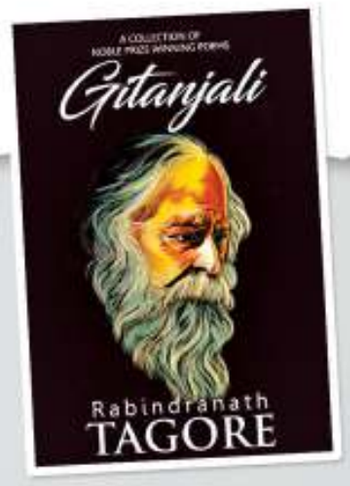


Tagore with Iranian Parliament members in Tehran during his 1932 Indo-Persian goodwill visit

The Sacred Core of Tagore's Literary Words

LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Tagore was a prolific writer who reshaped Bengali literature and music. He introduced new prose and verse forms and used colloquial language, moving away from classical Sanskrit models. His notable works include "Gitanjali," "Gora," "Ghare-Baire," and "Manasi." He is credited with introducing the short story genre to Bengali literature, with his first short story, "Bhikharini," written in 1877. His songs, known as Rabindra Sangeet, combine classical Indian music with folk traditions and remain popular in Bengali culture.



SOULFUL CONNECTION

Gitanjali is Rabindranath Tagore's most celebrated collection of poetry and the work that earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. This made Tagore not only the first non-European, but also the first Asian and the only Indian to receive this prestigious honour. The English translation, titled Song Offerings, introduced Western readers to the spiritual and lyrical richness of Tagore's writing. Its motto, "I am here to sing thee songs"— sets the tone for its introspective.



The Sunday Tribune

SPECTRUM

CHANDIGARH | 4 MAY 2025



Parthiv Shah captures a dialogue between the photographer, the artist and his work

ARTS PAGE 3



'Wolf Siren' is feminist retelling of a classic children's tale

BOOKS PAGE 4

My uncles, the ANANDS

R Umamaheshwari

As Navketan Films completes 75 years, Sohaila Kapur — the niece of Chetan, Dev and Vijay (Goldie) Anand — pays a theatrical tribute

IT was an evening exuding the warmth from memories and melodies of exquisite cinema at Gaiety Theatre, Shimla, with some in the audience humming softly along, nostalgic for the bygone times. Katyayini and the Three Arts Club recently gave a dramatised audio-visual storytelling by Sohaila Kapur, titled *'Anand Hi Anand: Celebrating 75 Years of Navketan Films'*. It was staged as part of the Mimamsa Children's Literature Festival organised by the Keekli Trust. Sohaila's mother, Sheil Kanta, was one of the sisters of the Anands — Manmohan, Savitri, Chetan, Kanti, Dev, Bonnie (Lata), Usha and Vijay (Goldie).

Their father, Pishorimal Anand, hailed from Gharota village, near Pathankot. The land was gifted to their ancestors by Maharaja Ranjit Singh for having served in his army. Pishorimal, however, broke away from *zamindari* and moved to Gurdaspur, starting this new family of his, and ensuring that all his children were well educated.

The Anand brothers started Navketan Films in 1949 with *'Afsar'* (1950). Their story is reflective of a more humane angle in the era of Hindi cinema: many artists of those times (friends of the Anand brothers) came to Bombay during the British rule, and many in the aftermath of Partition. Most had faced the trauma of Partition. Yet, it never translated into animosity, hatred, or othering of any community, either in personal lives or in cinema, unlike much of the violent jingoism and sycophancy in mainstream Hindi cinema today.

On the inspiration behind this production, Sohaila says, "For four years or so, I had been thinking of my *Mamas* (maternal uncles), how they entered a dream world. I felt ecstatic but couldn't understand this pull. Sometimes, there would be tears in my eyes. I felt that this emotion needed to be brought out on paper. So I started researching, spoke to family members, and started compiling their life stories. I wanted to write this beautiful human story of siblings who helped each other, stumbling into circumstances, and about a family that came together."

Dev Anand, she notes, would not have gotten his star persona had it not been for Chetan's wife, Uma, who insisted that a story had to be written celebrating his star appeal, after *'Ziddi'* became a hit. Uma and Goldie together wrote *'Baazi'*.

"Look at Dev Anand's films in the late 1940s and early '50s, he is always the wronged young man, lean, hungry, seeking justice. Then he became a crook, though golden-hearted, in 1951. He gambled, smoked, cavorted with the nautch girls. Uma and Goldie built an image of Dev Anand that lasted more than 50 years. Had it not been for Chetan Anand, Dev wouldn't perhaps have desired to become an actor. And Goldie would not have become the star director that he was had Uma not insisted that he write scripts," points out Sohaila.

"Goldie was 10 years younger than Dev. He had written and directed 21 plays while still in college (St Xavier's, Bombay). He filmed the first song for *'Nau Do Gyarah'*, which became a hit. In *'Funtoosh'*, he created Dev's image as a comic (with the famous song, *'Ae meri topi palat ke aa'*). Chetan *Mama* was into social realism. He was the father of the concept of art cinema. His film, *'Neecha Nagar'*, won the first ever Grand Prize for the best film at Cannes in 1946. Chetan made *'Neecha Nagar'* because he had Uma as his partner... He had that sensitive nerve for society and used art to send a message for social change. I was closest to him, but I also loved Dev Uncle. I admired Goldie for his technique and writing," she says.

The nearly two-hour performance at Shimla urges one to revisit and discover in the process the relevance of their filmography for our times. For instance, in a seminal moment in *'Haqeeqat'* (1964), directed by Chetan (playing an Army officer), we have the following dialogue:

Puran, tumne Gita padhi hai?
[Puran, have you read the Gita?]
Nahin, sir [No, sir].
Arre, padhi to humne bhi nahin hai, lekin suna hai ki usme likha hai, ki zindagi mein sabse badi cheez hai karm, amal. Action, John, action! Yeh baat hamne ek Musalman shayar ki nazm se seekhi hai...
[Neither have I, but I hear it is written therein, that the greatest thing in life is action. This, I learnt from a song by a Muslim poet]

That *nazm* was Kaifi Azmi's *'Farz'*, a few lines of which are as under:

Aur phir Krishna ne Arjun se kaha...
[And then Krishna said to Arjun]
Zindagi sirf amal, sirf amal, sirf amal
[Life is action, just action, just action]
Aur ye bedard amal sulah bhi hai, jang bhi hai [And this hard-hearted one is action, even as it is, reconciliation]
Amn ki mohini tasveer mein hain jitne rang, Unhi rangon mein chhupa khoon ka ek rang bhi hai... [The innumerable illusory colours of peace hide within them, one colour of blood, too]
Saathiyon, doston, hum aaj ke Arjun hi to hain [Friends, aren't we after all today's Arjun]
Hamse bhi Krishna yahi kehte hain
[That's what Krishna tells us, too]

Not to forget the context: the India-China war. In striking contrast is a Sahir Ludhianvi song, *'Kabhi khud pe'*, preceded by Dev Anand's angst-ridden soliloquy in *'Hum Dono'*, directed by Vijay Anand:

Yeh kaun si taakat hai jo hamein apne gharon se, apne maa-baap se, door laakar, humein apne kandhon pe bandook rakhne ko majboor kar deti hai
[What is this power that obliges us to go far from our homes, our parents, placing a gun on our shoulders?]

Chetan's *'Aakhri Khat'* (1966), an official entry to the Oscars, was a classic, shot with a handheld camera outdoors. It was one of the most sensitively picturised filming of a child. It was the candid film we know today, with haunting melodies by the Kaifi-Khayyam duo.

Sohaila points out that "if you see their films *'Tere Mere Sapne'*, *'Haqeeqat'*, *'Prem Pujari'*, *'Tere Ghar ke Samne'* — they were all political, but subtly so. There was the message of the Nehruvian idea of peace, Panchsheel, for a newly Independent country. *'Tere Ghar Ke Samne'* was about two neighbours wanting to outdo each other, building a house: a simple story! They hate each other and, in the end, embrace each other. It was about India and China. *'Haqeeqat'*, though a bit jingoistic or nationalistic, still ends with the message that there is no point in war and that we are brothers. *'Hum Dono'* discusses the futility of war, as well. They belonged in a different world. Their friendships were above and beyond religion and other dividers".

They worked with, and were, close friends of several Muslim poets, artists — Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Ali Sardar Jafri, Sahir Ludhianvi, Waheeda Rehman, Meena Kumari, KA Abbas, and so on. "They believed in the freedom of expression. IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) brought Chetan and Balraj Sahni together. I remember a certain play that they were performing for mill workers with Balraj. Uma and Chetan were very upset that it had not gone well and Chetan apologised to the audience. Balraj thought there was no need to do so since it was meant for a larger cause and the mill workers had enjoyed it. But, for Chetan, art was supreme. They had a falling out over this, but eventually made up... There was not a film of Chetan's in which Balraj did not act," she says.

'Anand Hi Anand' lends warm moments during interviews with the family: Sohaila's aunt (Usha) recounting Dev Anand's love affair with Suraiya, whom he gave a ring to, which was apparently thrown out by her grandmother.

You find friendships in the film fraternity beyond Indian shores, with Charles Chaplin, Frank Capra and Pearl S Buck, and stories of the bilingual film, *'Guide'*. You learn of Dev's father's disapproval of his marriage to Kalpana Kartik (Mona), a Christian from Shimla.

Among her uncles, Sohaila was closest to Chetan. "He was closest to my mother, and watching them chat felt warm. But all three brothers admired my mother, who worked with a British organisation, International Wool Secretariat. She used to organise the Sweater Queen in Shimla (a precursor to the Miss Shimla and Miss Delhi pageants)!"

Sohaila envisages a film or perhaps an OTT production, which hopefully would have more personal bits.

— The writer is an independent journalist and historian

PHOTOS COURTESY: SOHAILA KAPUR



Dev Anand and Dilip Kumar at the wedding of Dev's sister Bonnie (third from left). Standing next to Bonnie is the groom Raj Sarin and Kalpana Kartik. Also in the picture are Dev's other sisters, Sheil Kanta and Kanti Khanna.



A video grab of Uma Anand, Chetan Anand's wife, during the performance at Gaiety Theatre, Shimla.



Dev Anand with sister Sheil Kanta, Sohaila Kapur's mother. PHOTOS COURTESY: SOHAILA KAPUR



Sohaila Kapur (left) addresses the audience at the premiere of *'Anand Hi Anand'* at Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi, in December last year. Another show was held at the Gaiety Theatre in Shimla last month.
PHOTO COURTESY: THE THREE ARTS CLUB

Banu Mushtaq & power of words

MANDIRA NAYAR

BANU MUSHTAQ has broken every stereotype. She was the first to go to university in her family (her mother got married at 12). The first to marry for 'love'. She defied her family by refusing to accept sitting at home *burkha*-covered as her in-laws wanted her to. There was no lawyer, journalist and writer before in her family either. At 76, she has burst into the world of English publishing. She is the first Kannada woman writer to be shortlisted for the International Booker Prize 2025 for her short story collection, *'Heart Lamp'*.

"I tried to [take my life] once," she says over the phone. Her daughter was only three months old. "I was at home. I couldn't participate in anything." So, she poured petrol lying in the house on herself. Her husband stopped her just in time. This scene, a desperate act to break free, finds its way into her short story *'Heart Lamp'*, which is a punch in the gut. Mehrun douses herself with kerosene because her husband Inayat is in love with a nurse. She, too, is stopped in time. The parallel runs deeper. Mehrun, like her, had wanted more out of life. She wanted to study, but was married instead. The feeling of being trapped is so vividly captured that it leaps off the page.



Banu Mushtaq's short story collection, *'Heart Lamp'*, has been shortlisted for the International Booker Prize 2025.

Her writing is clear, evocative, personal and political. The stories are powerful, cinematic, heartbreaking — a slice of real life far from pretty, but never bleak. Translated by the gifted Deepa Bhasthi, who won the English PEN Translates Award 2024, Banu's stories crackle with life. They're quiet stories chronicling ordinary lives, but the underlying comment on patriarchy is loud. There is a streak of defiance that runs through, one that she echoes in her life. "Women have to obey unquestioningly," says Banu. "I started to question patriarchy."

Even writing in Kannada is an act of defiance. Urdu is her mother tongue. "We speak it at home," she says. But her father wanted her to study and took her to a Kannada medium school. "They said Muslim girls won't learn Kannada. They gave me six months to learn, or leave," she says. Banu made it.

Her life would fit perfectly in the stories that she crafts. "I have had only one attempt on my life," she recalls. A man with a long knife tried to kill her a few years back. He had smashed her car with a hammer before. She was in her office (at home) with junior lawyers when the man burst in to attack her. His back was towards the washroom as they struggled. "My husband emerged from there. He had seen an Akshay Kumar film the night before. He wanted real action," she laughs. "He stamped his face with his shoes." This was the second time her husband had saved her.

The "psycho", as Banu describes him, was jailed. But just as she was to present evidence in front of a judge, her daughter "softened" and asked Banu to let it go. "He told my daughter that he was sorry and wanted to be with his children," she said. When the case came up for trial, she persuaded her mother to not give evidence. "The judge, who was a woman, was very angry," she said. Later, Banu explained her position to her in private. The man was released a week later and Banu found him following her. "My husband offered to drive with me. We found him outside our house. He asked if I could give him ₹600. He had no money," she laughs. They did. "I meet peculiar people."

Her stories are threaded with this brand of humour — sharp, witty and rooted in the strangeness of small-town life. The Arabic teacher who loves *gobhi manchurian*; Nayaz who longs for high-heel shoes that his sister-in-law has got from Saudi in *'High-Heeled Shoes'*; Yusuf who swears that he will get his widowed mother married dressed in a Punjabi suit to upstage his wife.

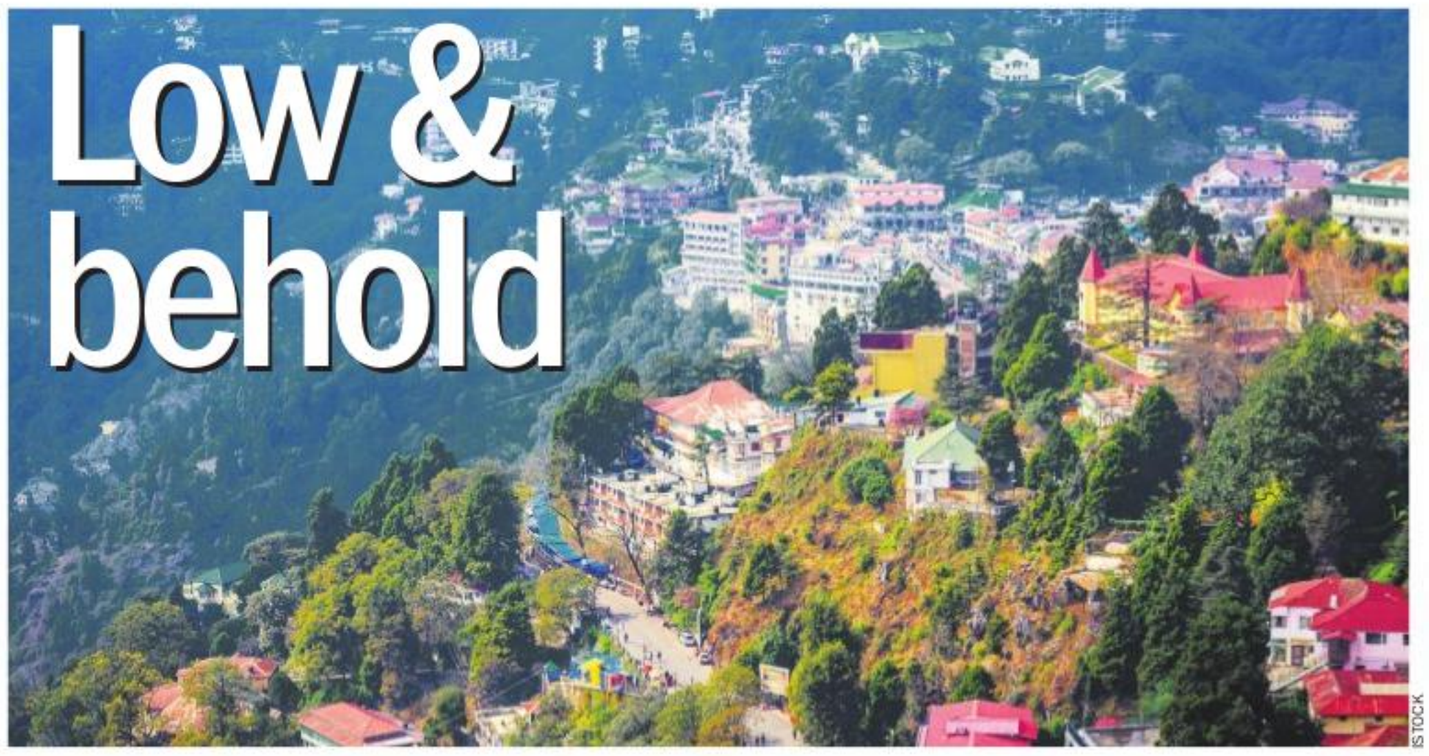
Her characters are unforgettable. Mehaboob Bi, the silent suffering mother of Yusuf, is hated by her daughter-in-law Akhila because of how close they are. *'Decision of the Heart'* looks at the *saas-bahu* relationship with a different twist. In *'A Taste of Heaven'*, Bi Dadi is the great aunt who got married as a child and lost her husband to a snake bite a month later. She spends a colourless life, full of servitude. Till she discovers *"ab-e-kausar"* Pepsi and stops eating or drinking anything. Or Shaista in *'Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal'*, the mother of three girls and three boys who wants to get an operation done after her seventh. Her husband Iftikhar and his professed love for her lasts barely 40 days after she dies. He marries again.

"I don't paint women only white," Banu says. "They are also scheming." She writes with empathy though. "Money from the pockets of poor people is just like them, broken, shattered, crumpled, wrinkly, diminished in essence and form," writes Banu in *'The Shroud'*.

Deepa has accomplished the test of all translators "to write in an English that wasn't owned by the English", as Salman Rushdie puts it. It is not easy as Banu speaks Dakhni, Urdu, Arabic and a Kannada that is spoken in Hassan. But Deepa, who is multilingual, found a way to make it work. It's magic.

— The writer is a literary critic

Low & behold



ISTOCK

How we are letting down hill stations is a collective failure

MRINAL PANDE

SUMMER is here and our hill stations are steadily getting overcrowded. Of late, each year as cars jam the highways, popular destinations like Mussoorie, Manali, Dalhousie, Dharamsala and Nainital are forced to put up road barriers: 'Sorry, we are full!' Social media then begins to heave and whine — Why? Why? Why? We bring loads of money to you, don't we? When will you Pahadis learn to manage your tourism business like Goa and Rajasthan?

Kipling had once asked an interesting question: "What do they know of England, who only England know?" After reading a comprehensive narrative on the hows and whys of the creation of hill stations like Nainital, Ranikhet, Shimla, Dalhousie, Ooty, Darjeeling and Mount Abu, our likely answer could be: "Maybe not nearly enough." One little fact almost unknown now is that most of these towns were not created organically by the native Pahadis, but by the British during 1820-1920. They required these cool pads to help their own white officials with much-needed rest and recuperation after long stints in the heat and dust of India's vast plains. These included Britons from various social backgrounds, but the higher officials were mostly from the upper classes: rebel third or fourth sons of affluent, titled families. They were all tired and exhausted after guarding the Raj and ruling the vast dusty plains of India, and could do with some leisure time activities in these resorts — fishing, hunting, sailing and even putting up plays occasionally.

The British discovered the Himalayan area as not just a mine of botanical information, species of wildlife and precious trails. It stood at a space where cultures and empires shared borders. In 1827, after Governor General Lord Amherst spent several salubrious months in Shimla with his family, the area became a fashionable summer 'hill station'. Nainital, Mussoorie followed and Cantonments like Dehradun, Ranikhet and Lansdowne also cropped up. Shimla rose to be the summer capital of the Viceroy and his staff. A serious reconstruction of the Himalayan zone and a reinvention of its culture were undertaken by the colonial rulers in Kolkata and later, after the British shifted the capital westwards, from Delhi.

Few of us realise today as we grow dewy eyed over the perfect locations and design of these towns, that there lies a steady and well thought out erasure of local histories, and the brutal subjugation of the indigenous people. The matrix recreated by old local tales is fading with the local dialects and the mass migration of Pahadis to the plains in search of a living.

One must concede though that the British methods of spatial reorganisation of this ecologically delicate terrain followed a scientific study of the Himalayan region, that created for all builders a strict set of operating procedures. Designing of all civil and military works had to be overseen by seasoned geologists and engineers, whose word was law. The Great Landslip of 1880 that decimated the newly created summer resort town of Nainital further forced the British to review and create proper manuals and budgetary allocations for all building activity.

It is on record that the engineers refused to dilute the high standards of service on grounds of their working under difficult circumstances, or use inferior quality material.

For all that was wrong with the British, their methods followed a scientific study of the Himalayan region, with a strict set of operating procedures for builders

In retrospect, the colonisers were not a monolithic category. Several of them cared deeply about the flora and fauna and the human beings who had lived in harmony with each other for centuries. It was soon realised that if the *Sahibs, Mems* and *Baba Log* were to be healthy, the vast domestic and bureaucratic support staff of *khansamas, ayahs*, clerks and nurses must also be provided good healthcare, regular vaccinations against contagious diseases like small pox and cholera, and hygienically safe homes. All that was of course done along clearly demarcated racial lines.

The British ejected the locals from ownership of land and forests to create urban structures that suited their mode of life. They also created permanent binaries between the rulers and the ruled, between leisure and work, development and ecological degradation and the first socio-cultural chasms between those who have the power to buy out the locals, demolish their lifestyles and use them as daily-wager labour.

These socio-cultural divides still bedevil old hill stations. The idle Indian rich are now buying prime properties, displacing the natives like the British. Most of the well-trained older professionals and managing staff with institutional memories had superannuated by the 1980s. They have mostly been replaced by people on grounds of not merit but their caste and political affiliations. Some two decades after Independence, things had started to flag, especially upholding of regular maintenance and repairs of roads and river waters. Two tiny hill states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh were carved out. Both had limited resources. Finally, it was decided that to beef up revenues, both be repackaged as perfect summer resorts where the rich and the religiously inclined (increasingly the same) would find ample leisure time.

With the young celebrating a good life as laid down by Hindi films, the elderly would find soul-cleansing pilgrimage trails to some of the holiest shrines in India. Thus the new map of *vikas*. No lessons, it seems, were learnt from the earlier ecological disasters and against advice, furious road expansion and tunneling was undertaken to facilitate revenue flow. Watching the rescue teams dredging the bodies of workers from power plants or collapsed tunnels and drowned pilgrims after sudden flooding, one wondered if the Central leadership, the corporates and state governments hotly apportioning blame for the tragedies on locals flouting norms, knew the real reason: their own greed.

Ironically, the biggest disasters in the last two decades have occurred in the valleys of our holiest rivers. And the iconic village of Raini, the birthplace of the Chipko movement, India's first major public movement against environmental degradation, has now all but disappeared due to repeated floods and the resultant mass migration of its villagers to safer locations.

As a child of middle-class parents growing up in the hills in the '50s and '60s, one benefitted enormously from the civil hospitals and vernacular schools then run by ageing but efficient teachers, inspectors, doctors and their staff. Hospitals and schools were solid buildings, sparsely furnished but adequate with large playgrounds. Today, one would be lucky to survive them. Protocols are missing and teachers and doctors with young families rate their posting in hills as hardship posting. They try hard to escape to the plains as soon as they can. All that is changed regularly are the names of buildings because each new government wishes to confer immortality on their own deemed heroes.

— The writer is a veteran journalist

CAPTION CONTEST 1508

MANAS RANJAN BHUI



Entries are invited to suggest a caption for the photograph. The caption should only be in English, witty and not exceeding 10 words, and reach Spectrum, *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 160030, by Thursday. The best five captions will be published and awarded ₹300, ₹250, ₹200, ₹150 and ₹100, respectively. Each caption must be accompanied by a clipping of the caption contest and its number. Photocopies or scans of the caption photo won't be accepted. Online subscribers may attach an epaper clipping at captionpics@tribunemail.com or a scanned copy of the e-paper clipping. Please mention the pin code and phone number, along with your address.

SELECTED ENTRIES FOR CAPTION CONTEST 1507



SPECTRUM APRIL 27 ISSUE (SEE PHOTO)

Digi yatra — Meenakshi Sharma via epaper, Amritsar

Addiction on wheels — Ishan Rana via epaper, Palampur

Hide and sneak — Rajiv Arora via epaper, Mumbai

Cellular compartment — Suruchi Aditya, Panchkula

Mobile and mobility — Alisha Chandra, Chandigarh

Beyond butter and chicken

RAHUL VERMA

YOU don't forget some food experiences. I vividly recall a dish my niece had ordered for us from an eatery popular with the young in the Delhi University area. This is a surprise, she announced — and then went on to unpack the dish she was drooling over: butter chicken pasta. I was a bit sceptical, but after my first forkful, I realised it wasn't bad at all. Butter chicken, I later reasoned, comes in a gravy that has all the ingredients that a good pasta sauce revels in: butter, cream and tomatoes.

Butter chicken, it must be said, is a pan-Indian dish. I remember attending two close friends' wedding in Guwahati, and hoping that there would be some interesting Assamese dishes at the feast. But it was butter chicken that occupied the high table, mainly because the Assamese guests wanted that — and not what was for them an everyday dish like *tenga masor* (fish curry)! On another occasion, I went for what I thought would be a good Maharashtrian lunch to the state house in Delhi, and found butter chicken on the menu.

The dish didn't appeal to me when I was introduced to it several decades back. But I prepared it at home on a couple of occasions, and realised that it could be tweaked to meet different requirements: add more tomatoes when needed, temper it with some fresh black peppercorn for friends who like the flavour, or even add a bit of celery to give it a new twist. For those who baulk at the thought of too much cream and butter, I replace the cream with whipped yogurt. And that works too.

Food snobs tend to turn up their collective noses at the mention of the dish, but there is much to be said about this much-maligned curry. You can play with it as much as you wish to, without taking away its soul. Just last week, to mark a special birthday, a friend had ordered butter chicken buns from a popular confectioner's in Delhi NCR. There were some succulent pieces of butter chicken in the bun.

On another occasion, I was served butter chicken momos. And those weren't bad at all, for the thick gravy that oozed out of the dumplings gave it both flavour and a saucy texture.

I like the story that the dish comes enveloped in. It is said that a popular Delhi restaurant had leftover *tandoori* chicken. A chef sauteed it in butter, and added some tomato puree, cream and a paste of nuts to enhance the flavours. And butter chicken was born. One of the reasons why the dish is such a hit, of course, is that the colours are vibrant. But butter chicken can be lightly tinged, too. Baba's, a restaurant chain that now has outlets in Delhi NCR, serves a light lemon-hued butter chicken which is as good-looking as it is tasty. A chef there tells me it is largely prepared without tomatoes.

A wizard called Aslam in Old Delhi serves a tomato-less butter chicken recipe that is as sinful as it is delicious. He grills the chicken, and adds some yogurt, cream and spices to it. In a saucepan, dollops of butter bubble away on a stove. Before serving, he pours melted butter over the chicken. I don't know what it does to your arteries, but I do know this — you keep coming back for more. Clearly, there is more to butter chicken than just, well, butter and chicken. Ever had butter chicken soup? Don't dismiss it till you try it.

— The writer is a food critic

TASLA BUTTER CHICKEN

INGREDIENTS

Chicken (cut into pieces)	1 kg
FOR THE MARINADE	
Black pepper (ground)	1 tsp
Turmeric powder	1/4 tsp
Juice of lemon	1
White pepper	1 tsp
Yellow chillies	1 tsp
Garam masala	1 tsp
Chaat masala	1 tsp
Garlic-ginger paste	1 tbsp
Salt	To taste
Oil	For frying
FOR THE SAUCE	
Cream	1 cup or 200g
Yogurt	½ cup
Chaat masala	¼ tsp
Black pepper powder	½ tsp
Salt	To taste
FOR THE TOPPING	
Butter	50g

METHOD

- Mix the chicken well with the marinade ingredients. Leave it aside for 2-3 hours. Put the cream in a bowl. Add the yogurt, salt, *chaat masala* and pepper. Keep aside.
- Saute the chicken in oil on a high flame for a few minutes. Cover and let it cook. Stir it now and then. After about 20 minutes or so, remove the lid, and stir till the juices evaporate.
- Once the chicken is done, place the pieces on a *tasla* — a flat, broad-rimmed platter. Add the cream-yogurt mix. Heat the butter, and add it to the dish. Serve with *rotis*, onion rings and green chutney.



IMAGEIN

A PHOTOGRAPH EXPLAINED



YOURS TRULY, MF HUSAIN



PARTHIV SHAH

THIS photograph was taken by me at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, in 1993, during MF Husain's landmark exhibition *'Let History Cut Across Me, Without Me'*. The image reflects not just a moment, but an entire philosophy that shaped Husain's artistic life — the idea of performance.

Husain often modelled his artistic persona on Picasso, with bold gestures and theatrical presence that mirrored his fascination with cinema and storytelling. This photograph captures a live dialogue between the photographer, the artist and his work — a moment where past and present meet through visual interaction.

The shoot was not planned as a traditional documentation. Initially intended to cover the exhibition's opening, the session evolved when Husain, intrigued by my photographs, agreed to a dedicated portrait shoot. What began as a brief session turned into a full day of improvisation and creative exchange. Husain posed with his paintings, interacting with them as if on a film set.

The result is a photo that balances grandeur with intimacy. It's a portrait of self-awareness and playfulness, where the artist's 'performance' becomes part of the artwork itself. The act of photographing Husain became a collaborative ritual, an acknowledgement that every image is a dialogue between the subject, the artist and the viewer.

This photo is part of a larger series that preserves a dynamic conversation — between Husain, his works, and the camera — offering viewers a space to engage, interpret and discover their own meanings. It was exhibited at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in an exhibition titled *'Sadak.Sarai.Sheher.Basti'* in 2017 and at the 2024 Venice Biennale with an immersive exhibition called *'The Rooted Nomad'*, both curated by Roobina Karode.

— Shah is an accomplished photographer, filmmaker and graphic designer

Versatility on paper, across three centuries

A fragile medium, paper lends delicacy, sharpness and vulnerability to art

SARIKA SHARMA

PAPER — fragile yet resilient; paper — crumpled, dog-eared, moth-eaten; paper as a medium of artistic expression. If 18th century European explorer-artists visiting India created vivid records of the time on paper, by the 20th century, it had become an intimate expression of artists' experimentation in modernism. Delhi-based Great Banyan Art recently brought together this long and colourful journey at *'Paper Alchemy'*, a selection of around 100 works from its collection, highlighting the versatility of paper.

From rare Oriental aquatints by Thomas and William Daniell, James Prinsep and William Hodges to modernists like MF Husain, FN Souza, HA Gade, Ramkinkar Baij, Shyamal Dutta Ray, Ganesh Haloi, and Avinash Chandra, the exhibition bridged historical traditions with contemporary voices such as Atul Dodiya, Anju Dodiya, Jagannath Panda, Rameshwar Broota and Anupam Sud, among others.

Curator Sonali Batra says the idea was to highlight paper's ability to preserve stories, evoke memories, and serve as a powerful medium for artistic exploration. "There's something incredibly intimate and versatile about the medium. It absorbs every mark and gesture in a way that feels immediate and honest," she says, adding that the show brings out paper not just as a surface, but as a material with its own story — one that has shaped Indian art for centuries.

Imperial expansion in the late 18th and early 19th centuries beckoned European artist-travellers to India. Among them was Hodges, whose works are known to be an early record of local architecture. There are views from a mosque, a farmyard in Bengal... Works by the uncle-nephew Daniell duo blend documentary precision with artistic vision, throwing light on the grandeur of Mughal architecture as well as the growing influence of the British. From Emily Eden's anthropological observations to James Prinseps' lithographs bringing out the vulnerability of his subjects, these early visual documents of a fast-changing land are sharp yet delicate.



PHOTOS COURTESY: GREAT BANYAN ART





Clockwise from above: *'The Gathering'* by Avinash Chandra, 1961, Watercolour on Paper; *'Dining with Ego'* by Anupam Sud, Etching (Edition 7/15); *'The Chalees Satoon in the Fort of Allahabad on the River Jumna'* (From Oriental Scenery) by Thomas and William Daniell, Aquatint.

A selection of works by pioneering artists such as Mukul Dey, Ramkinkar Baij and Abanindranath Tagore traces the rise of the Bengal school of art. These works blend western techniques and Indian sensibilities, recreating the everyday in modern idiom. Prod Batra, and she admits that this would also be the richest era for her. "There's something deeply emotional about that period. These works were created at a time when India was grappling with colonial rule and nationalism was gaining momentum. Artists were not just making art, they were holding onto cultural memory, reclaiming identity, and redefining what Indian art could be. You can feel the quiet strength and introspection in those works."

Among the Bombay progressives, Husain's oil and watercolours are at once intimate and spontaneous. The exhibition catalogue details on how Souza "experimented with chemical alterations, using solvents to disrupt ink without destroying the paper", expanding the "boundaries of drawing and printmaking".

Batra says that as the curation unfolded, it grew into a broader reflection on the history and evolution of Indian art. "What fascinates me most is the paradox that paper holds — it's fragile, yet it endures. It carries the weight of memory, yet also the urgency of expression. That duality became central to *'Paper Alchemy'*. I wanted to create an exhibition where vulnerability and strength coexist, and where lived experiences are transformed into lasting visual narratives."

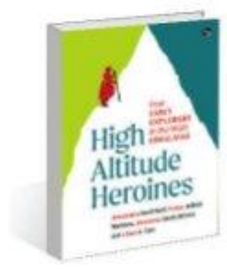
Even as the works date back centuries, they are in a good condition, a testimony to the way they had been carefully stored, handled, and framed over the years. What makes the exhibition interesting is not just the range it encapsulates, but also the experimentation that paper invites. "Its surface responds instantly to touch, making it ideal for spontaneity, layering, and mixed media. Artists have used everything from ink, tempera, and watercolour to collage and printmaking. Because it's so versatile and responsive, paper becomes a space where artists can take risks, explore new techniques, or delve into more personal, intimate ideas. In many ways, what might seem like limitations often spark the most creative and meaningful breakthroughs," says Batra.

Among the contemporary artists, Anupam Sud makes the best use of paper. "Her command over the technique of etching is extraordinary. She's truly a master of the process. One work in particular, *'Dining with Ego'*, stands out as one of the most powerful pieces I've ever seen. The technical finesse, the layered symbolism, and the way she uses paper to hold such emotional and psychological weight — it's remarkable," Batra says.

The artistic trail that these works on paper have etched over the last three centuries is an exhilarating journey into a rich history, as told through a rich medium.

The Dras trek, 1931... adventure she wrote

HENRIETTA SANDS MERRICK



HIGH ALTITUDE HEROINES
by Alexandra David Neel, Fanny Bullock Workman, Henrietta Sands Merrick, Lilia A Starr.
Speaking Tiger.
Pages 296. ₹599


HENRIETTA SANDS MERRICK

American traveller and writer Henrietta S Merrick (1879-1944) was the first woman to become a member of the Himalayan Club. On her journey in Ladakh, she was joined by her friends Sandy and Margot

WE left Matayan about six o'clock the next morning, crossed a bridge and followed the left bank of the Dras river into the village of Dras which lies in another wind-swept plain at 10,660 feet. We descended gradually through open country with sometimes streams to ford, then mounted along narrow paths overhanging the river. The rocks were polished like fine granite and were brown, green, and black — entirely different from any we had yet seen along the road.

Dras villages are scattered over the fertile valley, and here live those hardy Dards and Baltis who have made history for the countryside as fascinating as the record of Cortez. They have few needs, and almost all that the outside world contributes to them is tobacco, tea and sugar. Along the road whenever we met men of any race, the request was for *'ma-a-ches'*, matches. Around Dras the women wear sunbonnets for all the world like those of our grandmothers' days and they sow crops of buckwheat, pease, barley and lucerne in May and reap the harvest in August. We made the twelve and a half miles in five and a half hours of desperately hot trekking and entered a wide compound where were *serai*, post and telegraph offices, the second on our route since leaving Ganderbal.

The dak bungalow looked like a neglected barn, unpromising from the outside and badly planned but roomy and comfortable within... There were two bedrooms and a dining room to the right and two bedrooms to the left of the front hall. This led into a roomy kitchen. It was the best room in the building and I fancy the entire population must gather there for shelter during those cruel months when pitiless winds and snow make of Dras a prototype of the Buddhist Cold Hell.

We found the bungalow cheerless. Little light penetrated through the small windows set in walls that were 2 feet thick. We had no wood for fires and none was procurable. There are few trees in the countryside around Dras. The compound lies in a sandy, rocky plain flanked by a granary, *serai*, post and telegraph office. It was interesting to watch the postmaster holding hand scales up and weighing letters and my films against pieces of iron. All of this apparatus is kept in a hole in the plank floor when not in use. Here I had to part with Lalla and with all of the other ponies of the *bandobast*, the Res Rules being strict in that regard.

I hated so to part with Lalla; and I hated to part with my 'syce'. Don't picture to yourself such a groom as you are familiar with. Unless he be the private servant of a *sahib* who supplies his uniform, the syce is a man in rags and it never occurs to him to help you mount or dismount; you slide off and get on the best way you can though he stands at the pony's head and holds the reins and then trudges ahead or behind as you ordain. I kept him ahead of me after he had several times prodded my pony with a *khud* stick, looking quite innocent when I turned to see what could have made Lalla leap forward suddenly. But I was used to him; he was so smiling and so willing, and now all my fears and antipathies awoke...

I selected as Lalla's substitute an iron grey mare because of its important-looking saddle of red lacquer inset with ivory in finely worked design. I mounted with great pride and then recalled the saying that if pride goeth before a fall it vanishes more quickly after one...

The rising sun tipped just one peak of snow that showed between rifts of barren rock as we mounted next morning along a ridge where stone tablets carved with the image of Buddha flanked the roadside.

We saw never a bird, nor a flower. There was a good road up and down embankments, a bit monotonous until we came face to face with a lovely picture. Silhouetted against the sky, there on the crest of a hill before us was a man in flowing red robes mounted high on a Yarkandi saddle gay with brass trappings and heaped with brilliant saddle rugs. His head was held high; he looked over the countryside as if it were his own property; the long toes of his shoes curved upwards, their gold threads catching the glint of sunlight. At a respectful distance behind rode two women completely hidden with *'burqas'*.

Women of mystery! And what charm in the mysterious! Everything in India seems to be touched with it. Eyes hold unfathomable depths. Drums are muffled. Street calls blend into a droning wail. Unseen things are all about you. The passing show seems to be but the echo of a scene that you have just missed. Once 'down in India' while I was awaiting my train in the station of Udaipur I had seen a *purdah* cart drawn by oxen unload from behind its gold-fringed pink curtains a woman and three young children. The woman, her *burqa* drawn close, huddled into a corner by the wall while the children clung to her, gazing at me and calling her attention to the ungainly object in *topi* and short skirt with feet encased in walking shoes. Her own ankles were adorned with silver bangles and her whole diminutive person jingled beneath the *burqa* which she finally parted for a better view of the *memsahib*. An enchanting vision she was, with kohl-rimmed eyes and fabulously long lashes, a slender nose above red, red lips that smiled at me — Then the veil was quickly drawn as a burly man came up and directed his possession to the closed compartment on the train.

It took us four and a half hours to make the fifteen miles to Tashgam from Dras. Just before reaching the village we crossed a narrow bridge high above a turbulent stream. This led into a narrow lane that runs between high walls of stone which are really the walls of houses. Low openings lead into windowless rooms which are closed in winter with piles of stone. Mounds of clay on the flat roofs are perforated with holes, chimneys which let out the smoke and in winter time admit all the air that is desired; for it is bitter cold here in winter and during the long months, men, women and children hibernate until the snows that have banked them in have melted.

We passed a flat-roofed hut partly built into a cliff. A low door led into the utter darkness of a single small room.

'A hermit's hut,' I cried.

'Something more wonderful. The hut of a dak or mail runner,' Sandy explained. 'Each one speeds for his given number of miles after which he passes the sack on to the man ahead. In this way they keep open communication between Leh and the rest of the world until the snows render the service impossible. Heavy loads go in on ponies.'

It was a tedious trek of twenty-one miles from Dras to Shimshi Kharbu...

— Excerpted with permission from Speaking Tiger

Breaking into male sanctuary

SOURABH GUPTA

Man vs wild. Man vs woman.

BRAHM SAXENA, a retired CA, rattles his lawyer daughter Tara and son Rohit, a student, saying they shouldn't expect anything from him anymore, because, anguished by mankind putting itself at the "centre of everything" and plundering all life forms on earth, he's decided to do something about it. And a year later, when the family realises what he has done, the fact consumes, like a black hole, everything that has happened before, so you remember Keshava Guha's second novel only from the end since time starts to move backwards.

The other axis of the novel are the childhood friends of the Saxena siblings — the Chawla siblings, Lila and Kunal, among the uber-rich of Delhi. Kunal, who was adopted, decides to be the head of the family after the patriarch's death because he believes he's the rightful heir, not Lila, since being biological, her birth was "random, accidental", while he was "chosen" from hundreds of other orphanage boys. Lila, a private equity deal maker, fights this usurpation with Tara's help, triggering surveillance and spying into Kunal's organisation that infuses *deshbhakti* into school history books.



THE TIGER'S SHARE
by Keshava Guha.
Hachette.
Pages 246. ₹699

Earlier, stung by his father's refusal to hand down his wealth and instead serve all forms of life on the planet, US-educated Rohit quips: "Daddy, you've gone all Greta [Thunberg]." But Saxena appears to have gone all Dersu Uzala (the real-life Siberian hunter immortalised by Kurosawa in his 1975 film), who apologises to tigers, speaks to fire and, attuned to the rules of the wild, understands the helplessness of humans in front of it.

Rohit soon starts making YouTube videos ranting against animal conservation and espousing our right to dominate the rest of the species. Told in the wry, mocking voice of the daughter Tara, who has an opinion on almost everything — from Delhi's inverted urban planning and pollution to the sufferings of the super-rich and the quality of single men — the novel also becomes a mini-autobiography.

She pries open everything about herself like she does of the city — her under-developed relationship with her family, the years living with a Pole obsessed with his physique, the court cases that brought her glory, and money, and her encounter with uber-uber rich bachelor Vicky, who can't understand why his assistant has accused him of rape while he was scouring Japan with her to understand how to construct at his Delhi bungalow "the world's only perfect toilet", envisioned by writer Junichiro Tanizaki in the 1930s.

Through Tara, the male author is questioning male privilege in the voice of a woman. But does he get the voice right? In most places, yes. But more importantly, the voice gives him a wider range. As writer Katie Kitamura said in an interview: "Writing male characters is not very difficult because there is a vast canon of male characters written by men, for men. Writing female characters... feels almost inexhaustible."

The character of Brahm Saxena, though a male, too seems inexhaustible — a poor orphan boy from the UP heartland who builds a prosperous life for his family in Delhi, realising one day the actual purpose of his existence when face-to-face with the sheer, absolute and immutable force of the wild.

— The reviewer is a marketing professional

Fear and fairness

ARADHIKA SHARMA

GOURAHARI DAS' book appears to be a straightforward tale of a husband and wife living in two different cities in Orissa, each encountering unusual situations that cause apprehension for their safety and that of their families. However, beneath this simple narrative lies a profound exploration of the psychology of fear experienced by ordinary citizens striving to lead routine lives.

Draupadi, living in Bhubaneswar, is married to Debadutta, a forest official posted in the jungles of Sundergarh. They have a son, Pintu, who attends school and lives with his mother. This is an ordinary family with modest aspirations, content with working diligently to secure a comfortable lifestyle.

One day, as Draupadi is taking her son to school, she witnesses a horrifying scene: three hoodlums brutally knifing a young man. Instinctively, she shouts at them to stop. The kingpin's menacing glare sends chills down her spine. Later, when she learns that the young man has succumbed to his injuries, she is gripped with terror. She fears that the murderers will track down her family and inflict unimaginable harm.

Simultaneously, Debadutta faces a dire threat from Digal, a ruthless mafioso whose trucks loaded with illegal wooden logs have been seized on Debadutta's orders. Digal threatens him with severe harm if he does not comply with his demands. Protected by senior forest officers and local politicians, Digal sees Debadutta as the sole obstacle in his path. Debadutta is gripped by panic, not only because of Digal's formidable influence but also the safety of his family.

Das delves deeply into the corrosive nature of fear, vividly illustrating how it erodes confidence, ignites doubts and cripples one's ability to reason, love and experience joy. Instead, fear festers, breeding anger and guilt. Both Draupadi and Debadutta, gripped by their own terrors, choose not to approach the authorities. They fear the very system meant to protect them, feeling abandoned, betrayed.



THE LABYRINTH
by Gourahari Das.
Translated by Manoranjan Mishra.
Niyogi Books.
Pages 144. ₹295

Das notes, "Debadutta knew he was not brave. No government employee can be brave." Through their eyes, Das paints a picture of an ineffective and corrupt system that leaves the vulnerable to fend for themselves.

A desperate Draupadi turns to astrologers and *swamis*, seeking solace anywhere but from the police. This choice underscores her profound sense of helplessness and mistrust.

Translated with precision by Manoranjan Mishra, 'The Labyrinth' explores the intricate workings of a mind consumed by dread, creating its own traps and treacherous pathways. The central message is clear: true peace can only be achieved by confronting these fears and taking righteous action to find the way out. In the end, Draupadi and Debadutta, guided by their conscience, face their fears and take the right actions. This quiet victory leads them to inner peace.

— The reviewer is a freelance contributor

Feminist retelling of a classic children's tale

AMRITA DHALIWAL

BETH O'BRIEN'S 'Wolf Siren' offers a bold retelling of the classic 'Little Red Riding Hood' tale. Far from the simple childhood version, this novel transforms the story into a powerful journey of self-discovery, resistance, and feminine empowerment. Through poetic language and a fresh point of view, O'Brien explores deep themes of identity, oppression, and inner strength.

The novel is set in a remote village surrounded by a mysterious forest. The villagers live in fear of this forest, especially the men, who are forbidden from entering because of the threat of wolves. Life in the village is strict and controlled. People speak in whispers and follow rules passed down through stories meant to keep them in line.

At the centre of the story is Red, a blind girl who begins to question everything she has been taught. Her decision to enter the forest — a place that represents fear, danger, and the unknown — marks the beginning of a life-changing journey. Red's choice not only challenges the village's long-standing beliefs but also begins to unravel its secrets.



WOLF SIREN
by Beth O'Brien.
HarperCollins.
Pages 320. ₹399

In this world, women are expected to stay within narrow roles, silent and obedient. Red's act of stepping into the forest is symbolic — a rejection of these limits and a step towards truth and freedom. As she travels deeper into the woods, she learns that the stories meant to scare her are only part of the truth. What the village calls "wild" or "dangerous" is often simply powerful, untamed, and feminine.

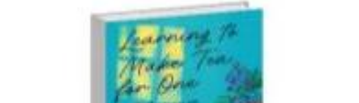
The forest becomes more than just a setting — it is a space of transformation, almost a living force. It represents all that society tries to keep hidden: female strength, freedom and instinct. Red's journey through it mirrors the path many women take when stepping outside the roles that society has forced on them. Red's blindness is portrayed in a unique and empowering way. It gives her a different kind of vision, one that is inward, sharp and insightful. She notices what others overlook and is able to understand things in ways that others cannot. Her disability becomes a source of strength, showing readers that power doesn't always come in expected forms.

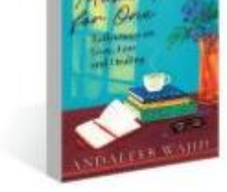
O'Brien's writing is rich and lyrical, but always grounded in Red's clear and determined voice. Through Red, we experience a world full of danger, mystery and hope. The novel encourages readers to question the stories they've been told and to look beyond fear to find truth.

'Wolf Siren' is not just a reimagined fairy tale, it is a universal story about reclaiming voice and identity. It speaks to any culture where women are told to be quiet, stay small, or hide their strength. This novel will stay with readers long after the final page.

— The reviewer is a freelance contributor

BACKFLAP





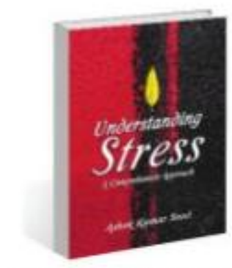
LEARNING TO MAKE TEA FOR ONE
by Andaleeb Wajid.
Speaking Tiger.
Pages 222. ₹499

As the second wave of the pandemic roared on unchecked across the country, within five days, it claimed the lives of both the author's mother-in-law and her husband. In a home shorn of love, the author finally turned to her writing to make sense of it all.



HUBRIS MAXIMUS
by Faiz Siddiqui.
HarperCollins.
Pages 323. ₹599

'Hubris Maximus' is a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of lionising leaders. The author offers a portrait of a messy and lucrative period in Elon Musk's career, as well as a case study on the power of using one's platform to shape public narrative in a world glued to screens.



UNDERSTANDING STRESS
by Ashok Kumar Sood.
Unistar Books.
Pages 492. ₹1,295

This is a simple guide that explains what stress is, why we feel it and how to handle it. It shares how stress affects your body and mind, offers easy tips to manage it and daily habits that one could inculcate to feel more relaxed and happy.

What inspires & limits us



PRADEEP MAGAZINE

MIND and body are the two pillars that sustain human existence. A sportsperson spends a lifetime perfecting his body to the demands of his chosen sport to achieve excellence. In the limitless vast space of the human mind, there is no goal which is not achievable. One can imagine flying to the Alps and conquering the Himalayas or falling into the depths of despair without blinking an eye. It is said if body and mind are in sync, no hurdle, howsoever difficult, is insurmountable.

The world is a crucible in which human bodies are shaped and new ideas forged. If we assume that sport is a metaphor for life, one would realise that if the mind and the body work at cross-purposes, success can never be achieved. Sport is as much about how to deal with the fault lines of your emotional conditioning as it is about perfecting your physical skills.

Mindfulness is the new-age mantra, that magic potion which can keep you off all traumas of the past and anxieties of an imagined distressing future. Be present in the present and all worries will dissolve, the Buddha said 2,500 years ago. I am a regular visitor to a Buddhist meditation centre where, surprisingly, the young and restless flock more than those whom age has left withered and helpless. Fear of the future, endless distractions and very little human contact in a world driven by the faceless social media has forced them into searching for an escape route that their present life denies them.

Among the many young seeking stillness and training in single-pointed attention was a professional golfer. He was struggling with his game, which had more to do with an afflicted mind that lacked focus. He was not seeking salvation but ways to keep his mind reined in so that he could perform to his potential on a golf course. Many years later, I met one of India's most lethal strikers of the cricket ball, who is now retired from the game and like most of his ilk, spending his time playing golf. Many say he is so good that he can turn pro. Is he thinking of becoming a professional golfer? "No, I want to enjoy my golf. Don't want to take pressure anymore." Pressure on a man who hit six sixes in a T20 international? Success comes at a cost.



The ease in his body movements shows Virat Kohli's ability to perform under pressure. PTI

We can't get rid of all our problems, but we can understand them and accordingly deal with it

The aspiring sportspersons require as much technical coaching as they need mind, or more appropriately, emotional coaching. Our five senses are our gateway to the world and every person has a unique neurology which gets expressed through verbal and non-verbal language. A distinctive psychological training method called the Neuro Linguistic Programme (NLP) to deal with the emotional issues that sportspersons have to deal with, puts these sensory perceptions at the centre of its research to solve their problems. It is a field which deciphers a person's trauma through the body and muscular movements.

One of the practitioners of this method is the bright, articulate Rukhsar Saleem, who is helping out with a hockey coaching programme being conducted at Delhi's Shivaji Stadium for underprivileged children by K Arumugam, better known for the hockey book he wrote on India's 1975 World Cup win.

Rukhsar was a business journalist who shifted gears, did her Masters course in NLP to understand human behaviour patterns and says that each person has a unique programming of neuro-linguistics in their bodies. One of the established facts of this programme is the dictum: "Feelings live in the mind (brain), emotions live in your muscles."

According to her, three of the five senses — visual, auditory and kinaesthetic — are the robust and dominant ones to receive any information. Each person has an innate or acquired preference (either due to culture or practice) to imbibe information from the outside environment. "So a good coach identifies how that information has been received and helps the sportsperson use that as a resource and bypass un-resourceful information to optimise performance under pressure. For example, in the case of Virat Kohli, the ease in his body movements and the ability to keep seeing around the field even when he is not batting, are strong indicators of him being extremely visual and kinaesthetic."

But there could be a player who feels stifled and gets choked by the sight of screaming crowds. It is likely that people from riot-ridden areas have a different neurology and are always looking outside, looking for danger. A coach's job is to find a balance between the outer and the inner world and reduce the gap between knowing and doing.

To understand the mind and its complexities and the resultant behavioural patterns could be a life-long project. According to Buddhism, it will require many lifetimes to achieve that end-goal of equanimity and wisdom. For our limited project to help sportspersons achieve their optimum potential, it is very important to understand what inspires us and what limits us. We can't get rid of all our problems but we can understand them and accordingly deal with it.

As Rukhsar puts it, "Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the ability to acknowledge it and how to deal with it." Cliche maybe, but its relevance has stood the test of time.

— The writer is the author of 'Not Quite Cricket' and 'Not Just Cricket'

Diktat-orship of the bureaucratic mind



AVAY SHUKLA

THE jury may still be out on whether India is an elected dictatorship, but it should be unanimous on the fact that it is a bureaucratic diktat-orship. For the past few years, our ministries and their penpushers, denuded of any role in sane policy formulation, have been passing their time in issuing all kinds of diktats on a daily basis, with damaging effects on us citizens. So we have to contend with new rules every second day, on KYC, motor vehicles, FASTags, pollution under control (PUC) certificates, on PAN, Aadhaar, voter I-card, phone and electricity meter linkages, demat accounts, tax revisions, nominations and anything else that catches their fancy. These rules are made without any consultation with the stakeholders and usually lack any sense or logic. A few will suffice to prove my point.

Take the latest diktat in the NCR region: all vehicles should affix a petrol/diesel/EV sticker on their windshields so that the cops can identify them BVR (Beyond Visual Range) in the manner of fighter jets. Non-compliant vehicles will be denied PUCs and fuel, and will be fined, too, for good measure. To add to our misery and confusion, no one has a clue where these stickers are available! Even Grok cannot figure out why this is necessary. If the cops need to see everything at a glance, then soon we may be asked to stick everything on the windshield — driving licence, registration, insurance, PUC, Aadhaar and the wife's photograph. In which case accident fatalities will double to 300,000 per annum, since the driver won't be able to see anything through the windshield!

Noida introduced a mandatory pets registration policy a couple of years back via an app. One has to feed in particulars (and a photo) of the pet, address, owner's name, vaccination proof. So far so good. But then, it also demands the owner's photo and Aadhaar details. Why, for God's sake? It is the dog which is being registered, not the owner, surely. And what happens if the owner's photo doesn't match that on the Aadhaar, or resembles that of the dog? I have a friend who looks uncannily like his pet, a pedigreed bulldog, and there's every chance of the two photos getting mixed up, in which case the app will probably insist that my friend take the anti-rabies and distemper shots too, as a matter of abundant caution! Why not keep the whole thing simple?

It would appear that Noida is exceptionally endowed with cerebral bureaucrats: sometime back, another diktat was issued that required all buildings on arterial roads to illuminate 30 per cent of their exterior facades at night, to present a beautiful nightscape. Another ill-thought-out intervention, and completely unnecessary at a time when power consumption is going up by almost 10 per cent per annum. It will add to the electricity bills of the residents, but even more important, it pushes up power consumption precisely at the time of day when the power load is at its highest! And it's all thermal power, because renewables are not available at night. Such a policy is in total contradiction to the national power policy, which is trying to reduce dependence on coal-based power, currently at 70 per cent of the total power generated. It also bucks the global trend of reducing city lighting so as to lessen the heat island effect, cause less disturbance to nocturnal creatures, especially birds, and lower the stress that excessive lighting causes to humans. Did the authorities even consider these factors, one wonders? Have they not heard of light pollution and the global trend to reduce it?

We have to contend with new rules every second day... These rules are made without any consultation with the stakeholders and usually lack any sense or logic

There is now a wave among city administrations to ban the humble *tandoor*, allegedly because it adds to air pollution. Cities in MP, Maharashtra and UP have already issued orders to this effect. *Tandoors* are used primarily by bakeries and restaurants serving *Mughlai* food, and there would probably be a few hundred of them in every large city — as compared to millions of vehicles! I have not come across any report or study carried out by any of these cities to establish that *tandoors* are a major source of pollution, compared to the major polluters — vehicles, construction, road dust, burning of garbage and waste. Nothing meaningful is ever done to tackle the major polluters, but the *tandoors* are an easy target, as all low-hanging fruits are. The ban endangers one of our traditional, popular and distinctive forms of cuisine, one copied across the world: could that be the real motive behind these bans, I sometimes wonder? And will they also ban cooking at home since PNG/CNG also releases significant quantities of nitrogen dioxide, according to studies by the universities of Oxford and York? It is estimated that 40,000 persons die every year in the UK because of this. And cows too for good measure as their flatulence releases vast amounts of methane?

As a popular meme goes, scientists tell us the universe is made up of protons, electrons and neurons. They forgot to mention morons. And protons and neurons don't stand a chance against them.

— The writer is a former IAS officer

A vital space of inner joy

UNIVERSE

POPE FRANCIS

HOPE is an amusing child too. She knows that humour and a smile are the leaven of existence and a means of facing difficulties, even major worries, with fortitude. The writer Romain Gary's perceptive definition of humour fits well: "It is an affirmation of dignity, a declaration of man's superiority to all that befalls him."

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For all of us children, importance was given to education in the meaning of joy, healthy irony, or a joke.

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My family life experienced no shortage of difficulties, suffering, tears, but even in our hardest moments, we discovered how a smile, a laugh, could give us that added strength to get back on track. Papa, in particular, taught us so much. It wasn't a question of removing problems, of pretending nothing was wrong, of making light of them — comedy, after all, is tragedy seen from the other side — but rather of preserving a vital space of inner joy to face them and to overcome them.

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REUTERS

To emphasise this happy marriage, this link between hope and joy, I chose to invite to the Vatican a group of over a hundred artists from the world of comedy, of various nationalities and disciplines in the months leading up to the opening of the Holy Door of the new Jubilee. Someone pointed out that it was a fine leap forward from the time when it was the fate of actors and jesters to be buried in unconsecrated ground, though for anyone who chooses to take the name of Francis, "God's Jester," it's probably the minimum that I could expect. A little later, one of them quipped that it's good trying to make God laugh,,, except that, being omniscient, He will know all the jokes in advance... and will ruin your punch line. This is the kind of humour that warms the heart.

Life inevitably has its sadnesses, which are part of every path of hope and of every path toward conversion. But it is important to avoid wallowing in melancholy at all costs, not to let it embitter the heart.

— Excerpted from 'Hope' by Pope Francis, with permission from Penguin Random House

Jewels of the summer garden

RIMA DHILLON

EPHEMERAL, colourful and finely attuned to nature's rhythms, these birds are the true jewels of our summer gardens. Their return each year is not just a spectacle, but a reminder of how intricately life is woven across seasons, landscapes, and even the quiet corners of our backyards.

Around mid-March, a tiny ethereal apparition appears among the mango blossoms — flitting and somersaulting, while hawking insects. Its long tail feathers stream behind like silken ribbons, reminiscent of the 'tail' we, as children, would put on a paper kite to balance it. The male Indian Paradise Flycatcher, also called Dudhraj for obvious reasons, glides through the sun-dappled branches with infinite grace and poise. The pure white plumage, topped by a black, slightly peaked head and the iridescent blue ring around the eyes, is a sight to behold.

The male Indian Paradise Flycatcher can also sometimes be seen in rufous plumage, resplendent with tail streamers. The jury is still out on the reason for this different colouration — it could be a combination of age and genetics. The tail streamers are especially grown as courtship display and may reduce after the breeding season.

The female, though only rufous and without the tail streamers, is no less beautiful. Parental duties are equally shared by the pair, from nest-building to hatching and raising the brood. The male Paradise Flycatcher is a hands-on parent and helps during the incubation period. The long tail streamers hanging down from the tiny cup-like nest often give away its location.

Among the tangled roots of India's forests, a sudden flash of colour betrays the presence of one of nature's most elusive jewels. The Indian Pitta is one of the most eagerly awaited and prized sightings of summer breeders for birdwatchers. It announces its arrival with its distinctive, high-pitched, three-syllable call heard very early each morning.

The time is so precise you could probably set your clock by it. It's also why it has earned the moniker 'Six O' Clock Bird'. In Sanskrit texts, the Pitta is called *Navranga*, alluding to the nine colours that appear in its plumage. It is, however, predominantly olive green in appearance, with a distinctive black band through the eye. It can remain undetected and elusive, standing statue-like or silently hopping around foraging in the leaf litter — but its serenading calls from atop trees easily give away its location.



(L-R) Indian Golden Oriole, Indian Paradise Flycatcher and Indian Pitta.

PHOTOS COURTESY: JASBIR S RANDHAWA AND ISTOCK

This small, Myna-sized bird migrates north from as far as Sri Lanka during the summer to breed in the Himalayan foothills. From mid-May to early June, Pittas are almost literally 'falling from the sky'. The bird is so exhausted from its long journey that by the end, any refuge will do. It can end up in the most unusual situations. At these times, people think it is injured and try to nurse it. The only thing it really requires is some water and rest before it flies off to more wooded areas and begins to serenade for a mate.

While the Indian Pitta and Indian Paradise Flycatcher use our gardens as resting spots before heading off to the cool, verdant foothills bordering Chandigarh, the Indian Golden Oriole nests in urban areas. Its bright golden-yellow colour is the inspiration for its vernacular names. In Punjab, it is called *Peeli Koel* (Yellow Koel) for its colour and melodious song.

In spite of its bright colour, the Indian Golden Oriole is heard more often than it is seen, as it tends to perch in the thick foliage of tall trees. Its trilling musical notes are only a part of its repertoire. It is known to mimic birds like Drongos, Bulbuls, and Shikras with great finesse — using these to attract a mate and for territorial defence.

The Oriole is a smart bird that uses existing situations to its advantage. For protection of its brood, it builds the nest near aggressive species like Drongos and Treepies, depending on them to keep the predators away.

Most birds have associations in folklore, and these three species are no exception. In an agrarian country, they are revered as the harbingers of good fortune and rains. Farmers have, for ages, taken the cue for planting crops from the arrival of these birds in the summer. However, these birds time their arrival with the rains. Breeding birds require large quantities of soft-bodied invertebrates to feed their young. Rains bring a peak abundance of hatching beetle larvae, termites, ants, crickets and earthworms — ensuring a rich food supply of high-protein diet for the nestlings. A seasonal change or unmonitored use of chemicals in the fields can result in poor breeding success for the birds, disrupting a cycle that has long been in harmony with the land.

— The writer is president of the Chandigarh Bird Club

Crackdown on female foeticide

How Haryana is going all out to check sex-determination tests and illegal termination of pregnancies

GEETANJALI GAYATRI

THE Haryana government is pulling out all stops to confront the scourge that the state had once gained notoriety for — gender-based sex-selection and female foeticide, the practice of terminating a pregnancy when it is determined that the foetus is female. The year 2024 ended with a drop of six points in Haryana's sex ratio — 910 female births per 1,000 males. Alarmed by the dip and reports of use of pre-natal diagnostic technologies to determine the sex of the foetus despite the ban, a State Task Force (STF) was constituted in February this year, with Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Sudhir Rajpal in charge. The mandate was to monitor every facet of the skewed sex ratio and plug the holes in a state known for its patriarchal mores and preference for a boy.

The STF, which first met on February 7, decided to track pregnant women who had already given birth to a girl child and attach '*Sahelis*' or health workers with them. It also tightened the noose around the medical termination of pregnancy (MTP).

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971 (2021) allows abortions up to nine weeks using MTP kits, but only under the supervision of a registered gynaecologist in an approved centre. An MTP kit has Schedule-H drugs that cannot be sold without a prescription from a registered medical practitioner (RMP).

An illegally sold MTP kit is more often than not used only after a sex-determination test has ascertained that the pregnant woman is carrying a female foetus.



A joint team of the Health Department, Food and Drugs Administration and Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau with the 5,805 medical termination of pregnancy (MTP) kits seized from the Kaithal house of the accused (second from right) recently. TRIBUNE PHOTOS



A SEIZED ULTRASOUND SCANNING MACHINE USED FOR SEX DETERMINATION.



SEIZED MTP KITS.

TRACKING SUPPLIERS

The online sale of MTP kits is illegal. The Drugs Control Officers (DCOs) in Haryana have donned a new role and are playing decoy, taking on online suppliers of MTP kits; shops and nursing homes carrying out illegal MTPs; illegal clinics flourishing unnoticed and the drug peddlers coming from neighbouring states.

While more than 6,000 MTP kits have been seized, 30 cases of illegal sale of MTPs have been found. Twenty FIRs have been lodged, four sale licences cancelled and 12 persons arrested in the past three months.

It began with Gurugram when the DCO placed an online order for an MTP kit on February 11. The kit, ordered from a website which had its supplier based in Uttar Pradesh's Badaun, was delivered at his office after which an FIR was registered and one accused was arrested.

Later, the health authorities zeroed in on a gynaecologist from Karnal who could not explain the mismatch in the number of MTP kits procured and used at her clinic.

The biggest haul came from Kaithal last week when the health authorities seized 5,800 MTP kits from a house.

"After getting a tip-off about drugs being stocked at a particular house in Kaithal, we took the help of the local police and monitored the movement of the accused for more than 10 days before arriving at his doorstep for a raid with a team of the state narcotics cell. While he had stocks of drugs without necessary permissions, we found more than 5,800 MTP kits. He disclosed that he had procured these from a supplier in Karnal, and we raided his premises the same night. The raid thus began at 11 am and ended the next morning at 5 am," says Chetan Verma, the Kaithal DCO.

In yet another raid, the Food and Drugs Administration team got a tip-off of a Hyundai Aura car being used to deliver MTP kits and drugs to Faridabad. "He had 20 MTP kits and 35 types of allopathic drugs. An FIR was lodged and he was arrested," says State Food and Drugs Controller Manmohan Taneja.

MODUS OPERANDI

While the kits cost anywhere between ₹100 and ₹200 per piece to the supplier, these are sold to the customers for nearly ₹1,000 or more, given the risk involved. These are sold within a closed network and the outreach is through word of mouth. "Though the doctors are rarely involved in this nexus between the supplier and the consumers, the involvement of the staff cannot be ruled out. However, this, too, is limited to sharing information about suppliers to acquaintances," health officials claim.

Most of these online suppliers operate from Tier-II cities and are based in non-descript villages of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, two states which figure prominently in the list of suppliers based on the online orders placed and received. Some suppliers also operate from high-end areas and prominent cities in a bid to ward off suspicion.

Also, with 21 of the 22 districts in Haryana (other than Rohtak) sharing boundaries with other states, nabbing these suppliers becomes a big challenge. "While we are carrying on with identifying websites and registering FIRs against the suppliers, on the directions of the STF, the DCOs have fanned out across districts and are carrying out inspections at the 1,200 MTP centres as well. The more raids we are carrying out, the more information about the illegal sale of MTPs is flowing in. We are verifying whatever tip-off is coming our way," explains Taneja, adding that no mismatch in records at these registered MTP centres is being overlooked.

NEW NORMS

The government is trying to put a check on the sale of MTP kits by enforcing stricter norms. "While the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994, mandates the consent of two gynaecologists for an MTP after 12 weeks, the Health Department has recommended to the Centre to amend the legislation in a way that it becomes mandatory that the consent also comes from a government hospital even if it is being carried out at a private recognised centre," says Dr Simmi, a member of the STF.

She adds that the Health Department, in a letter to all Civil Surgeons, has said an MTP of a woman with two girl children should be monitored. Further, the department has ordered that no wholesaler will give supplies to a retailer; this will only be given to the 1,200 approved MTP centres. "The DCOs will carry out inspections at the centres for details of the MTP kits procured and put to use," Taneja explains.

When the STF was set up, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini had assured of strict action against the conduct of sex-determination tests.

ACS (Health) Sudhir Rajpal says meetings of the STF are being held regularly to monitor the sex ratio at the micro level. Every birth is being tracked through the health workers, and the impact of the actions against illegal operators is being gauged.

"We are putting in place a multi-pronged strategy to ensure that the sex ratio shows a marked improvement. We have written to the Police Department for a dedicated team for raids. We have also involved the Women and Child Development Department in our rural outreach programme for pregnant women, and sought a status report of pregnant women from health workers," says Rajpal.

Directions have also been issued for looking into the sale of illegal MTP kits over the past two months for comparison with the termination of pregnancies before and after 12 weeks during the period.

When young develop old-age hear loss symptoms

A study shows how repeated exposure to loud music, noise can be damaging

BHARTESH SINGH THAKUR

OVER a decade back, doctors at the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Department in the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, were baffled to discover hearing loss in 20-year-old patients. These were not cases of temporary damage or infection, but young patients showing symptoms of old age.

Around the same time, the then head of the ENT Department, Prof Naresh Panda, met Dr Sabyasachi Rakshit, a biophysicist at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Mohali, who had recently returned after his postdoctoral stint in the US. Dr Panda shared the riddle, urging him to look deeper.

A cue from Prof Panda set Dr Sabyasachi on a path of exploration. "Dr Panda had identified certain genetic mutations in proteins related to hearing among the affected patients and suspected their association with the disease. He guided us in using Progressive Hearing Loss (PHL) as a model for studying Age-Related Hearing Loss (ARHL)," he says. From there on, it took several years for Dr Sabyasachi and his team to solve the riddle, but the hard work paid off, with the discoveries getting published in *Nature Communications*, a peer-reviewed, open access, scientific journal.

"There were relentless challenges throughout. Preparing proteins and creating in-vitro conditions alone took more than three years. However, I remained focused as the goal was bigger than the hurdles," says Dr Sabyasachi, who got fascinated with the science of hearing as he watched doctors testing his newborn's ears for otoacoustic emissions — whispers from within the inner ear itself.

The DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance contributed ₹3.5 crore for the study, along with ₹80 lakh from the Science and Engineering Research Board, besides generous help from IISER for setting up the laboratory equipment.



Biophysicist Dr Sabyasachi Rakshit (right) with researcher Pritam Saha in the lab at IISER.

WHAT INNER EAR FEELS

The study explains how the protein Cadherin-23, which is involved in hearing, changes shape when it is pulled or stretched by a physical force — like the forces your inner ear feels when you hear sound — and explains why some people lose their hearing faster than others.

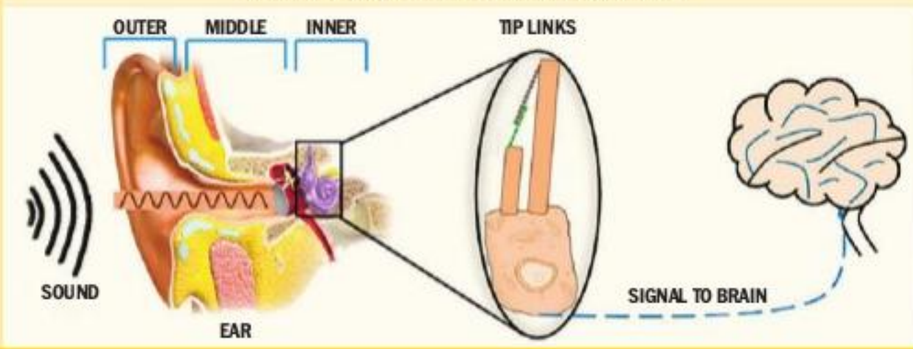
ALARMING RATE

The silent pandemic of hearing loss has been rising, and according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), it is estimated that by 2050, over 700 million people — or 1 in every 10 persons — will be affected by it.

DECODING THE SCIENCE

The breakthrough explains how human beings lose hearing ability over time, thus simplifying the sound-biology interaction. If the protein, important for sensing sound vibrations, can't handle stress, it breaks down, leading to hearing loss. The findings explain that how well a protein handles mechanical stress might also be a result of evolution, depending on the environment where a creature lives.

MECHANISM OF HEARING INSIDE HUMAN EAR



HOW HEARING WORKS

There are microscopic protein structures called tip-links deep inside our ears; these play a crucial role in hearing. These tip-links act as gatekeepers for the tiny ion channels in our ear cells. When sound waves reach them, these stretch the tip-links, which then open the ion channels. This allows ions to flow, changing the cell's charge and sending electrical signals to the brain, and letting us perceive the sound.

Even the buzz of a mosquito creates just enough force (10 picoNewtons) to trigger the system, explains Dr Sabyasachi. However, what will be the impact of, say, a high-decibel show of singer Diljit Dosanjh on these tip-links, or of the roar of the city's traffic at peak hour, or a mother's shrieking call waking you up in the morning?

Giving an analogy of the problem at hand, Dr Sabyasachi says, "You can open the door with a thread, which will let the process of hearing reach the brain. But what will happen if you ask the elephant to open the door? It can remove the door rightaway, causing serious and permanent damage. This is what can happen with constant exposure to loud sound or headphones." Something similar had happened with the youngsters who reported hearing loss at PGIMER.

THE BREAKTHROUGH

Dr Sabyasachi and his students — Pritam Saha (biology); Vishavdeep Vashisht (physics); Ojas Singh, Gaurav Bhati and Surbhi Garg (chemistry); and Dr Amin Sagar (ex-postdoctoral student) — built a special device called magnetic tweezers in their lab, but on a tight budget, especially during the difficult pandemic years. This tool allowed them to create intermittent beep sounds of various intensities that tip-links experience and study their behaviour under repeated stress.

In their first breakthrough (*Nature Communications*, 2024), the team discovered that tip-links behave like "smart seat belts". These safely allow sound forces to reach our hearing cells but can also absorb stronger, potentially damaging forces. "However, if the sound is too loud, the tip-links temporarily disengage — like seat belts unbuckling in extreme situations — to protect our hearing cells from permanent damage," says Dr Sabyasachi.

The second breakthrough (*Nature Communications*, 2025) revealed what happens over time with repeated exposure to loud music or noise. "The tip-links lose their force-filtering ability, which could explain how age-related hearing loss develops. The repetitive inputs of loud sound induced fatigue in the tip-links, making them more prone to unfolding and losing their critical force-filtering function. Studying this was no easy task, given the time ARHL takes to occur naturally," says Dr Sabyasachi.

After examining mutations linked to PHL, Pritam Saha, a doctoral researcher and part of Dr Sabyasachi's team, said, "We have found that even small genetic mutations can alter how these proteins fold and unfold under force, leading to hearing problems."

WHAT'S NEXT

The IISER team wants to push the boundaries even further. Its goal? To translate songs into mechanical signals that can speak directly to the tip-link proteins, communicating with them in their biomechanical language to better understand their response to music and sound stimuli.

As Dr Sabyasachi puts it, this line of research brings them one step closer to understanding the intricate dance between sound and biology, and perhaps, one day, to develop ways to slow or even prevent hearing loss altogether.

Urban dreams, rural roots: Why millions still farm



Illustration by **Cheyenne Olivier (France)**

Many amateur gardeners find gardening hard. And yet nearly 900m people farm for a living. And this does not include all those, mostly women, who grow chilli and curry leaves, tulsi and lemongrass on a tiny plot of land adjacent to their homes, or in pots on their porch



Abhijit Banerjee

TASTING ECONOMICS

My grandfather was a devoted, if not particularly gifted, gardener. Our terrace was lined with earthenware pots where jasmines and tuberoses grew in the summer and roses in the winter. Every year, sometime in October, my grandfather would broach his plans for the winter seasonals — this year, we would agree, unlike the last many years, the dahlias will be as large as a man's hand and the marigolds tight as a child's fist around an unexpected candy. We would come back from Gariahat market carrying bags of damp earth ("best quality from Hooghly") and the pomace left after pressing out mustard oil, its potency confirmed by its repulsive odour.

My job was to empty the pots and break up the clods, reluctantly bringing chaos into the lives of a hundred peaceable earthworms, before mixing our old dirt with the new. One year, when I was eight or nine, I decided to launch an agricultural project of my own. With a spoonful of cement from the kind man who was fixing our terrace, I blocked the drainage hole at the bottom of a pot to have the standing water one needs for rice to germinate and planted a handful of unhusked rice that our cook had found while cleaning the rice and discarded. The grains turned into green shoots that I carefully transplanted in other pots. In due course there was rice, a whole handful that I peeled off the sprigs and proudly brought to our cook to ask him to get them husked and make rice. I still recall the look of infinite contempt that quickly flashed over his face before he patiently explained that there was not enough for one mouthful.

If this was an appropriate learning experience for a future development economist, Cheyenne's memory of being lost among the cherry tomatoes seems to presage a future artist. Her father, like my grandfather, found gardening a bit mysterious and frustrating, but this one time the cherry tomatoes went wild in their front yard. Cheyenne, looking for the sweetest of them all, found herself surrounded by plants a foot taller than her, laden with bright red fruits, but no dad in sight. These days, Cheyenne does the gardening, but she has stayed away from growing vegetables. As for me, my one attempt to grow flowers in our then front garden in Cambridge was such a disaster (weeds everywhere, dead plants, poor landscaping) that an obviously irate neighbour came to warn us that we were depressing everyone's property values.

Many amateur gardeners find gardening hard. And yet the world over, poor rural families manage to do it successfully enough to make farming the single largest occupation in the world. Nearly 900 million people, more than 10% of the world, farm for a living, by a recent Food and Agriculture Organisation estimate. And this does not include all those, mostly women at least in India, who grow their own chilies and curry leaves, tulsi and lemongrass on a tiny plot of land adjacent to their homes, or in pots on their porch. I have an indelible memory of being somewhere in central Bengal, interviewing a woman whose face was framed by two beautiful, velvet green winter melons (*chaal kumro* in Bangla) hanging from the bamboo eaves of her hut. One side of her little house was crisscrossed by creepers that went onto her roof, filtering the sunlight through the mosaic of giant leaves and yellow flowers.

Interestingly, when we surveyed poor families in rural Udaipur district in the early 2000s, while more than 90% said they worked in agriculture, only 17% said farming was the main source of their earnings. This is a pattern that shows up in many places in the world today, very different from how it was, for example, in India 100 years ago.

What explains this pattern? Why don't they give up farming and specialise in whatever else they do that pays most of their bills? Why does almost every poor family we surveyed in Udaipur own some little land? A part of the answer is that in many developing countries like India, living in the city is expensive and/or unpleasant for low-income families. The shortage of decent affordable housing is acute — the choice is usually between crowding into a slum or spending 4-5 hours a day commuting. Many migrants, therefore, prefer to leave their families in their home village and make regular trips back. The land in their village gives them a place to call home, and something for their family to do while they are away (they will often come back for the planting and the harvest).

For policy makers in many low and middle-income countries, who are often acutely aware of just how inadequate their urban infrastructure is, this continuing attachment to the village takes a bit of the pressure off. Even China, the most dramatic example of large-scale urbanisation in our times, movement to urban areas was strictly regulated through the hukou system (residence registration) to ensure demand for housing did not outpace its supply.

Land ownership also offers a form of social security in places where the state does not offer one. If you lose your job, it is a way to feed the family and survive. In China, in the depression after the Tiananmen Square episode in 1989, a large portion of the urban labour force went back home to cool their heels. Farming is what sustained them. Something similar happened in India and many other countries during the pandemic.

Of course, this requires the households to worry about future uncertainty enough to hold onto the land. It is not clear that they always do: when things are good, they may be tempted to sell the land and take a job elsewhere, but if the job suddenly vanishes, they will still need to be supported by the community or the state. This is another reason why the state may try to force them to hold onto a certain amount of land — that way they have something to fall back upon.

This might explain the unique position of land as an asset in many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. What farmers call their own land isn't actually theirs to sell, though they might have been farming it for generations. For example, until recently, land in China remained state property to be allocated to households for cultivation based on need. At least in theory, families that were too busy to cultivate their land were meant to lose it to those with unemployed hands. Elsewhere, such as in the northeast of India, but also in large parts of Africa and the Mexican ejidos, for example, the decision to sell land rests with the community. And even where there are no legal restrictions on land sales, as in much of India, there is a strong sentiment attached to land that belonged to the family (*baap-dada ki zamin*), which probably serves a similar purpose. I see that pride on the face of our cook when she offers me a bilati amra (apparently called hog plum in English) that grew in her family's garden south of Kolkata. With a pinch of salt and some chili powder, it makes a rare healthy snack that I adore.

There are other commitment advantages to keeping some land in the family: if something happens to the main income earner or he (it is typically a man) simply abandons them, it can provide a minimum sustenance. In Africa, for example, unlike in India, land that a woman brings into the marriage or acquires as a part of her bride-price continues to belong to her even if the man marries again.

Indeed, this attempt to codify the special social role of land can go even further. A study by my wife and colleague Esther Duflo and Chris Udry from Northwestern University, finds that in Côte D'Ivoire, there are three types of land in each marriage. There is land that the man controls and cultivates, whose produce belongs to him and he might use in whatever way he pleases; land his wife controls and cultivates and whose produce belongs to her; and land, which the father is expected to cultivate, to grow "appreciated crops", crops that can only be used for the welfare of the children. The main example of such a crop turns out to be yam, which both feeds the family and gets sold in the market, but the money from it can only be used for things like children's education. This seems to be a way, in a setting where men often marry multiple times, for each wife and her children to have a long-term claim on the father's time.

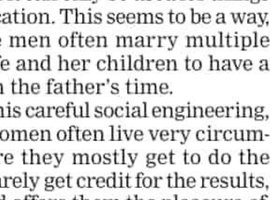
But beyond all this careful social engineering, in a world where women often live very circumscribed lives where they mostly get to do the drudge work and rarely get credit for the results, having a bit of land offers them the pleasure of being able to deliver something delicious and/or beautiful to the family. I remember the joy with which my aunt, who never worked outside and never had a child, would make karaishutir kochuri (breads stuffed with peas) for us, "with peas", as she would say with her slightly withheld smile, "from my own garden."

This is part of a monthly column by Nobel-winning economist Abhijit Banerjee illustrated by Cheyenne Olivier.

RECIPE

Karaishuti diye begun pora (Smoky eggplant salad)

Here is a recipe for when the peas are at their sweetest...



- Pop 500 gm of peapods and boil the peas till cooked but not mushy (6-8 minutes). Char two eggplants of 500 gm each that have been scored with a sharp knife (or 3 or 4 smaller ones) on a gas fire or under a broiler till the skin is mostly burnt and the flesh is falling apart. Cool. Discard the skin and the stem. Mash the flesh and leave in a colander for any liquid to drip out. Mix with the cooked peas, ½ cup minced red onion, 1 heaped tablespoon finely chopped ginger, 2 thinly sliced green chilies, ¼ cup chopped cilantro, ½ cup finely chopped tomato, 2 tbs mustard oil, and 1 tsp salt (or to taste). Serve with slightly charred bhakris or phulkas.

WHY SAM ALTMAN WANTS TO SCAN YOUR EYES



Experts say that by next year, 90% of the content online could be AI-generated, with no human intervention in sight. So, how will we tell the difference between what has been created by humans and what is computer-generated? Enter: World ID, a new way to find out bot's real or not

HOW IT WORKS

- You look into the Orb
- It scans your iris
- Deletes your image
- Creates a World ID
- Gives you a blue check in the World App
- Your ID is stored on the blockchain (but not your photo)

GOODBYE CAPTCHAS?

The orb has been created by Tools for Humanity, a startup co-founded by Sam Altman, OpenAI CEO, as part of their crypto project, Worldcoin. It's a little globe whose job it is to verify human beings. "Right now, the only ways we have to prove someone's human are either invasive or super annoying," TFH Chief Architect Adrian Ludwig told USA Today. "Like CAPTCHAs — or handing over private data like your phone number or ID."

WHY DO WE NEED THIS?

As everything from scams to attractive Instagram users can be fake, it aims to provide authentication so you know when you're interacting with a person. If enough people use it, it could be used to thwart scammers and bots masquerading as people.

THE NOT-SO-ROSY PICTURE

While all this sounds great, there are questions about the security of this World ID. The larger project has been subject to scrutiny — getting banned by Spain's privacy watchdog, while in Argentina, a watchdog group is investigating its collection, storage and use of personal data.



Sam Altman

Sources: USA Today, Wired, Reuters

As child witnesses shape court verdicts, Indian justice system is slowly changing

It's not easy for a minor to testify, especially against their kin. To help them speak up, some courts have introduced child-friendly steps like taking video testimonies in playrooms, but there's a long way to go

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ChatGPT image

> We are able to get convictions in only 10% of the cases. So many times, the child has no support system except for the father, who is accused of killing their mother
>
> **Vineet Dahiya,** ADDL PUBLIC PROSECUTOR

> The hardest part is making children feel comfortable enough to speak, especially if it's a relative. They worry the accused will come back home and hurt them or they're pressured by family to stay quiet
>
> **Geeta Sharma,** PUBLIC PROSECUTOR

Over the past year or so, Indian courts have seen a handful of rare but powerful moments where a child's voice tipped the scales of justice. A seven-year-old stood before the Supreme Court earlier this year and recounted, with a courage that belied her age, how her mother was killed and cremated by her own father, sending him to prison. In Hyderabad, two four-year-old girls — one a survivor, the other her friend — testified against a rapist, helping secure a 25-year sentence. And in Chennai, a nine-year-old girl recounted, with chilling clarity, how her father had killed both her mother and grandfather with beer bottles and a pressure cooker. Her words alone led to a double life sentence.

What makes these cases stand out is the extraordinary weight the courts placed on a child's words whatever their age. In Feb, the Supreme Court held that a child of tender age can be allowed to testify if it has the intellectual capacity to understand questions and give rational answers.

But coaxing a statement from a child is not easy. What matters is how comfortable the environment is for such conversations, who's listening, and what the system does to protect them before and after they do.

PLAYROOM OVER COURTROOM

Not every courtroom offers this kind of space for a child to speak freely, so a safe space away from wooden docks and black coats can be far less intimidating. Like in a playroom on the third floor of the Madras High Court with stuffed toys, a fridge stocked with soft drinks and a corner for colouring. Here, in this specially designed, air-conditioned environment, a child witness is gently eased into the process.

Instead of having to take the stand, judges talk to them via video link. Before any testimony, there's a 'competency test' where the child is asked to explain what 'truth' and 'lie' mean. If they struggle, the session is deferred, says special public prosecutor S Anitha. Prosecutors also try to visit the child beforehand. "The prep isn't legal — it's emotional," says one prosecutor. Children are reassured it wasn't their fault. Inside court, small details matter. Leading questions are avoided and instead of verbal descriptions, children are shown photo charts and asked to point.

Maharashtra is slowly catching up when it comes to Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) trials. Some courts now allow children to testify in-camera, seated inside the judge's chamber. Lawyers don't question the child directly. They submit questions in advance, which the judge asks in a conversational tone. A support person or trusted adult stays close. "Children, especially the very young, aren't expected to remember everything," adds advocate Aniket Nikam. "The questioning isn't as pointed as it would be for adults."

In late March, the Mumbai civil and sessions court opened its first vulnerable witness deposition centre designed not just for children but also for adult survivors of sexual violence and those with disabilities or mental illness. The centre has a one-way mirror, audio-video link, and a private enclosure that serves as both waiting and testimony space, shielding witnesses from the gaze of the accused and the court.

POLICE GRILL WITH CARE

Police who are the first responders in such cases, too, have changed tack. "We avoid uniforms while recording a child's statement," says Inspector Saraswathi from Chennai, who has handled over a dozen such cases. "We ask only open-ended questions. A child may forget dates, but never the moment."

Mumbai's Joint Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Satyanarayan Chaudhary says handling child witnesses today involves far more care than before. "Two weeks ago, we rolled out five mobile support vans for women and children in distress," he says. Each van includes a counsellor, a woman officer and a constable, dispatched from regional control rooms. Most statements are recorded at home or in the van, by plain-clothed officers, and always in the presence of a guardian.

These changes are part of a larger rethink, where prosecutors, judges, and child rights groups are working together to build calm, child-sensitive methods that are rooted in trust than procedure.

BEFORE AND AFTER TESTIMONY

But there are still many blind spots. In April 2025, the Madras High Court pointed out that unlike child survivors of sexual abuse, who are protected by specific laws and procedures under POCSO, child witnesses in violent crimes don't have proper support.

The court was closing a case where an eight-year-old had seen her schizophrenic uncle kill her mother. Justices MS Ramesh and N Senthilkumar said this wasn't a one-off situation. Many children are exposed to such trauma, and there's no system in place to help them cope. The judges have now asked the central and state govts to create a protocol to support such children.

Emotional recovery, experts say, takes far longer than the legal process allows. Psychiatrist Dr Harish Shetty, who has counselled several child witnesses over the years, says it can take months, sometimes years, to prepare a child to face court. "A boy who'd seen his mother's murder was brought to me at nine," he recalls. "Initially, I did very little. Just gentle breathing, casual chats about friends and favourite sports. Only once the anxiety settled did we begin approaching the memory."

The prep took nearly a year and several sessions — photo cues, small conversations — before the boy opened up about what he had seen. "And once they do, you don't leave a child raw," Shetty adds. "There are follow-up calming exercises, sometimes writing about how they feel to release and heal." In some cases, he says, a child may testify years later. "Once the feelings are processed, the memory becomes more stable or else, they may freeze or dissociate in court."

And even with such groundwork and prep, a conviction can be a different challenge altogether, especially if the accused is a relative. Additional public prosecutor Vineet Dahiya, who practises in Delhi sessions courts, says the pressure that child witnesses feel in cases of murder or domestic violence leaves them vulnerable. "We are able to get convictions in only 10% of the cases," he says. "So many times, the child has no support system except for the father, who is accused of killing their mother."

In one murder trial, the child froze the moment he saw the accused. "He thought the man would hurt him for speaking out," public prosecutor Geeta Sharma recalls. In a sexual assault case, the child began sobbing as soon as she saw the accused in court. "Children are often pressured by family to stay quiet. Sometimes it's poverty, social fear, or just wanting life to go back to normal," she says.

While NGOs often step in to support, Sharma points out that courtrooms are still overburdened. Long backlogs mean children are sometimes made to revisit trauma years after it happened. "And in some cases," she adds, "the accused manages to convince the parents to settle."

Lawyers agree that simple logistical safeguards — like a dedicated waiting room — can make a huge difference. Yet, even in serious cases like murder, children are left to wait in common areas, sometimes just metres from the accused. 'In-camera' proceedings sometimes shield only the child's testimony, not the moments before or after.

Activists say while very young children are generally treated with sensitivity, older minors face a tougher time in court. "They often face hostility," says Audrey D'Mello, director of NGO Majlis which has been appointed as a 'support person' in over 2,500 cases under the POCSO Act. What's needed, Sharma insists, is training — across the board — to make the deposition space truly child-friendly.

Custody battles, too, can leave deep scars, says Mumbai-based family lawyer Kanupriya Kejriwal. "Children feel a sense of betrayal and guilt in preferring one parent to another. There could also be instances of tutoring and blackmailing at home by one spouse against the other," says Kejriwal. The trauma in cases of domestic violence and adultery can be worse. "Children have access to phones and very often the child has seen an inappropriate message or witnessed a beating," she adds.

Some family courts, like Bandra's, are now trying to soften the blow by appointing independent child counsellors who observe parent-child interactions and submit neutral reports to the court.

Judges at the Juvenile Justice Board have also tried to make their spaces gentler. In one case, a five-year-old sat across from a magistrate, quietly colouring a book while responding to the magistrate's questions, as her mother stood behind.

Yet for all the progress, the emotional scaffolding around a child in court can be uneven. "Most govt psychologists are overburdened and under-involved," says Shetty. "What takes a year to build in therapy is rushed through in court."

Even small gestures like a gentler tone or lawyers shedding their black coats aren't consistently practised. "It may seem minor but for a traumatised child, even the sight of a formal courtroom can feel hostile," explains Shetty. Defence lawyers can sometimes badger young survivors with unsettling questions and public prosecutors don't always step in fast enough to shield them. And though judges sometimes intervene they can't always control aggressive cross-examination. "It confuses and traumatises children even more," says D'Mello.

Still, when handled right, a child's voice can carry remarkable weight. Last week, a sessions court in Dindoshi sentenced a man to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for sexually assaulting a nine-year-old girl in a Mumbai chawl. Much of the evidence was circumstantial, but the child was called the 'star witness' by the court, and praised as 'wise' and 'inspiring confidence' even under tough cross-examination. As JCP Chaudhary says, "When the witness is a child, it's their innocence that gives truth its power."

Additional reporting by Swati Deshpande, Himanshi Dhawan, Rebecca Samervel, Ram Sundaram and Sindhu Kannan

WHEN THE KILLER IS MOM OR DAD

Chhattisgarh, 2025: Eight-year-old testifies that she saw her mother and her lover strangling her father. Though she had not disclosed this in her statement to the police, it emerged that her mother had threatened her into silence. HC upheld their conviction

Chennai, 2024: A nine-year-old girl's testimony helps convict her father for the brutal murder of her mother and grandfather

Mumbai, 2023: Four years after witnessing his mother's murder, a Class 2 boy testifies in court that "my father killed her... by knife." His statement helped convict Umesh Bobale, a 48-year-old dentist, for stabbing his wife Tanuja 37 times. The child calmly answered 54 questions during the trial. "I didn't scream," he said. "But I was feeling something in my heart."

Bareilly, 2023: A seven-year-old girl's testimony led to a life sentence for her mother and her mother's partner, who were found guilty of strangling the girl's father with a dupatta. The child revealed the truth to her uncle after the mother initially claimed he had died in his sleep.

Why Pahalgam response poses a challenge

RIGHT & WRONG



SWAPAN DASGUPTA

Since Independence, India has witnessed innumerable mass killings. At one time, caste-based militias in Bihar had made the massacre of defenceless villagers their pastime. During the Punjab troubles of the 1990s, armed Khalistanis intercepted long-distance buses, segregated Hindu passengers from the rest and gunned them down. In August 2000, terrorists shot 36 people undertaking the Amarnath yatra, an outrage repeated, albeit with lesser casualties, in July 2017.

Nearly every one of these tragedies resulted in political convulsions and threatened to escalate into something far bigger. Yet, while the assassination 1914 of one Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo led to a horrible world war that killed anywhere between 15 and 22 million people and reshaped global politics unrecognisably, other tragedies have been turning points when history refused to turn.

Since the prospect of two nuclear powers slugging it out fills the global community with dread, it is possible that the aftermath of the Pahalgam tragedy will stop short of a full-scale war. The daunting challenge before Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to give the terrorists and their backers a fitting reply without at the same time getting dragged into a larger regional conflict.

Pakistan's sense of national purpose is, by contrast, distorted. Like at the start of the Afghan war in 1980 and the 9/11 attacks in 2001, its strategists are probably considering ways of leveraging the global wariness of conflict to extract a price. In their scheme of things, the Hamas copy-cat 'Resistance Front' is both a prize asset and a dispensable irritant, depending on circumstances.

Unlike Pakistan where public opinion is a plaything and where the elite has hedged its bets with dual nationality, democratic accountability has made decision-making less flexible in India. It is almost inconceivable that Jawaharlal Nehru's generosity with the Indus Waters Treaty in 1960 or Indira Gandhi's show of misplaced magnanimity in Shimla 1972 can be repeated in today's India. The reason isn't merely the ferocity of electoral politics but the modification of the Indian personality. The past decade has seen important shifts, marginalising those whom Swami Vivekananda deprecated as the 'patient' and 'mild' Hindu who had become accustomed to subordination.

There are specific features of the Pahalgam massacre that may shape the overall Indian response. First, the killings weren't a result of indiscriminate firing, as happened during the Mumbai attack of 2008. They were preceded by crude acts of humiliation and assertions of Islamic triumphalism. In an earlier age, the details of non-Muslims being singled out would probably have been underplayed in the media. It took many months before the magnitude of the ethnic cleansing of Hindus from the Kashmir Valley in 1990 was realised by the whole country. In Pahalgam, the gory details of what happened was known nationally within a few hours.



PRESSURE POINT: The popular mood is of impatience but govt has to resist getting dragged into a larger regional conflict

Second, most of the 26 people who were mercilessly killed before the eyes of their wives and children had travelled to Kashmir from almost every region of India. Additionally, they were all middle class, and their murder unsettled those who had either recently visited Kashmir as tourists or were planning to do so. The thought that 'it could have been me and my family' has resonated throughout the middle classes. Their collective cry for justice and retribution is a force multiplier the BJP cannot ignore.

Arguably, many of these pressures were also at work in determining India's response to the 2008 Mumbai attack that dragged on for four days and led to 175 deaths. There are, however, two important differences.

First, the Manmohan Singh govt over-invested in the ability of global diplomacy providing justice to an angry nation. The prevailing wisdom of the Modi govt is that fanatical Islamists sponsored by Pakistan cannot be confronted with niceties alone. The unstated influence of Benjamin Netanyahu's scorched earth policy against terrorists in Gaza among decision-makers in the Modi ecosystem should be noted. Although this doesn't mean India has the luxury to emulate Israel's war, it does suggest that the armed forces and other agencies will not be constrained by extraneous considerations.

Finally, had the surgical strikes and the Balakot retaliation in 2019 not happened, public expectation from Modi would have been measured. Unfortunately, the popular mood—fuelled by media sabre-rattling—is one of rising impatience. If this is allowed to persist, there will be a backlash that could lead to damaging taunts by the Opposition of the PM as a paper tiger. Alternatively, there could be a temptation among hotheads to enhance national security through action against the real or imaginary proxies of Pakistan. For its political sustenance, the BJP, it must be remembered, depends on Hindu consolidation.

In view of how the Waqf Amendment Act has been painted before ordinary Muslims, communal relations on the ground are quite strained. Its fragility is apparent from a spate of localised disturbances in different states. Unless Middle India feels that its anger has been addressed by effective action, the govt could become busy quelling fires on the home front. ■

Winning Test series in India toughest assignment we have as Oz cricketers

__Pat Cummins__ has caused a lot of heartbreak for Indian fans in recent times. The Aussie paceman, who took over the reins at a difficult time in Nov 2021, has overseen his team's success in the 2023 World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup — both at the cost of India in the final. Earlier this year, his team finished off India's WTC Final hopes. The pacer, who is now leading Sunrisers Hyderabad team in the IPL, talks to __Dwaipayan Datta__ about the dynamics of being a top-level captain and writing a not-so-typical cricket book

FOR THE RECORD

Your book 'Tested' has stories of 10 leaders including former PM Julia Gillard. What goes into the making of a successful captain, and who are the leaders who inspire you?

I think it is about collaborating well, dealing with pressure and having genuine care for the players. I find myself looking to the business world for inspiration. What resonates with me with these leaders is their ability to stay ahead of the competition and get the best out of their workers. In a lot of the new startups, the founders are in their 20s and 30s, much like a professional cricket team.

How has the great Dennis Lillee influenced you as a cricketer and a person?

Dennis has been a great source of wisdom and support since I first met him around 2013. Technically, he got my action to a point where I could deal with the stresses that come with fast bowling while maintaining my strengths.

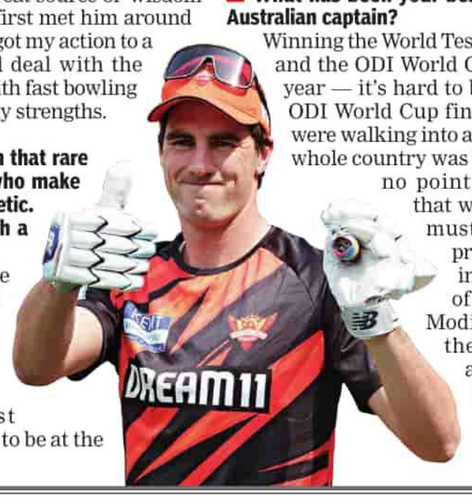
Many feel you're in that rare group of cricketers who make pace bowling look poetic. What makes you such a joy to watch?

I think some people are being very kind because when I bowl it doesn't feel very poetic! The fast bowlers I love watching in Test cricket always seem to be at the batter, asking questions even when conditions aren't in their favour. That is the ideal place to be in as a bowler, consistent but not predictable.

You took over Australian captaincy when the national team was at a bit of a crossroads. How difficult was it to bring everyone together and become the world-beating unit that you are?

The one thing that remained constant during this time was a core of brilliant, experienced players. A lot of the initial days were spent fostering an environment where everyone comes together, but at the same we stay out of each other's way when it makes sense to.

What has been your best moment as an Australian captain?



Winning the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup in the same year — it's hard to beat that. In the ODI World Cup final, we knew we were walking into a game where the whole country was behind India, so no point in pretending that wasn't the case. I must admit, it was pretty sweet standing in the middle of the (Narendra Modi) stadium with the boys, looking around the stadium in stunned silence. I'll never forget that.

India couldn't be beaten in a bilateral series by Australia since 2016, until your team did it earlier this year. Is it the most difficult team to beat across formats? Do you think a Test series win in India will be your final frontier as captain?

India's depth and home dominance make them the ultimate challenge across all formats. It's a few years away but winning an away Test series in India does seem like the toughest assignment we have as Aussie cricketers.

You're enduring a tough IPL season with SRH. How difficult is it to deal with failures?

Failures are tough but part of the job. We all want to win everything but some of the most successful teams ever may reach just over a 60% win rate. Knowing this, it does help in thinking objectively about the parts you think you need to improve upon, but also the parts that you believe are right, and just didn't pay off on this occasion.

How important is it for a captain to be at the top of his game during a big series?

I believe it is quite important. Results aside, I think clarity of thought can make a difference across a long series.

There aren't too many bowling captains. How easy or tough is it to lead while being the No. 1 bowler of the team? And what did you make of Jasprit Bumrah as captain during the India-Australia series?

It's a skill I've got better and better at, and I've just learnt to lean on senior guys when needed on the potential blind spots I may have, for example, how long and when to bowl myself. I find it hard to judge a captain that I haven't played under but I always believe the benefits of a bowling captain can certainly outweigh the cons.

Mitchell Starc, Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Scott Boland — where do you place this pace quartet in Aussie cricket history? And how's the next crop shaping up?

I'll leave that up to others, but it has been an amazing time over the past decade playing alongside those guys. The next crop is really promising; we have about another half a dozen guys who have debuted across formats in the last couple of years and have been match winners. So, I feel we have great depth!

India in crosswinds: US sneeze, Chinese cough, and global shivers

SWAMINOMICS



SWAMINATHAN S ANKLESARIA AIYAR

Some analysts feel that a US recession has already begun. There is an old saying, when the US catches cold, the rest of the world sneezes. Can you see Indians reaching for their handkerchiefs?

Quarterly GDP growth in the US fell by 0.3% in the first quarter, Jan-March. A recession is widely defined in the US as a fall in GDP for two successive quarters. The National Bureau of Economic Research, which delivers the final verdict, adds another condition — economic activity must be affected substantially. That verdict will take many months more to be delivered. But the signs are unfavourable.

Major institutions are downgrading their GDP growth forecasts for the whole world and individual nations like India. The IMF has cut its 2025-26 forecast for India from 6.5% to 6.2%. But this is just a first volley based on current uncertainty. Worse will follow.

The US has so far imposed a 10% tariff across the board plus 145% for China, and 25% on steel, aluminium, and autos. This alone means the highest US tariffs since the Great Depression.

Trump has threatened further high reciprocal tariffs on all trading partners which are on pause for 90 days. Optimists hope for a happy US resolution with most trading partners within these 90 days. Pessimists say Trump cannot forego high tariffs to have any chance of diverting lost jobs back to the US. He wants to go down in history as the man who changed America, not as the one that was all bark and no bite. In any event, he is not the sort of person to suddenly go quiet after 90 days in office. He will for his full term keep returning to his favourite theme of using tariffs to Make America Great Again.

The uncertainty created by Trump is guaranteed to slow world growth. No company knows how much to invest, where, and when. They will keep plans on the back burner, awaiting more certainty. Consumers too will avoid spending sprees —they know the economy could turn nasty. Slowing consumption and investment mean a recession. India cannot escape the consequences even though it will be less hard hit than others.

Some US analysts believe that a recession has already started. Others are less downbeat. Jason Furman of Harvard University points out that the GDP data for the first quarter were seriously distorted by companies and individuals importing goods like crazy to stock up on the cheap before the 90-day pause expires and prices soar. Going by alternative measures such as 'core GDP growth', Furman estimates that the US economy actually rose and did not fall in the first quarter. But he and others warn that the import tariffs already announced are sufficient to seriously slow the US economy. China, the second largest economy in the world, was already slowing before Trump's stratospheric tariffs and will now slow even more. When the two biggest economies slow down, the rest of the world cannot but follow suit.

Optimists will point to the fact that stock markets in both the US and India look cheerful right now. The Dow Jones index reached a peak of 44,882 just after Trump assumed office, hoping for generous cuts in income tax and corporate tax without damaging import tariffs. On hearing of his reciprocal tariffs, the Dow plunged to 37,645. But after Trump announced his 90-day pause, the Dow recovered again to 41,317 by May 2. No sign of panic here.

The stock markets in India too show no sign of panic. The Nifty reached a peak of 26,216 last September just before it became clear that Trump was likely to be a big winner in the US Presidential election. It then slid steadily down to a low of 22,082 on hearing of reciprocal tariffs. But after the 90-day pause, it has recovered to 24,346.

Does this mean all is hunky dory? No. The markets are highly volatile up and down, driven by greed and fear. Fear drove them down when Trump announced reciprocal tariffs high enough to guarantee a recession. Once Trump paused his tariffs, greed took over as investors sought to recover lost ground. But as the 90-day deadline nears, expect fear to take over again.

My personal take is that a recession will begin in the April-May quarter if it has not begun already. It will be a deep recession, not a shallow one. India is resilient and will be hit less than other emerging markets but will take a painful hit too. Trump's remaining three years will contain more ugly surprises. These may include a second recession within four years. Like Ulysses, let us prepare for a long, perilous voyage. ■

Let's not take Pakistan army's bait and put emotion over reason

THE UNDERAGE OPTIMIST



CHETAN BHAGAT

It's terrible. There is no other word for it. What happened in Pahalgam should not have happened. It's not justified under any circumstances. Just look at the massive repercussions of the attack: 26 killed, and their families devastated. Livelihoods lost, and a regional economy that was hobbling back to life destroyed all over again. A nation engulfed in sorrow, along with anger and frustration at a problem that never seems to go away. An Indian society that risks being fractured all over again on religious lines. Chances of a full-scale war between two nuclear powers.

All this brought about by just a few guys with guns, in one afternoon. Are these deranged youth who believe killing innocent Hindus at point-blank range is doing some sort of service to their religion or nation or Kashmir all it takes to destroy the peace of a nation and take the world to the brink of a nuclear war?

There are no easy answers. People have their own viewpoints on how Kashmir should have been handled, but one solution was to integrate the region more with India, improve the local economy, and create opportunities for the youth. Then, hopefully, with prospects of a better life, the insurgency would go away. Indeed, that is exactly what was attempted after Article 370 was revoked in 2019, and several policies designed to make Kashmir more integrated with India were brought in. And despite recent events, one cannot deny that some progress was made. Tourist numbers skyrocketed to close to 3 million in 2024. Easing of residency and land acquisition norms perked up the real-estate sector and attracted investments. The Pahalgam incident aside, the Valley remained largely peaceful, even during elections last year.

Of course, the process of rejuvenation of a region's economy takes time. To expect all of Kashmir's youth and locals to see massive benefits in five years and no longer be lured towards terrorism or radicalism is naïve. The Pahalgam attacks show us that. But it doesn't mean that the slow economic rejuvenation policy should be abandoned. No, that should continue and perhaps with more support as the region would require that post-Pahalgam.

The Pahalgam incident also shows us that the perpetrators are desperate. They saw that Kashmir was healing, and the only way to stop that was to strike a blow and make it bleed again. This is also why we must be careful in our response to the incident.

First, we must understand the perpetrator. Despite multiple denials, a National Investigation Agency report shows that the Pakistan army was involved in the conspiracy. Reports suggest its army is losing popularity amongst the people, and these are two separate entities. For instance, the army is behind the arrest of Imran Khan, who remains popular amongst Pakistani people.



GUN FOR GROWTH: We need to persist with rejuvenation of Kashmir's economy because that's the only way we can persuade youth to give up insurgency

Second, and understandably so, our immediate response is emotional. More than anything we want one thing — revenge! We want to "hit them hard!" We want the perfect deterrent.

However, what if the perpetrators' intention is exactly that? What if they want us to "hit them hard" and, thereby, escalate the conflict between the two countries which until now seemed to be at an equilibrium. What if the Pakistan army's intention is just to ensure that the Pakistan army gets more relevant with the threat of war looming on the nation? What if retaliations and counter-retaliations eventually spiral into a full-fledged war? Wow, won't that be their dream come true?

This is why, no matter what our instinct suggests, we will serve India better by giving a reasoned response vs an emotional one. So, what's a reasoned response? A reasoned response is far more blunt, far less entertaining (especially for TV channels), far less immediate and far more drawn out. Rather than a reprisal that plays into Pakistan's hands, a smarter thing to do would be a 360-degree, non-stop, 24x7 response. This involves going after Pakistan's regime with all kinds of methods including economic sanctions; foreign consensus-building so that Pakistan's status becomes akin to isolated North Korea; openly supporting insurgencies in Pakistan such as the Baloch movement; using propaganda to turn the Pakistani people against the army; and digging in further on India's own Hindu-Muslim unity, as well as persisting with Kashmir's economic revival plan. Essentially, doing everything the Pakistani army would not want us to do.

No, that doesn't mean we don't retaliate at all. India should do some targeted response, particularly at the Pakistani army hubs, to emphasise the point that we are after the perpetrator and not Pakistani people in general. If we attack Pakistan in general, its people will automatically gravitate towards their army as their saviours. Revenge, although enormously emotionally satisfying in the moment, often doesn't do the job. This is exactly what they want and hence, not something we want to do. Let's not take the bait. ■

INBOX

Water treaty pause the right thing to do

Apropos of 'Blood for water...' (ATM , Apr 27), India did the right thing by putting the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance. It is not only a river-sharing agreement, but a mechanism of trust which has been systematically eroded by Pakistan. When cooperation becomes a cover for aggression and treaties are weaponised, it is time that a deep state like Pakistan be taught a tough lesson. There are many instances globally too where treaties have been withdrawn or done away with by the likes of US and USSR, citing national security reasons.

— **M K Goel,** Delhi

Signs of larger malaise

With reference to 'Why does resilient...'(ATM, Apr 27), the attitudes of the rating agencies speak of a larger malaise within western institutions of treating the Indian financial establishment with distrust and fear, a behaviour that remains impervious to facts and ground realities. Despite climbing to the fifth largest economy and having a debt/GDP ratio far below its peers, global organisations continue to view our country as being fragile. We should disregard such pessimism and reaffirm our faith in India's growth story.

— **Shashwata Ganguly,** Kolkata

Reducing dependence

This refers to 'China's rare-earth...', (ATM, Apr 27). To overcome the dependence on China for rare-earth metals, we should now shift our technology entirely towards hydrogen cells. Further, we can explore our seas for alternate metals like sodium.

— **Amit Tiwari,** Amethi

Email your letters to the editor at *sunday.times@timesofindia.com* with 'Sunday Mailbox' in the subject line. Please mention your name and city

Trump's divide & prosper mantra, and how India can strategise

BY INVITATION



ABHIJIT DAS

The assault on the global trading regime by US President Donald Trump, especially through the reciprocal tariffs announced on April 2, provides a fertile ground for examining negotiating strategies. It is common knowledge within the trade policy community that the US failed to secure most of its negotiating objectives in the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations at the WTO, which commenced in 2001. On many issues of its interest, it was repeatedly checkmated by multiple coalitions of developing countries.

The reciprocal tariffs were, thus, a bid to compel recalcitrant countries, such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa etc. to come to the negotiating table. With most countries keen on preserving their export prospects in the US market, they are likely to be agreeable to the US demands, many of which they had previously resisted at the WTO. Further, by shifting the negotiations from the WTO to a bilateral forum, Trump has reduced the possibility of developing countries banding into coalitions to oppose the reciprocal tariffs. Divide and prosper is the mantra for success behind forum shifting.

In an attempt at diminishing the economic prospects of China, against which the big stick may not be effective, Trump is resorting to brinkmanship. With China not showing any sign of backing off, Trump's strategy is likely to centre around finding a face-saving solution. Else his credibility could take a hit, which might even encourage some of the larger developing countries to think twice before offering concessions to the US in their bilateral negotiations.



GAME ON: US will be in a hurry to do deals before US consumers feel the pinch of tariffs

It is relevant to note that by focusing on high tariffs of India and many other developing countries, Trump appears to have won the battle of perception. No doubt, the tariffs of the US are substantially lower than those prevailing in many countries. However, this is directly related to the outcome of the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations, which entitled many developing countries to maintain high tariffs. The success of issue framing can be gauged from the reality that most commentators do not even make a passing reference to Trump's tariffs being illegal, even though they breach multiple commitments of the US at the WTO.

Where does India find itself in this web of negotiating strategies? Trump has said that America's tariff negotiations with India are "coming along great," and a trade deal with New Delhi may happen soon. But even before the US imposed reciprocal tariffs, the two countries had decided to initiate negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement. India is likely to use this opportunity to seek reduction in tariffs imposed on it and perhaps also for securing new market access in labour-intensive products. Given the asymmetry in the economic and political clout between India and the US, India may be compelled to bargain on terms set by the US. However, there could be a deadlock at the negotiating table if the US insists on extracting concessions from India in sensitive areas such as govt procurement, agriculture and intellectual property rights.

What strategy should India adopt for grappling with such an eventuality?

While India engages in bilateral negotiation with the US, it must not forego the possibility of collectively working with other countries for protecting and promoting its trade interest vis-a-vis the US. India must also work towards preventing a power-based regime from replacing the rules-based trade order. This would strengthen its hands in bilateral negotiations and also increase its options.

Overall, multiple negotiating strategies appear to be at play behind the US tariffs. While Trump seeks to leverage his country's asymmetric power at the negotiating table, whether the strategies will succeed is likely to depend on how his administration exploits two other ingredients for negotiating success — information and time. By negotiating separately and simultaneously with many countries, the US has positioned itself to have complete information about the concessions being put on the table by various countries. Most countries are likely to be unaware of what concessions others are offering to the US. The US is likely to exploit this situation of significant information asymmetry for extracting maximum concession from others, while conceding little ground itself.

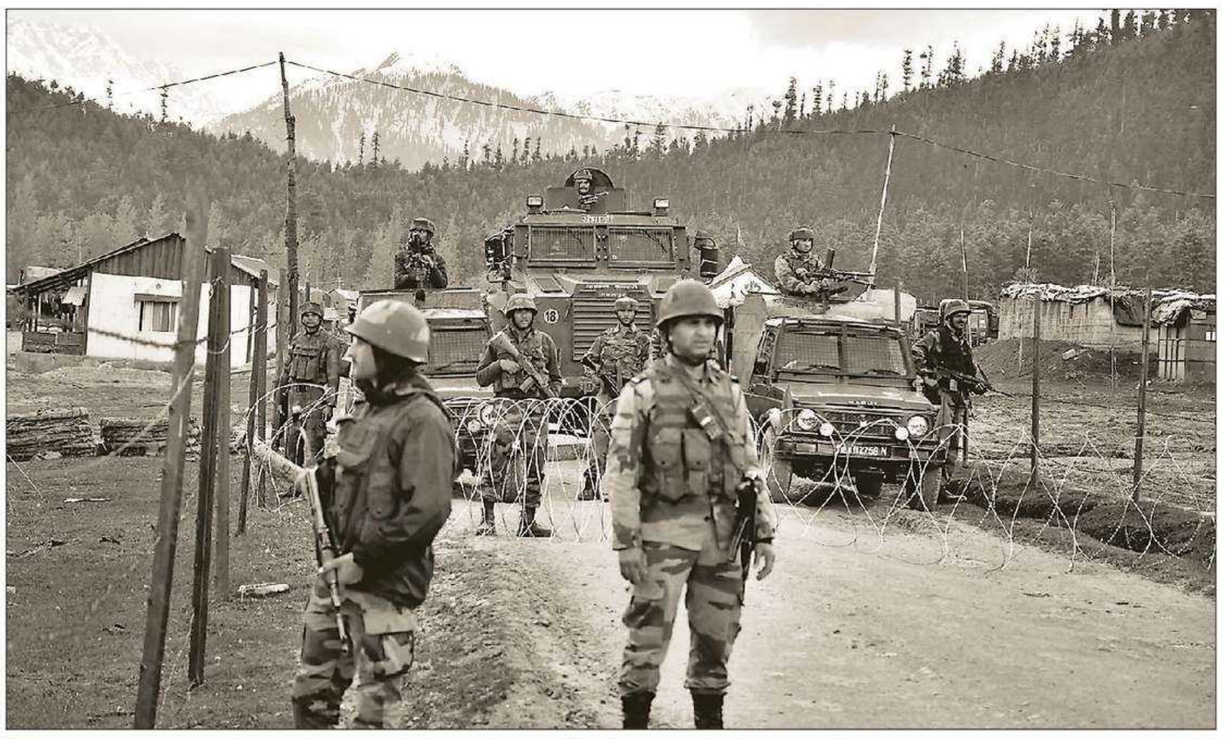
Further, from the perspective of US strategy, it is essential that countries are rushed into concluding the bilateral negotiations before US consumers start feeling the pain of empty retail shelves. Time may also be of essence in containing further uncertainty in financial markets. This might explain the rationale for the US seeking to conclude many bilateral negotiations within the 90-day period. The coming few months are likely to provide a fascinating glimpse of whether the strategies being deployed by the US help it in securing what it aspired for during the Doha Round and maybe much more. ■

The author is an international trade expert and author of the recently published book 'Strategies in GATT and WTO Negotiations'. Views are personal.

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

Terror crosses borders, so must consequences

The need is to consolidate an economic, strategic, and geopolitical offensive against Pakistan and break the back of its sponsorship of terror



India must not only play defence but also script an audacious offensive across land, sea, and air. HT PHOTO



Abhishek Singhvi



Akash Kumar Singh

In the orchestra of global affairs, silence is complicity. John F Kennedy famously said, "Geography has made us neighbours. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners and necessity has made us allies. Those whom God has so joined together, let no man put asunder."

India needs to roar to teach a few strong and reverse lessons on geography, history, and economics to its neighbour. When violence, criminality, and bloodshed cross borders, no country can afford to remain a silent spectator. Enough of playing second fiddle to global laziness, it is time to draw the bow and create a symphony of consequences.

Firstly, Pakistan needs to be hit at its most vulnerable nerve — its economic underbelly. The economy is the spinal cord of any terror network, and Pakistan's is no exception. Instruments such as the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)+ status (European Union giving trade preferences to countries, including Pakistan) and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Grey List (penalising nations promoting terrorism) must be leveraged against Pakistan. Yet, the real rot lies deeper. The UN Drugs and Crime Office (UNODC) has underlined that close to 90% of the raw material for heroin originates from Afghanistan. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) transports this opium, processes it into heroin, and rakes in blood money — fortunes that are then laundered abroad and funnelled into terror coffers. India must declare an all-out war on this narcotics empire. A coordinated strike — with the Border Security Force, the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and other agencies — should choke the drug routes at sea and land, cutting off the oxygen supply to the ISI's terror tentacles. As is said, "Cut off the head of the snake, and the body will wither."

Secondly, it is imperative to keep Pakistan entangled on multiple fronts. Perpetually avaricious, Pakistan remains locked in a historical tussle with Afghanistan over the Durand Line, now bleeding profusely at the hands of the very Taliban it once fostered. India must seize the moment — deepen ties with Afghanistan, engage segments of the Taliban via trusted third parties, and widen fissures within Pakistan on this issue. By isolating the ISI-backed Haqqani Network, India can ensure that Pakistan continues to reap the whirlwind it sowed. A similar thing should be done with the help of Iran at the Baluchistan front.

Thirdly, at the global stage, we must redouble our efforts to hold Pakistan accountable under UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1373 — mechanisms designed to cripple terrorism at its source.

Fourthly, it is high time the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan be shown the door. If diplomatic eviction is not immediately feasible, India must ban its operations outright. This toothless tiger has prowled aimlessly for decades — now, it must kick the bucket once and for all.

Fifthly, Pakistan remains a cauldron of cruelty at the internal front. Ethnicities and communities like the Hazaras and Ahmadiyyas live under the sword arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances. India must extend a similar moral and diplomatic embrace to these groups as also to the Uyghurs in China, who have repeatedly stood shoulder to shoulder with India, including after Pahalgam. As the idiom goes, "Charity begins at home, but justice must travel far and wide."

Sixthly, another layer of danger emerging is the unholy trinity of Pakistan, Turkey, and Malaysia. This axis, masquerading as saviours of the *Ummah*, has historically left a trail of blood — from the Armenian genocide to the persecution of Greeks, Assyrians, and now Kashmiris.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and its allies have blossomed into India's strategic and cultural partners. India must not merely stand at the crossroads; it must take the high road by creating a coalition of civilisations — a league of nations that have been victims of genocides and terrorism, united not by grievances alone, but by a shared pledge to anti-terror memory and justice.

Seventhly, while the world erects grand memorials — the Holocaust Museum in Washington, the Armenian Genocide Museum in Yerevan — India remains amnesiac about the horrors inflicted upon it. The time is ripe for a Terror Museum in Srinagar — a living, breathing testimony to Pakistan's decades-long jihad against Kashmir and India. Let the world bear witness. Let history be etched in marble and memory.

> PAKISTAN NEEDS TO BE HIT AT ITS MOST VULNERABLE NERVE — ITS ECONOMIC UNDERBELLY. THE ECONOMY IS THE SPINAL CORD OF ANY TERROR NETWORK, AND PAKISTAN'S IS NO EXCEPTION

Eighthly, India must actively support the dissident voices from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan. Those hounded out by Pakistan's Punjabi-dominated military elite must be empowered to establish governments-in-exile. If Jawaharlal Nehru could lay the groundwork for the Tibetan government-in-exile in the 1950s, the Narendra Modi government can surely walk in those footsteps today.

Lastly, India must unleash its digital warriors. Even more than human intelligence, we are among the best in technical intelligence. There is also a need to launch a digital strike. Without firing a single bullet, we can paralyse enemy infrastructure, leak military secrets, and confound adversary narratives. As the winds of digital warfare blow stronger, India must remember: When terror crosses borders, so must consequences — swiftly, silently, and surgically.

In this long-drawn chess game of survival and supremacy, India must think three moves ahead. We must not only play defence but also script an audacious offensive across land, seas, air, and public minds. For too long, Pakistan has mistaken our patience for passivity. It is time to break the illusion, hit hard wherever and whenever necessary, and exhibit the might of India. The process of these nine initiatives must be a continuous, ongoing process, not a reactive move against another Uri or Pulwama. History is unkind to those who stand at the water's edge, watching the tides of change pass by them. It rewards those who ride the storm and reshape the shoreline.

Abhishek Singhvi is a fourth term MP, jurist, former chair, Parliamentary Standing Committees on Commerce, Law and Home, and former additional solicitor general of India. He is also member, Congress Working Committee, senior national spokesperson, Congress, and chair of the party's department on law, human rights & RTI. Akash Kumar Singh is a PhD scholar at the Special Centre for National Security Studies, JNU and a former LAMP fellow. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



Portrait of Pope Francis: His life and his message

I wish I had met Pope Francis. I wouldn't say that of other famous people but of the Pope it's true. He had a warm, genial, happy face. He smiled a lot and each time his eyes would light up. His laughter was heartfelt and genuine, his affection for children sincere. He liked being with people. He saw himself as one of them.

Much of this was obvious from the pictures I saw during his lifetime. It's what I discovered after his death that's really endeared him. Today I want to share with you the picture of Pope Francis that I've been able to research.

In the style of St Francis of Assisi, whose name he took as his own papal name, the Pope lived very modestly. He shunned the grand papal home in the Vatican and chose instead a small two-room apartment in a guest house. He wore battered brown shoes. He would frequently invite his guards to breakfast and often dine in the Vatican workers' canteen.

Before he became a priest, Francis was a bouncer in Buenos Aires. Perhaps that's why his approach to the priesthood was very different to other priests. His central aim was to embrace the poor. He saw the Church and his faith through their eyes. Not surprisingly, they called him the Bishop of the Slums.

It probably also underlies one of the most amazing things he did which the world barely knew about. After the Israel-Hamas war broke out in October 2023, it's reported that "He would make nightly phone calls to the Holy Family Church, the only Catholic church in Gaza, to offer prayers and words of encouragement to both Christians and Muslims sheltering within its walls."

The fact so few knew of this is perhaps typical of Francis. He did it because he wanted to. Not because he was seeking credit or publicity. I'm more surprised the few who knew did not make a greater effort to ensure it was better known.

Francis was the first Pope to soften the Catholic Church's attitude to homosexuality. "Who am I to judge?", he famously asked. He was also the first to believe that divorced or re-married Catholics could receive the sacrament. Even though four conservative Cardinals publicly opposed him, he did not waver.

Of course, the Pope was traditional and conservative on issues like contraception, abortion, same-sex marriage and transgender recognition. As I was told, he was a very liberal Catholic Pope but he was still a Catholic Pope. That wasn't said to limit praise but to illustrate his willingness to push the boundaries.

All of this points to one simple fact. Pope Francis cared about people. The position he took on the issue of immigrants and refugees proves this. His first formal visit as Pope was to the island of Lampedusa to meet illegal migrants from North Africa. Weeks before he fell ill, he criticised United States President Donald Trump's policies linking illegal immigrants with criminality. I can't think of any other head of State who went so far.

The late Pope was also the first to formally enter into a dialogue with Islam. He held an open-air mass in the United Arab Emirates, the first ever on the Arabian peninsula. This act of inter-religious fraternity was attacked by conservatives. He simply ignored their position.

There are aspects of the Pope's life where, arguably, he failed. He was not particularly adept at handling allegations of corruption in the Vatican, even when they concerned the Secretariat of State. Cardinal Angelo Becciu may have been imprisoned in 2023, but the wider problem was not really tackled. But then none of his predecessors was any better.

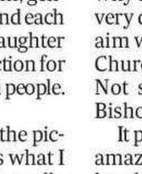
> POPE FRANCIS CARED ABOUT PEOPLE. THE POSITION HE TOOK ON THE ISSUE OF REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS PROVES THIS. HIS FIRST FORMAL VISIT AS POPE WAS TO THE ISLAND OF LAMPEDUSA TO MEET ILLEGAL MIGRANTS FROM NORTH AFRICA

However, Francis may have ensured the Catholic Church will continue as he left it. Of the 135 Cardinals eligible to vote for his successor, 108 were appointed by him. Of them, 53 are European but 82 are from Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Oceania. So, will his successor be another non-European? The odds suggest he could be.

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

America will have to pay for targeting campuses

For more than a century, the US has drawn some of India's brightest minds in pursuit of world-class education. From BR Ambedkar, who went on to draft India's Constitution, to business titans like Mukesh Ambani and Azim Premji, American universities have helped shape generations of Indian thinkers, builders, and changemakers. Today, however, under the Trump administration's increasingly hardline immigration policies, that legacy is being threatened. The consequences of these actions could reverberate for decades to come.



Frank F Islam

In recent weeks, reports from US campuses have sent a chill through the Indian student community. Thousands of international students on F-1 visas have been detained, deported, or denied re-entry for seemingly minor infractions. According to the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the records of more than 4,700 international students have been terminated by US Customs and Immigration Enforcement. Half of these students are estimated to be Indian nationals.

The reasons for these terminations range from immigration violations to allegations of advocating pro-Hamas positions. It appears though the majority of the cases stem from interactions with law enforcement. Sharvari Dalal-Dheini, senior director of government relations at AILA, told CNN-News18 last week, "Many of the so-called crimes they were charged with or picked up for are things that everyday Americans wouldn't even consider crimes, and certainly not college students."

In certain instances, students were deported for traffic offences, including speeding, sometimes just five to ten miles over the limit.

There are many troubling aspects to the current crackdown on F-1 visa holders.

Most of the students impacted, according to reports, are from Asia, West Asia, or Africa, with Indian students making up the majority of them. This is not surprising since nearly 30% of all international students enrolled in US universities are Indian nationals According to the Open Doors analysis, of the approximately 1.13 million international students on F-1 visas during the 2023–2024 academic year, nearly 332,000 were from India.

A recent AILA review of 327 visa revocation cases revealed that 60% involved Indian students. This disproportionate representation of Indian students is troubling. It suggests that these students are caught in the crossfire of an administration intent on restricting legal immigration, particularly from specific regions, under the guise of security and order. Much like the administration's tariff policies, the crackdown on F-1 visa holders could have long-term negative consequences.

It is quite possible that a significant number of Indian students will choose to stay home or seek opportunities in countries more welcoming to international talent. That would not only be a loss for the students, but a setback for the US as well.



The trust broken in classrooms today may take decades to repair. REUTERS

To grasp the gravity of the current crackdown, one needs to look no further than the US tech industry. Two of the most influential and consequential companies in the world — Microsoft and Google — are led by former F-1 visa holders: Satya Nadella and Sundar Pichai. In addition, tens of thousands of former international students now occupy leadership roles across the American economy, from senior engineers and startup founders to university presidents and deans, strengthening institutions that help define the nation's global edge.

The crackdown would not only have intellectual costs. It would also have economic costs for the US. International students contribute substantially to the US economy. According to research by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, these students added $43.8 billion to the US economy in the 2023–2024 academic year and supported 378,175 jobs across the country. Indian students alone might be contributing more than $10 billion annually to the US economy through tuition, housing, and living expenses.

Universities themselves are feeling the strain. Even before this latest crackdown, enrollment of Indian students in US universities had begun to decline due to tightening visa rules, hostile rhetoric, and rising costs. Now, as stories of raids, detentions, and revocations circulate across WhatsApp groups and social media forums, this damage is accelerating. With alternatives like Europe and Australia increasingly seen as safer bets, the US is losing its reputation as a welcoming destination for international talent.

What began as a broad campaign of hostility toward immigrants — from the mass deportations of undocumented families to the demonisation of H-1B visa holders — has now turned university campuses from havens of learning into frontlines of suspicion. Sadly, for the US this moment transcends universities. At stake is nothing less than America's identity. Historically, this immigrant nation — as John F Kennedy referred to the US — has flourished because of its openness to embracing immigrants of all types including the world's dreamers, scholars, and builders. That openness is now under siege.

Unless it is reversed America will pay an enormous cost for this shortsightedness. The trust broken in classrooms today may take decades to repair. And, when the world's brightest students stop knocking, the door may never open in quite the same way again.

Frank F Islam is an entrepreneur, civic leader, and thought leader based in Washington DC. The views expressed are personal

{ ANOTHER DAY }

Namita Bhandare



Justifying murder in the name of family honour

You might just miss it tucked away inside your newspaper. A few paragraphs that don't even begin to tell the story. The one of love, and dying for it. The one where choosing a partner is not just a radical act but also life-threatening.

The serious-looking bearded man, HM, tells me that he is a "survivor" of a painfully familiar tale. Falls in love with the "wrong" sort, as in wrong caste. There's another complication: She had been married off as a child, so, for her to fall in love as an adult with somebody else becomes a question of family honour; an honour vested in her and dependent on her toeing the line.

HM from Jaipur tells me about the whispered phone calls. The restrictions on her movements. The threats. The physical abuse from her family pressuring her to fulfil the terms of an illegal marriage. And then he learned she had died. Her family said by suicide. No police complaint was ever filed. No case registered. That was in 2018.

I met HM at a consultation on honour killings — the inappropriately named term for the murder of young people by their parents for marrying against caste and faith.

Organised by Dhanak of Humanity, a non-profit founded in 2004 by Asif Iqbal to help interfaith and inter-caste couples, the consultation coincides with a Supreme Court ruling earlier this week that confirmed the conviction of 11 people in the horrific 2003 Kannagi-Murugesan double murder where a Dalit man and Vanniyar woman in Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu were killed in public for their crime of falling in love. "At the root of this crime is the deeply entrenched hierarchical caste system in India, and ironically, this most dishonourable act goes by the name of honour-killing," the court noted.

In 2022, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 18 such killings. That number, say activists, is a massive underestimation as killings are often passed off as suicides or illnesses. When the father or brother is complicit, families are loath to report. And even when cases are reported, conviction is a problem with witnesses turning hostile. "This is a crime where the whole community colludes to cover up," a police officer in Hisar told me in June last year.

This week alone, two cases made it to the papers. One in Amreli, Gujarat, where the father of a Muslim woman strangled her after she fell in love with a Hindu man and refused to marry the man her father had picked for her. The second is in Jalgaon, Maharashtra where a retired CRPF officer shot dead his daughter and injured her husband. Two years had passed since their marriage, but the father had not been placated because his son-in-law wasn't as educated as his daughter.

Controlling the autonomy of adult daughters in the name of protecting them remains a concern of recent state laws that make it virtually impossible for interfaith couples to marry by conversion. Modern India's first uniform civil code has a clause that mandates registration by couples who cohabit. In the name of protection, the Maharashtra assembly in December 2022 set up a committee to track interfaith and inter-caste marriages. "Women are not seen as autonomous human beings," senior advocate Vrinda Grover said at the consultation. "Yet, they carry the honour of the family, the community, the nation."

The Supreme Court has, in the past, come out strongly against such killings with a slew of guidelines including safe houses in every district — a directive that only Haryana has followed. Maybe a modern society needs to revisit Periyar EV Ramasamy's 1925 advocacy of a "self-respect marriage". It was conducted without rituals, premised on the idea of equality and dignity. Above all, freedom for young people to love as they wish.

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

Financial freedom for women

This is with reference to "In Bihar, women script a story of empowerment" by Lalita Panicker (April 27). Making rural women empowered not only makes them financially independent but helps them improve their lifestyle and their families as well. This imparts financial freedom to women.

Abhilasha Gupta

After the Pahalgam attack

This is with reference to "After Pahalgam, a nation united in battling terror" by Gopalkrishna Gandhi (April 27). The article made me feel that we as nation can respond to such attacks by remaining united, empathetic and humane. Though this very hard to secure in a politically charged environment.

Dinesh Reddy

II.

The widespread condemnation of the Pahalgam attack by the Kashmiri public is a powerful message. It reflects a growing alignment with peace. This must be nurtured by ensuring that Kashmiris are treated with dignity.

Sanjay Chopra

Write to us at: **letters@hindustantimes.com**

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