

HOW DEEPPFAKES ARE CREATING NEW RISKS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

OPINION

DR FAUZIA KHAN



With the rise in the usage of digital media by Indians, a new challenge has arisen in the form of synthetic and manipulated media, particularly deepfakes. The term, created from "deep learning" and "fake", refers to content altered or generated using AI to appear convincingly real. While this technology is misused globally for financial fraud and political manipulation, its most serious impact in India has been gendered. Women increasingly find their faces inserted into explicit or violent content without their consent, creating significant harm to dignity, privacy and social reputation.

REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT MUST LEAD THE RESPONSE

The Indian government has recognised the seriousness of this issue. The National Commission for Women has also taken note of this issue, proposing a new section in the Bharatiya Nyaya

Sanhita to define 'modified content'. These steps reflect that the Indian government is beginning to seriously tackle the problem. In October 2025, it released the Draft Synthetic Information IT Rules 2025, which require watermarks on AI-generated content and mandate user declarations for uploaded material. However, regulatory clarity is essential, and unfortunately, these rules create more problems than they solve. They broadly define anything made or altered digitally that looks real as "Synthetically Generated Information", or SGI. Apar Gupta of the Internet Freedom Foundation notes that these draft definitions are broad enough to include ordinary digital tools such as Instagram filters, automated captions, or even basic image edits. The Rules provide penal consequences in case the wrong watermark is used, or SGI is used to commit an 'unlawful act'. This is extremely broad wording and can be used to censor any content. He states that "The combination of vague definitions, platform censorship and proactive monitoring can be used to remove content critical of the government." It risks placing a compliance burden on legitimate content creators without necessarily improving protection for victims of non-consensual synthetic

intimate imagery. We need process transparency, not punitive or reactive content moderation, he concludes. Regulations intended to address online gender-based harm must therefore be narrowly tailored, focusing on the deliberate creation and circulation of manipulated intimate content rather than covering everyday digital expression.

Along with legislative reform, India must strengthen its enforcement capacity. Cybercrime units remain chronically understaffed and undertrained, and often lack the forensic tools required to detect manipulated content quickly. Reducing delays in take-down processes and investigations is as important as drafting new rules.

TECHNOLOGY HAS OUTPACED PROTECTION

Despite emerging policy responses, the tools used to create deepfakes have become more accessible than ever. Free mobile applications can replace faces, generate synthetic videos or remove clothing from photographs within minutes, even for users who have no technical expertise. The Make It Real report 2025, released by the Rati Foundation in collaboration with Tattle Civic Tech, documents how these tools have made forms of abuse once considered extremely uncommon.

Digital platforms face a similar challenge. Synthetic content spreads quickly and often outruns detection systems. With cybercrime units already overstretched, manipulated images remain online long enough to be downloaded, mirrored, forwarded and



archived. This creates a situation where complete removal is extremely difficult, even after the content is proven false. These trends show that offensive technology is advancing faster than legal and protective institutions.

UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN IMPACT

Although deepfakes are produced through artificial intelligence, their effects are felt in everyday life. When a manipulated video that appears to show a woman in an explicit or compromising situation begins circulating, the consequences are serious. Even if proven false, an affected person may experience fear of judgement, anxiety about being recognised by acquaintances, concern

about workplace reputation or uncertainty about where the content has travelled. The knowledge that the material cannot be fully removed from the internet adds to the distress.

The Rati Foundation, a charity that helps tackle the issue of online safety in India, released a report titled Make It Real, which found that nearly 70 percent of abuse cases reported by Indian women in 2025 involved AI-generated manipulated images. It also noted that women are increasingly targeted by strangers rather than by individuals known to them.

Well-known incidents highlight the scale of the problem. The 2023 manipulated video of actress Rashmika Mandanna, widely reported by nation-

al media, showed how real such content can appear. Journalist Rana Ayyub has spoken in international publications about being targeted with deepfake sexual imagery as part of organised online harassment. In Assam, influencer Archita Phukan faced non-consensual distribution and monetisation of deepfake content created by a disgruntled ex-partner, a case reported in Mathrubumi and The Economic Times.

Social responses often intensify the harm. Families may feel uncertain or uncomfortable, especially when unfamiliar with digital manipulation. Adolescents may not understand the seriousness of forwarding manipulated content. Additionally, women face a

lot of resistance from their communities to even file a complaint with the cybercrime cell, in order to avoid 'further attention'.

THE ROLE OF PLATFORMS, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Platforms such as Meta and Google must develop stronger mechanisms for identifying and removing manipulated intimate imagery and provide clear pathways to solve urgent user complaints. Regulations should support these processes while avoiding unnecessary burdens on lawful communication. The Draft Rules need to be altered to facilitate this.

Additionally, schools and colleges should incorporate digital literacy into their curriculum, with em-

phasis on consent, privacy, responsible sharing and awareness about synthetic media.

Deepfake content may begin as a prank among classmates and end up resurfacing in later years in ways that damage a person's privacy, dignity and opportunities. Parents also play an important role. Open conversations about online safety and digital behaviour help prevent harm. Families should be encouraged to respond to victims with support. These social institutions form an important part of the broader response towards deepfakes.

CONCLUSION

Deepfakes represent a fast-evolving form of gender-based online harm that requires coordinated and carefully designed action. India must adopt precise regulatory definitions focused on non-consensual synthetic intimate content, invest in stronger cyber forensic capacity, and encourage transparent platform processes for swift takedowns. Digital literacy and public awareness must also become central to prevention, ensuring that women feel supported rather than isolated when such incidents occur. On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, institutions, communities and platforms must work together to ensure that technology does not become a tool that undermines the safety and dignity of women.

Dr Fauzia Khan, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, and former Minister of State for GAD, Education, Health, Mahasabha

Sovereignty, sanctions and legal complexities of buying oil from a state at war

OPINION

PROF. ABHINAV MEHROTRA & DR. BISWANATH GUPTA



The Russia-Ukraine conflict has prompted governments worldwide to reshape global energy flows through sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and economic incentives. These actions reflect political and strategic choices, but they also raise deeper questions about the legal foundations of energy governance, the limits of external pressure, and the balance between state sovereignty and collective security. Understanding this balance is essential, as energy markets are deeply intertwined with global stability, eco-



nomic recovery, and international norms.

PERMANENT SOVEREIGNTY OVER NATURAL RESOURCES

A central principle of international energy law is the doctrine of Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources (PSNR), articulated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1803 (1962). PSNR affirms that states retain full authority over the exploration, development, and sale of their natural resources. Under general international law, states are

not legally required to stop purchasing oil from a country engaged in armed conflict. Decisions to restrict trade based on geopolitical considerations, human rights concerns, or alliance commitments are political choices rather than legal obligations. Only sanctions adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) create binding duties for all states.

THE ROLE OF SANCTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

Sanctions, when applied carefully and multilaterally, are legitimate instruments of diplomacy. They serve to signal international condemnation, restrict resources available to aggressors, and uphold fundamental norms such as sovereignty and territorial integrity. The global response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict illustrates the belief that targeted economic measures can deter escalation and demonstrate solidarity with affected states. Sanctions can thus reinforce global norms while exerting pressure without resorting to direct military engagement.

CHALLENGES OF UNI-



LATERAL SANCTIONS AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Tensions emerge when unilateral sanctions or extraterritorial pressures are imposed. India's approach, guided by "strategic autonomy," emphasizes diplomatic engagement, economic stability, and protection of domestic interests. Legally, India's policy does not violate international rules. Politically, it reflects the challenge of navigating global pressures

while safeguarding national priorities. Strategic autonomy allows states to maintain sovereignty while participating in a highly interconnected and politicized global energy system, highlighting the limits of externally imposed coercion.

BALANCING SOVEREIGNTY AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

An equitable and rules-based energy order must simultaneously respect state

sovereignty and support coordinated international responses to crises. Achieving this balance is complex, as energy markets, supply chains, and security dynamics are closely linked. National decision-making cannot occur in isolation, yet cooperative action is essential to maintain stability. Effective governance requires reconciling domestic priorities with shared international responsibilities to ensure resilience, fairness, and predictability in

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE SANCTIONS

Sanctions illustrate the tension between sovereignty and collective action. Poorly designed or inconsistently applied measures can disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, distort markets, or erode trust among states. Effective sanctions should be transparent, predictable, multilateral, and carefully targeted. A nuanced approach ensures sanctions

remain proportionate, legitimate, and fair, avoiding arbitrary or politically selective outcomes. By respecting the legal rights of states while signaling international norms, sanctions can function as a measured tool to uphold order without undermining sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

Sovereignty remains a cornerstone of the international system, yet no state operates in isolation. Balancing national prerogatives with collective responsibility is crucial for a stable, equitable, and rules-based global energy order. Carefully designed sanctions, grounded in multilateral oversight, can uphold international norms while allowing states to pursue domestic priorities. Recognizing both the authority of states over their resources and the necessity of coordinated international action is essential for fairness, resilience, and stability in an interconnected world.

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CURRENCIES	
US \$	₹89.30
UK Pound	₹114.60
Euro	₹103.39

INDICES	
BSE	553.6
Sensex	26720.38 +110.87
Midcap	47230.39 -5.13
Smallcap	62121.55 -201.06
NSE	26720.38 +110.87
Nifty	26720.38 +110.87
Nifty 50	26720.38 +110.87
Nifty 100	26720.38 +110.87
Nifty 200	26720.38 +110.87
Nifty 500	26720.38 +110.87
Nifty 1000	26720.38 +110.87

COMMODITIES	
Gold (10 gm in ₹)	553.6
Silver (1 kg in ₹)	553.6
Crude (1 barrel in ₹)	553.6
Natural Gas (1 m³ in ₹)	553.6

MONEY MARKET	
Call rate	4.75 -5.45
91-day FBR	5.35
1-year Gilt	5.51
5-year Gilt	6.16
10-year Gilt	6.51

IN BRIEF

Demand to sustain FY26 growth

BENGALURU: India will withstand trade-related uncertainties and maintain growth through the rest of 2025/26 (April-March), with the help of strong demand, steady public spending and easing inflation, the government said in its monthly economic report. Macroeconomic developments in October indicate a stable and resilient domestic economy, supported by easing price pressures, it said.

Bandhan loans

CALCUTTA: Bandhan Bank will sell NPAs over 180 days past due with principal outstanding worth ₹2,212.17 crore and auction the written-off loan portfolio of ₹3,719.14 crore as on September 30, 2025.

Adani purchase

MUMBAI: Adani Group on Thursday said it will buy a 72.8 per cent stake in Flight Simulation Technique Centre (FSTC) for ₹20 crore, marking the conglomerate's foray into the pilot training segment.

Whirlpool stake

NEW DELHI: Whirlpool Mauritius, a promoter entity of Whirlpool of India Ltd, on Thursday divested a 11.23 per cent stake in the home appliances maker for ₹1,499 crore through an open market transaction.

CALCUTTA FRIDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2025

From infra to medicine, industry leaders see artificial intelligence as a multiplier for human potential

AI not a threat: Bhattacharya

Pinak Ghosh

Calcutta: Amid persistent anxieties that artificial intelligence (AI) will displace human workers, Arundhati Bhattacharya, president and CEO of Salesforce-South Asia, on Thursday offered a different perspective, arguing that AI is not a threat to jobs but a strategic tool that could help developing economies enhance service delivery in healthcare, education and the public sector.

Pointing to divergent dynamics in advanced and developing economies, Bhattacharya, in a keynote address at the Infocom 2025, a flagship event of the ABP Group, said advanced economies stand to benefit by deploying AI and robotic agents to counter labour shortages.

"In the developed world, there is already a labour shortage. The next wave is going to be robotic agents, and that is where they will be able to make good of their loss of labour. It may not go entirely,



(left) Arundhati Bhattacharya and Bhaskar Ghosh on Day 1 of Infocom 2025 at the Hyatt Regency in Calcutta on Thursday. Pictures by Sanat K Sinha

but to some extent, sure," she said, adding that the context of developing countries like India is different. "In the developing world, there is no shortage of people. But I think there is a big reason to lean into AI. We (India) are a very populous nation, and in a brick and mortar manner, there is no way that you can give the service that these people actually deserve, whether it be services like medicine, education or citizen services that the government should provide," Bhattacharya said.

She pointed to crowded

classrooms and overstretched state hospitals as examples of systemic limitations that AI can help ease. "If we want to improve the quality of life of the people who go to state hospitals, if we want to improve the kind of pedagogy that we can give to 60 students in a class, AI at long last allows us to do all of this — allows us to target treatment, create tailored curricula for students, allows a person who may not be very good in communication to write an intelligible letter," she said.

Bhattacharya said AI can

act as a catalyst for restoring human dignity in essential services. "For the first time, we are getting a chance in this technological age for humans to become more human," she said. "But we have to do it well. We have to remember that there is an ethical use for it, if we do it for the benefit of mankind, if we do it without allowing it to become the controlling factor, if we do it with full understanding of how we control it, and guard it and direct it," she added.

Industry leaders at the Infocom echoed her stance. Bhaskar Ghosh, chief strategy and innovation officer at Accenture, said AI should be viewed as a capability multiplier rather than a headcount reducer. "Suppose I have to lift a weight, maybe I have to lift 50 kg. But with a machine, I can lift 500 kg with lesser effort. Think of AI as exactly the same thing, only instead of lifting weights, it

can enhance the IQ of the workers. We should use AI not for replacing workers but to enhance the capability of each and every person in the enterprise with the power of AI," Ghosh said.

"What I strongly believe in the next 3-5 years down the line, every individual in the world will have a personal cognitive brain. Every business will have a digital enterprise brain and every nation will have a national digital brain," Ghosh added.

Mohapatra, head of customer solutions and CIO advisory at AWS, drew parallels with the cloud revolution. He recalled similar fears in the late 2000s that operational engineers would become redundant. "With the explosion of cloud technology, more opportunities have opened up. We are exactly at the same inflection point. But the fundamentals are not going to change," he said.

Experts urge robust tech foundation

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta: Artificial intelligence dominated discussions on the opening day of Infocom 2025, with experts highlighting the surge in AI and quantum technology applications from drug discovery to predicting bond price movements.

Stephen Barak, chairman and managing general partner, REDDS Capital outlined ten breakthrough technologies — from AI and quantum computing to robotics and renewable energy — that he said will define future enterprise competitiveness.

Despite the momentum, speakers warned that AI's potential cannot be fully realised without a robust technological foundation. "We need to build a strong foundation to run AI," said Raju Vegesna, CMD, Sify Technologies, during a fireside chat with Arnab Basu, client and industries leader at PwC India. He noted

Portal for unclaimed assets in the works

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta: The finance ministry is working with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to build a single, consolidated portal that would allow savers and retail investors to recover unclaimed assets across multiple financial instruments, including dormant bank deposits, pension balances, equity holdings and unpaid dividends.

The initiative aims to streamline what is currently a fragmented, time-consuming process and bolster consumer protection in one of the world's fastest-growing retail investment markets.

The portal is expected to be launched soon, M Nagaraju, secretary of department of financial services said on Thursday, while speaking at a camp on 'Aapki Poonji Apka Adhikar' (Your Money Your Right) organised by Punjab National Bank in New Delhi.

Equity markets hit all-time highs

Bengaluru: India's equity benchmarks ended little changed on Thursday, as investors took profits after the indices scaled record highs amid a favourable macroeconomic backdrop and boosted by hopes of a local rate cut next week.

The Nifty 50 rose 0.04 per cent to 26,720.38 and the BSE Sensex settled 0.13 per cent higher at 55,360.39, both closing just 0.5 per cent below their all-time highs hit in September 2024. Meanwhile, the broader small-cap index fell 0.5 per cent, while mid-caps edged flat.

The Nifty and the Sensex rose as much as 0.4 per cent and 0.5 per cent, respectively, earlier in the session to all-time highs of 26,730.45 and 55,365.86, driven by rate-sensitive financials amid growing conviction of policy easing by the Reserve Bank of India next week.



"The market setup, at least for the large-cap benchmarks, remains very favourable for a continued rally," said Sunny Agrawal, head of fundamental research at SEICAPS Securities. "This is supported by imminent rate-cut hopes from both the Federal Reserve and the RBI, improving domestic earnings, tax cuts, eased val-

uations, stable domestic flows, benign inflation and robust economic growth prospects," Agrawal said.

The benchmarks, however, ended flat as broad-based profit booking at record highs offset the strength in financials. "Bouts of profit-taking are inevitable at all-time highs and will continue until the De-

cember earnings season meets expectations and justifies valuations in the broader small-cap and mid-cap segments." Among Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Tech and HDFC Bank were the major gainers. Heavyweight financials rose 0.5 per cent, while banks and private banks gained about 0.3 per cent each.

Foreign Institutional Investors bought equities worth ₹4,778.03 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors also purchased stocks worth ₹6,247.93 crore in the previous trade.

Among individual stocks, Ashok Leyland jumped 7.3 per cent to a record high after the truck manufacturer's unit approved its merger with real estate firm NDL Ventures.

Reuters

India-UAE trade talks progress

New Delhi: India and the UAE have discussed issues related to market access, data sharing, allocation of goods import quota, anti-dumping and services to boost economic ties, the commerce ministry said on Thursday.

These issues were discussed during a meeting of the Joint Committee under the India-UAE CEPA (comprehensive economic partnership agreement). CEPA is a kind of free trade agreement (FTA). "The two sides conducted a comprehensive review of progress under CEPA and detailed discussions were held on market access issues, data sharing, allocation of Goods TRQ (tariff rate quota), anti-dumping matters, services, Rules of Origin, BIS licensing," it said.

The Indian side also

briefed the UAE on its recent decision to allocate Gold TRQ through a transparent competitive bidding process.

The two sides also deliberated upon enhancing regulatory cooperation in pharmaceuticals, resolution of issues related to Certificates of Origin and early signing of the MoU on food safety and technical requirements between the agricultural and processed food products export development authority (APEDA), India and ministry of climate change and environment, UAE.

The bilateral trade has crossed \$100 billion in 2024-25, which is an increase of 19.6 per cent over 2023-24.

The two have fixed a target to increase non-oil and non-precious metal trade to \$100 billion by 2030.

PTI



Queue of food delivery workers in front of a restaurant in Calcutta

Food service projected to pass \$125bn by 2030

New Delhi: India's food service market is likely to cross \$125 billion by 2030, with the organised sector expected to double from its current level and overtake the unorganised segment, according to a report.

In 2025, the food service market in the country is estimated at \$78 billion, according to the report titled 'How India Eats' by Swiggy & Kearney. The food service market stood at \$49 billion in 2019 and is estimated to reach over \$125 billion by 2030, the report said.

The organised segment will drive over 60 per cent of the overall growth in food services, and overtake the unorganised segment, it added.

The food services segment in India presents a massive headroom for growth, with the current contribution to GDP at 1.9 per cent compared with 5 per cent in China and 6 per cent in Brazil, the report noted. "This growth is an outcome of unstoppable consumer demand supported by resilient supply," the report said, adding that cloud kitchens, QSRs and dessert parlours are expected to lead the charge.

It pointed out that the Indian consumer is experimenting more with 20 per cent growth in unique cuisines ordered per customer and 30 per cent growth in restaurants ordered from per customer.

IT dept eyes undisclosed assets

New Delhi: The Income Tax department will start sending SMS/emails to about 25,000 individuals, who are part of the "high-risk" cases identified for non-disclosure of foreign assets in the Income tax returns (ITRs) filed for assessment year (AY) 2025-26, sources said.

The "high-risk" cases have been identified on the basis of information received from foreign jurisdictions under the automatic exchange of information (AEOI) framework.

As part of the "nudge" campaign, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) in the first phase will target 25,000 'high-risk' cases by sending SMS/emails, asking them to file revised ITR by December 31, 2025, to avoid penal consequences. The second phase will start from mid-December.

PTI

Investor protection key priority for Sebi: Pandey

New Delhi: Markets regulator Sebi chairman Tuhin Kanak Pandey on Thursday stressed the need to strengthen investor protection, warning that unregistered advisory groups continue to lure individuals into unsafe trading channels and that *dabba* trading keeps resurfacing in new digital forms.

He said the challenge has intensified in an age where misinformation spreads faster than facts. Fraudulent trading apps look convincing, digital profiles mimic legitimacy and guaranteed-return schemes promise what no regulated market can offer.

Pandey noted that such "un-



Tuhin Kanak Pandey

registered advisory groups lure individuals into unsafe trading channels, and *dabba* trading continues to resurface in new digital disguises. Such unregistered advisory groups and disorganised operators are not isolated incidents, but coordinated attempts to exploit investor trust.

This makes it essential, he said, to ensure that people do not fall prey to "deception disguised as opportunity".

Incentive structure

Sebi on Thursday introduced a new incentive structure for mutual fund distributors, where they will receive additional commission for bringing in new individual investors from B-30 cities and new women investors from any city.

The new incentive structure, aimed at promoting wider outreach and awareness, will become effective from February 1, 2026.

PTI

Mahindra eyes EV bounty

Bengaluru: Mahindra & Mahindra plans to sell around 7,000 electric vehicle (EV) units by the end of this fiscal, a top executive said on Thursday.

The Mumbai-based auto maker currently sells between 4,000-5,000 EVs per month. The company, which on Thursday expanded its EV portfolio with the launch of a seven-seater model XEV 9S, aims for the electric range to account for around 25 per cent of its overall volumes by 2027-2028 calendar years.

"We are moving to an operating production capacity of EVs to 8,000 units per month by the fiscal end, of which we hope to sell 7,000 units a month," Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) executive director and CEO for auto and farm



The Mahindra XEV 9e in Chennai on Wednesday. (Reuters)

sectors Rajesh Jejurikar told reporters here. The company currently rolls out its electric vehicles from its Chakan-based manufacturing plant. Mahindra has already sold over 30,000 EVs (BE 6 and XEV 9) over the last seven months, raking in a revenue of around

Apple opposes new antitrust law

New Delhi: Apple is challenging India's new antitrust penalty law under which the US company could potentially face a fine of up to ₹38 billion, a court case at the Delhi High Court, seen by Reuters, shows.

The challenge is the first against India's antitrust penalty law, which, since last year, allows the Competition Commission of India (CCI) to use global turnover when calculating the penalties it imposes on companies for abusing their market dominance.

Since 2022, Tindler-owner Match and Indian start-ups have been locked in an antitrust battle with Apple at the CCI, where investors' last year issued a report saying the



Crowd outside an Apple store opening in Bengaluru in September. (Reuters)

US smartphone company had engaged in "abusive conduct" on the apps market of its iPhone Operating System, iOS.

Apple denied all wrongdoing, and the CCI is yet to make a final decision in the case, including any penalty. The company is asking judges

to declare as illegal the 2024 law that allowed the CCI to use global turnover, not just that in India, when calculating penalties. According to its 545-page court filing, which was made public, Apple's "maximum penalty exposure" at the rate of 10 per cent of its average global turnover derived from all of its services globally for three fiscal years to 2024 could be around ₹38 billion, it said in the filing.

Such a "penalty based on global turnover... would be manifestly arbitrary, unconstitutional, grossly disproportionate, unjust," it added.

Companies also risk fines of as much as 10 per cent of their global turnover for antitrust violations in the European Union.

Apple cited the CCI's use of the new rules for the first time on November 10 in an unrelated case, where they were retrospectively applied to a violation by the affected company a decade earlier.

Apple has "no choice but to bring this constitutional challenge now to avoid retrospective imposition of penalty against them," it argued.

The company has maintained that it is a small player compared with Google's Android, which is the dominant player in the Indian market.

Apple's smartphone base has, however, become four times larger in the last five years in India, according to Counterpoint Research. Reuters

"Over the next 5-10 years, we should shift our technologies towards green fuels, whether electrically operated tractors or machines running compressed biogas"

Desh Chaturvedi, agriculture secretary



XXCE

PROVE IT

Illegal immigration is undeniably a threat to India. But that should not give the State the licence to evict people on the basis of contested evidence. The fate of Sunali Khatun, a resident of Bengal's Birbhum district, shows that such a possibility cannot be ruled out in a country whose ruling regime appears keen to weaponise the rhetoric of *ghuspathiyas* for political and ideological purposes. Ms Khatun and five others, including her minor son, had been detained in Delhi in June and deported to Bangladesh within a matter of days. The Centre alleges that they did not possess the documents necessary to prove citizenship or legitimate residency and that due process was followed in the course of their deportation. But things took a revealing turn in the court of law. The Calcutta High Court not only quashed the deportation but also directed the Union home ministry to bring back Ms Khatun and others within a stipulated time frame. A court in Bangladesh, too, had asked the Indian high commission to facilitate their return to India. But the Centre refused to do so, leading the Calcutta High Court to give its nod to initiate contempt proceedings against the former. The Centre then took the matter to the Supreme Court where it was subjected to searching questions recently. In fact, the highest court observed that since several documents attesting to the citizenship of the accused has been made available, the Centre could, as an interim measure, bring the deportees back and offer them an opportunity to prove their claims. Incidentally, the names of Ms Khatun's parents, it has been reported, figure on Bengal's 2002 electoral roll: a key benchmark for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of the state's electoral list. The outcome in this case must be decided on the basis of clear evidence: polarising rhetoric has no role to play in this.

What makes the developments in this particular case important is that migrants, mostly Muslims from Bengal, had been at the receiving end of an administrative drive to push back alleged infiltrators from not only Delhi but also Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh — each state has the Bharatiya Janata Party at its helm. While administrative interventions to weed out illegal immigrants are necessary, care should be taken to ensure that *bona fide* residents are not inconvenienced in the process. This is not just a question of national security. It also involves safeguarding the fundamental rights of citizens.

POISON FRUIT

There is growing concern that India's environmental degradation — poisoning — may have a 'foreign hand' as well. Stricter regulatory standards in Europe, complemented by rising public outrage and falling competitiveness, is bringing about the transfer of decommissioned dirty industrial plants to Indian shores, as was pointed out by Ameer Shahul, an author and an environmentalist, in a recent article. There is substantial evidence to support this conjecture. Some years ago, Italy shut down a polluting plant that had poisoned both groundwater and thousands of people in Viozenza. What had led to death and devastation in Italy was — shockingly — thought of as a lucrative business opportunity by an Indian company that proceeded to acquire the proverbial poison gravy train and locate it in an industrial estate abutting a wildlife sanctuary in Koyta. Two polymer trains — accused of producing polycarbonates linked to toxic emissions — are being dismantled by Dow Chemical in Germany; only for the proceeds to be reassembled in Dahej in Gujarat. These are, of course, not the only instances of what ecologists describe as 'pollution colonialism' where the industrial West dumps its toxic wastes on a profiteering-minded developing world. It must also be pointed out that the records of Indian industries on this front are equally bleak. Vedanta's depredations in Odisha are well-documented. Even public sector undertakings, especially oil companies, have been penalised by the Central Pollution Control Board for violating environmental regulations.

The real issue is that there exists a State-mandated permissive culture that encourages such transgressions in this country. The consequences of such complicity include a weak regulatory mechanism to identify and then penalise such violations. Enforcement of regulatory standards is feeble. The abundance of cheap land and labour also makes commercial procurement of used reactors, distillation apparatus and other detritus profitable. The lack of transparency, as experts have pointed out, enables the vested interests — bureaucrats and investors — to pass this trade in poison as an instance of economic growth. The price of the pursuit of the fruits of poison is evident: contaminated water and food, falling soil productivity, the rise of cancer hubs near polluting industries and so on. The recent discovery of traces of uranium in the breast milk of lactating mothers in several of Bihar's districts reveals the depth of the horror whose roots lie in the willingness to sacrifice environmental protection and public health at the altar of commerce.

SCRIPSI

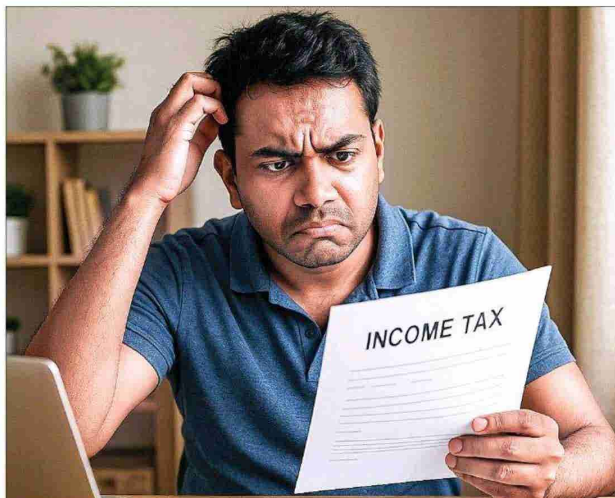
Everything has beauty.

CONFUCIUS

Bureaucratic complexity afflicts not just the SIR

Control freak

T.M. KRISHNA



people to delete names on and manipulate the voters' list.

This complexity is not a feature of just the SIR. Every form or process that the Indian government has established for its citizen seems to be made to confuse rather than enable, making it nearly impossible for the citizen to complete the task without fear. Filling a form and submitting it to the authority concerned are always tense exercises. We are worried that we misunderstand something. The language is abstruse, the follow-up question is usually framed differently, often not in the sequence it should be in, and, sometimes, the form itself is illegible. When submitting the form, we cannot ask questions of the officer as we would be pounced upon or ridiculed. The illiterate are at the mercy of a middle man or the officer who filled the form. For the marginalised, this can mean life or death.

The income tax return process is a classic case of how difficult things are. Successive governments have claimed that they have made things easier. For them, changing from paper documents to online filings seems to be synonymous with simplification. Nothing can be further from the truth. The ease needs to be in access for the citizen, the series of actions that need to be taken, in the

quality of the human interaction, and the final mode of submission. In the case of income tax returns, nothing is comprehensible for a non-accountant. All those who file accounts trust their chartered accounts and, to use a musical phrase, 'go with the flow'. That is not how it should be. Individual filing needs should be simple to understand and complete. This ambiguity is also true of any government grant application. A cultural organisation based in rural India complained about how it was impossible to even apply for a grant because it just did not know how to navigate the online system. The local government representative will not help. He will just say, 'it's all online, go file it there'. The manner in which the government interacts with its citizens through its bureaucratic systems is condescending, hierarchical, and discriminatory. While we often discuss discrimination in terms of human behaviour and social interaction, we forget that inequality is perpetuated through simple things such as application forms, access to information, and officer-citizen interface.

Why does the State behave in such a manner? Some blame it all on red-tapism and a bureaucratic culture that the British left behind. Others will probably point to legal

requirements. I believe the answer lies in the State's propensity to display authority and control its citizens. The entire bureaucratic apparatus is built on this nature. The State is a being on its own. Individuals, however kind, become a part of this larger character once they enter its fold. It is in fact impossible for them to survive as a servant of the State unless they wear the robe of Corruption, too, is a result of the State's character, one that everyone within the structure feels they need to embrace, accept, or ignore. Citizens have also normalised such behaviour with the 'this is how governments are' rhetoric. Any change in how the State interacts with its citizens is not only about the transformation of the people who work for the government but also about changes in the actual grassroots processes. One example of something being done right, despite little change in the people within the system, is the Right to Information Act.

When the EC made symbols the mode of identifying political parties, and then ensured that every citizen irrespective of his/her geographical location, would be able to vote, it prioritised the citizens' right to vote over everything else. The EC needs to rediscover that spirit.

T.M. Krishna is a leading Indian musician and a prominent public intellectual

Saffron symbol

■ Sir — The prime minister, Narendra Modi, hoisted a saffron flag atop the Ram temple at Ayodhya during the Abhiyee Muhurat ("In Ayodhya, PM hoists flag of 'rejuvenation'", Nov 26). It was gratifying to see the hoisting of the Dharma Dhwaaj marking the completion of the temple.

During his speech, Modi waxed eloquent about civilisational pride. But it was completely irrelevant for the prime minister to talk about Thomas Babington Macaulay, a British administrator, whose education policy, Modi argued, still has Indians enslaved.

S. Balakrishnan, Jamshedpur

■ Sir — While hoisting a Dharma Dhwaaj at the Ram temple, Narendra Modi emphasised that "wounds of centuries are [now] healing". One wonders whose wound Modi is talking about? Surely not those who are victims of communal polarisation in New India.

No prizes for guessing why Thomas Babington Macaulay, who was responsible for promoting English education in India, has become the subject of ire of the saffronites. Modi's attack on Macaulay is in line with the ruling regime's covert design of imposing Hindi as the national language.

Kajal Chatterjee, Calcutta

■ Sir — Prime Minister Narendra Modi is notable for his engagement with



Young mind

■ Sir — According to a recent study by the University of Cambridge, the human brain peaks at the age of 32 and remains in adolescent mode till then. The research says that the human brain moves through five major phases, with important rewiring milestones occurring at the ages, 9, 32, 66 and 83, and that neural networks keep reshaping themselves well into adulthood. This perhaps explains why ageing feels confusing. Your knees may be in their forties, your back in its sixties, but your brain is still a teenager. So the next time someone says, 'Act your age,' you can easily retort, 'I am still buffering.'

Tathagata Sen, Pune

Hindutva symbolism. His hoisting of a Dharma Dhwaaj atop the Ram temple has raised several questions: should the leader of a secular country engage in such religious exercises? Isn't Modi's act tantamount to disregarding the sentiments of other religious communities?

Manoharan Muthuswamy, Chennai

■ Sir — Narendra Modi's presence at the flag-hoisting ceremony at the Ram Temple shows that he has now morphed into

cricketers' temperament and skills. Barring for long hours is an art. Sadly, the current team does not have cricketers of the calibre of Sunil Gavaskar, Rahul Dravid, and V.V.S. Laxman.

India's next red-ball assignment is an away series against Sri Lanka in August 2026. The long hiatus means that the team management and players will immediately transition to a white-ball cricket schedule, allowing them little time for introspection.

Bal Govind, Noida

■ Sir — The declining standards of India's Test cricket are deeply concerning ("Live by the spin, perish by the spin", Nov 27). This is in sharp contrast to the era of Virat Kohli, under whom India played 31 home Tests in seven years and lost only two. Today, visiting teams defeat India with unexpected ease. The reasons behind this decline are clear: unfair selection and personal favouritism. India needs fair selection and a return to the five-bowler strategy.

Md. Imdadullah, Hyderabad



Losing streak

■ Sir — The way India surrendered the Test series to the Proteas, after the white-wash of 3-0 at the hands of New Zealand, is now raising questions about the competency of Gautam Gambhir as the coach. He might be an expert in limited-overs cricket but the way he has managed the Test team is deplorable. The exclusion of Mohammed Shami and Sarfaraz Khan has proved costly.

Atul Krishna Srivastava, Navi Mumbai

■ Sir — India's vaunted Test record lies in a shambles. The two consecutive defeats at home have turned the spotlight on poor team selection. Test Cricket cannot be won by bits-and-pieces players who can win only Indian Premier League and Twenty20 matches.

N. Mahadevan, Chennai

■ Sir — After the heavily criticised pitch at Eden Gardens in the opening match of the Test series against South Africa, the Guwahati Test, too, saw the result swing in favour of the visitors. The Assam Cricket Association had risen admirably to the occasion. The pitch, playing conditions, fitness, and overall spectator experience earned the cricketing body wide-spread praise.

Himangra Kaushik, Guwahati

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SRIMOYEE BAGCHI

ODD ONE OUT

MAN & MONSTER

Victor Frankenstein would have been a poster boy for the manosphere. But Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* — it released on Netflix this month — like many earlier adaptations of Mary Shelley's novel, misses the real monstrosity of the novel. Shelley's novel has long been taught as an early work of science fiction warning about the dangers of invention. That interpretation is accurate but incomplete. At its core, *Frankenstein* is a study of how patriarchal power behaves when it is allowed to operate without restraint.

Victor is proof of what can go wrong when a man assumes mastery over everything and sees it as his natural right, perceiving dependence to be a flaw. This assumption is also central to the manosphere's foundation. Modern influencers describe the omnipotence of the manosphere as a masculine ideal. They repackage dominance as self-development. Victor follows the same pattern. He isolates himself, pursues ambition without consultation, and treats other people as satellites trying to form a relationship. When the creature appears, Victor rejects him and refuses to acknowledge any role in his suffering. Shelley identifies this behaviour as cowardice, not strength. This clarity is what is missing for young men who are taught that empathy is a liability and that turning away from emotional responsibility is a mark of strength.

The creature's development is further proof of how toxic the chambers of the manosphere can be. Shelley does not portray him as naturally violent. His rage emerges after repeated experiences of exclusion, humiliation and abandonment. He teaches himself language, studies history, and tries to form relationships, only to be met with hostility. Shelley makes it clear that monstrosity is not inherent. It is produced through neglect. Victor's indifference shapes the creature's fate far more than any physical deformity. Shelley thus offers an early psychological case study on the effects of social isolation and parental failure — conditions that the manosphere often trivialises or misinterprets.

In the manosphere, the women in the book are consistently sidelined or erased. Elizabeth Lavenza is idealised into near invisibility; Justine Moritz is executed because no man defends her; Safie's mother is removed from the story by a controlling father. There is a discernible pattern here. Women in Victor's world exist only within the limits men set for them. The novel demonstrates how patriarchal systems depend on the oppression of women, an agency, and how male authority often relies on narratives that exclude competing — feminine? — perspectives. This is precisely the dynamic that the manosphere tries to revive.

Frankenstein also poses the instability of the patriarchal view. The novel's narrative structure — shifting among Walton, Victor and the creature — reveals how limited each narrator's authority is. None of them sees the full picture. Each distorts events to serve his own self-image. Shelley anticipated a problem that is now amplified online: men presenting their lives as closed systems in which their understanding is complete and the questions of women are beyond question. She reminds us that such certainty is a mask for fear, insecurity and isolation.

Most modern adaptations of *Frankenstein* do not address this part of the novel. The omission matters because they reinforce the idea that *Frankenstein* is a story about technological overreach rather than a study of social power. Del Toro's adaptation is not an exception. A core reading of *Frankenstein* would, in fact, challenge the central myths of the manosphere, showing that emotional suppression is not strength, that authority requires care, and that neglect has lasting consequences. It would demonstrate that women's silence is not natural but enforced. Above all, it would argue — convincingly — that a culture that rewards male detachment creates the very wounds it later claims to diagnose.

Glimpses of a life behind bars

THE CELL AND THE SOUL:
A PRISON MEMOIR
By Anand Telumbde
Bloomsbury, ₹699



How did it feel like being trapped in an Indian prison cell when the entire world was struggling against the Covid-19 pandemic? The unenviable experience, as narrated by Anand Telumbde, reveals among other transgressions, the travesty of social distancing inside the Talaja Central prison during the pandemic: "I entered prison during the COVID-19 pandemic and witnessed the joke called social distancing," he affirms. Beyond the personal horror, the general experience was one of tragic apathy and looming vulnerability: "In the hospital barrack of the Talaja prison... over fifty-five people jostled for space meant for thirty or thirty-five." Telumbde further points out that the "Single-prisoner cells housed five, leaving barely enough room for the inmates to huddle. Many contracted COVID-19, yet officials insisted there wasn't a single case as result of 'excellent management'. Deaths occurred but were never recorded as COVID-19 fatalities." These appalling revelations will stay with the reader.

Implicated in the Elgar Parishad-Bhima Koregaon case in 2018, Telumbde was forced to stay nearly thirty-one months as an undertrial before being granted bail. An amalgamation of jail jottings and life history, *The Cell and The Soul* serves as a crucial testimony to the political circumstances that thwart an individual's innate right to freedom. Despite the surrounding, Telumbde found time for reflection and introspection: "The cells surrounding mine house... gangsters, serial killers, those convicted of communal crimes, and even encounter specialists. Their formidable statuses commanded a unique form of respect; even the *jhabdar* approached them with heightened politeness, reflecting the intricate social dynamics within the prison walls." This memoir also exposes the dehumanising realities that plague the Indian criminal justice and penal systems; the thriving corruption between jailers and inmates; guards serving as messengers for inmates against hefty bribes; the complete abrogation of the right to dignity enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution; the quiet flouting of norms for high-profile prisoners;

the underreporting of deaths during the pandemic; the deplorable state of hygiene and sanitation and so on.

In the section, "Thou Shalt Not Speak", Telumbde speaks of the exemplary powers of a "notorious don" who was housed in his quadrant. "...a well-known figure in the world of crime", the don boasted of his remarkable power and influence: "Guards treated him with deference, and he often shared his abundant canteen supplies — fruits, drinks and syrups — with us and the jail staff. While we struggled to manage our purchases with in the limited monthly allowance... the don and other affluent prisoners enjoyed unlimited supplies through a 40:80 ratio arrangement." Telumbde clarifies, "The specifics of these transactions were unclear, but it was commonly believed that monetary exchanges occurred outside the prison in cash. It is not that such things only happened in Talaja; they happened in all jails in the country."

Tinged with occasional wistfulness but also a meticulous portrayal of a noxious reality, the most poignant sections of Telumbde's memoir pertain to stories of pain, loss and remembrance. Telumbde's empathic narrative in these sections is bound to strike a chord with his readers. The chapter, "We Lost Stan", devoted to the struggle and the tragic demise of Stan Swamy, records the author's personal association with the Jesuit priest. Also implicated in the Bhima Koregaon violence, Stan Swamy had to struggle against Parkinson's disease and other age-related issues during his incarceration.

Given its potent blend of anguish, personal reminiscences, activism and nostalgia, Telumbde's book is bound to make the reader reflect on the lives of India's countless undertrials whose precious years are consumed behind bars.

Argha Kr Banerjee



Gaze on an artist

Ramananda Bandyopadhyay works in a register so gentle that it is easy to underestimate its force. RAMANANDA: THE LYRICAL MODERN (Art Frequencies, Rs 5,000) by Vinayak Pasricha aims to correct this. It begins with a larger question about how we look and what we miss, which is apt for a book that concerns itself less with spectacle and more with the steady labour of seeing. Bandyopadhyay's artistic world is built from small gestures: women combing their hair, birds gossiping on the margins, village rituals half-remembered from childhood. The book shines when it lingers on these details. Anecdotes about Santiniketan — Benode Behari summoning him in the rain, Nandalal Bose correcting students' sketches through tracing paper — anchor the artist within a lineage without trapping him there. But the book is more an archive of Bandyopadhyay's works. The excellent and extensive reproductions of the artist's works, divided into segments that mirror Bandyopadhyay's evolution as an artist, are what make the tome worth collecting.

Srimoyee Bagchi

The ninety-nine per cent

WHY THE POOR DON'T KILL US: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INDIANS
By Manu Joseph
Aleph, ₹599



This provocatively titled book is a searing criticism of the world of the privileged in India. Employing a capacious definition of the poor — anyone who does not feel economically comfortable in a particular situation — it delves deep into the servile universe of this constituency. It finds the poor in India to be meek. The poor do not exhibit their fury even when they live in one of the most unequal regions on earth. The author's insightful analysis brings poverty and inequality into a unified, conceptual fold. Quite purposefully, Manu Joseph deploys the title of the book to convey the intriguing absence of violent revolts in India. He is equally perplexed to find even non-violent ways of resistance missing from the national landscape. This lack of aggressiveness on the part of the poor explains the relative peace amidst the fault lines that divide the poor, thereby pre-empting the formation of any lasting solidarity amongst them. Moreover, the absence of a robust culture of

do they not they kill the rich? The book is an attempt to find plausible answers to this central question.

Meekness, docility and low self-worth of the poor apart, Joseph lists a number of reasons that have led to the containment of outbursts from the poor. There are numerous structural fault lines that divide the poor, thereby pre-empting the formation of any lasting solidarity amongst them. Moreover, the absence of a robust culture of

human rights has rendered Indian jails and the criminal justice system extraordinarily heavy-handed when it comes to their dealing with the poor. But India's political class has been successful in calming the poor by their rhetorical appropriation of the needs and the concerns of the downtrodden. Besides, the promise of a better future through higher education acts as a lid on the possible volcanic eruptions of the poor; people start pursuing individual pathways of success through education which, for the author, offers only false hope. In the process, they fail to spot the structural reasons for their deprivation. They do not realise that they are subsidising us all as the poor. In fact, it is not costly to be middle class in India because of this invisible, heavy subsidy offered by the huge army of informal labour.

Interestingly, the privileged need the poor but prefer to insulate themselves by creating islands of comfort and safety that the Other India encroaches upon only as maids, drivers and delivery boys. Put differently, there is an unmitigated process of escape for the rich in India within India.

Manish Thakur

HARDBACK HARVEST

Unique vision

■ NATURE AND EXTENT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN WEST BENGAL (Navayug, ₹995) by Biswanath Chakraborty comes at a time when the state is warming up for the upcoming assembly elections. The book illustrates how parties across the political divide have used violence as a political tool. Some of the solutions offered by the author can

help electors create a list of demands to make of their political representatives before casting their votes.

■ THE MAKER OF FILM-MAKERS: HOW JAGAT MURARI AND FTH CHANGED INDIAN CINEMA FOREVER (Viking, ₹1,299) by Radha Chadda portrays the vision



of her father, Jagat Murari, an illustrious documentary film-maker, whose singular vision of establishing a film

institute in Pune changed the course of Indian film-making. Supplemented with rare photographs, Chadda's book reveals how the institute honed the talent and shaped the careers of some of India's greatest cine legends.

■ EVERY ROOM HAS A VIEW: A NOVEL (Speaking Tiger, ₹499) by Sujit Sarai is a story about a last wish. The characters go on a journey of self-discovery and, through that journey, tell the story of displacement and isolation in a foreign land. The "dark" humour that the novel promises is often predictable.

A hero and the train

SHAH RUKH KHAN AND THE RAILWAY NARRATIVES
By Ankur Konar
Hawak, ₹350



Ankur Konar's intriguingly-titled book is an imaginative exploration of something most cineastes recognise instinctively but rarely interrogate: the centrality of trains in Shah Rukh Khan's films. Konar thereby redirects the gaze to the railway carriage, the waiting room, the platform's edge and the tracks — spaces that shape SRK's screen image as well as the emotional vocabulary of mainstream Hindi cinema.

The book's citations from articles by scholars such as Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Rebecca Harrison, and Omar Ahmed lend it a strong theoretical framework to analyse its central tenet: "the train metaphor as a 'dominant presence' in Khan's films. Konar also examines the intertwined relationship between the train and cinema, "both products of mass production", both democratising in their reach, and goes on to show how the train has been synonymous with Indian modernity. One of the book's strengths lies in its ability to situate the railways within India's collective memory. Konar reminds the reader that the railways are not neutral props.

They carry remnants of colonial history, the Partition trauma, and the everyday negotiations along the lines of class. Khan's inter-connectedness with the railways in his films and even personal life thus places him within a deeply textured national imagery. This grounding gives the book a cultural weight that distinguishes it from fan-centric studies. Attributing the use of railways as a "fragile space of global capitalism" by the "brat pack" generation, which includes film-makers like Aditya Chopra and Karan Johar, Konar demonstrates how trains recur not merely as picturesque settings but as narrative pivots, emotional catalysts and symbolic reservoirs.

Konar switches between film analysis and cultural commentary with ease. In his reading of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, the train is not simply the climactic stage for a hand-pull rescue; it becomes a space where tradition and modernity col-

lide. In *Swades*, the train charts the protagonist's moral trajectory. The train becomes a vessel of romance, separating and then uniting the lovers in *Veer-Zaara*, *Shakti, Kal Ho Naa Ho*, *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna*, *Devdas*, *Job Harry Met Sejal*, and *Chennai Express*, while in Khan's newer films (*Raees*, *Pathaan*, *Jawan* or *Dunki*), it is a site of anguish or political tension. Konar also argues that the "longest song sequence on a train", "*Chaiyan Chaiyan*", fosters a key "oriental discourse" even though the train in this instance is not central to the film.

The book is structured in the form of short, thematic chapters, making it highly accessible to readers who may not have an academic bent of mind. Konar's writing is clean and evocative. Its tight chapters make it a brisk and enjoyable read, but also leave one wishing for analytical takes on larger questions, such as the politics of public space. Uneven editorial oversight, including repeated phrases and a few factual slips, threaten to derail an otherwise engaging narrative occasionally.

Shaoli Pramanik



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Burden of proof

SIRs enumeration process of putting the onus on residents for eligibility is flawed

The Election Commission of India (ECI)'s SIR of electoral rolls, being held in 12 States and Union Territories (UT), demands urgent judicial scrutiny due to its implementation and its basic methodology. While the Supreme Court continues to hear challenges to the constitutionality of the SIR process pioneered in Bihar, the same flawed approach is being persisted with in other States. Voters are to fill enumeration forms delivered by Block Level Officers (BLO) and match their details against electoral rolls from 2002-2005. Though data from Bihar suggest that the process did not dramatically alter election outcomes, it saw a sharp decline in the gender ratio of the electorate. Other localised distortions also warrant concern. The ECI claims that enumeration forms have been delivered to most electors in the 12 States and UTs, but genuine voters continue to scramble for forms, and confusion persists about the documentation required for enrolment on the draft rolls due next month. The guideline mandating that BLOs visit households appears to be only on paper. The Gauhati High Court, in *Dr. Manmohan Singh* (1999), interpreted requirements in the Representation of the People Act, 1950 expansively: an ordinary resident is a habitual resident with the intention to dwell permanently – whom any reasonable person would accept as a resident of that place. Operating from this principle, the ECI and the judiciary have historically presumed that any resident adult was, by default, a valid voter.

The SIR inverts this presumption. Regardless of having voted earlier, every elector must now prove their legitimacy against old records or documents listed by the ECI. This shifting of the burden, from the state to citizens, risks major disenfranchisement, especially married women and migrants, as in Bihar. As courts have recognised, a strict interpretation of the "ordinarily resident" requirement can vitiate the democratic process. During hearings on Bihar, the Court focused on implementation, placing the onus of protecting genuine voters on party representatives and legal volunteers. It did not examine whether the enumeration form methodology passes constitutional muster, nor did it address persisting inaccuracies in revised rolls – likely a consequence of hurried BLOs leaving errors uncorrected. The ECI could have chosen a more patient door-to-door verification to ensure universal adult franchise, complemented by technology-driven de-duplication. Instead, it doubled down on an approach that prioritises "purifying" the rolls over protecting the franchise. As the SIR expands, the Court must move beyond procedural oversight to examine the process's constitutional foundations. What is essential is a clear directive restoring the burden of accurate enrolment to the ECI rather than leaving citizens to prove that they belong on rolls they have been on for years.

Domestic trouble

Indian cricket's traditional strengths are now seen as vulnerabilities

As the dust finally settled at Guwahati's Barasat Cricket Stadium on Wednesday, India's dominance as a Test host was lying in a shambles. Seemingly invincible at home and with an aura that made former Australian captain Steve Waugh refer to India as the final frontier, rival units struggled to stay afloat. But empires do crumble and that reality overwhelmed Rishabh Pant's men as South Africa won the second Test by 408 runs and seized the series 2-0. Last year, the visiting New Zealanders swept the Test series 3-0, and now it is Temba Bavuma's turn to trigger a coup. The South African captain led astutely, both at Kolkata and in Guwahati, and his men's excellent performance reiterated their defending champion status in the ICC World Test Championship. Coach Gautam Gambhir is facing intense scrutiny though under his watch India drew the away Test series in England and won the ICC Champions Trophy and Asia Cup. But the sudden vulnerability in Tests at home sticks out like a sore thumb. It is a fact that over the last few years, personnel have changed and India no longer features Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, R. Ashwin and Cheteshwar Pujara in Test whites. Meanwhile, Ajinkya Rahane has been dropped and Mohammed Shami is yet to find his way back.

Change is inevitable, but India's downfall in home Tests has been steep. The absence of injured captain Shubman Gill in the second Test was a hard blow, and the rest of the batters failed to raise their game. The adrenaline rush and instant gratification that limited overs cricket offers seem to have dulled the survival instincts of many players. The patience to build a Test innings, the ability to bat for time, and the nuanced way of countering spin, have all waned within the ranks. There is talent in the squad, but the constant shuffling of players and an over-dependence on too many all-rounders have unsettled the playing eleven. Off-spinner Simon Harmer and left-arm speedster Marco Jansen bagged 17 and 12 wickets, respectively, through the series, and exposed chinks in the Indian batting armour. Over the last four decades, India had pedigreed batters at number three and four. Dilip Vengsarkar-Mohinder Amarnath, Rahul Dravid-Sachin Tendulkar, and Pujara-Kohli, have all done duty. It is time to find reinforcements while the batting core will revolve around G.L. Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal. All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, the last of the stalwarts, is 36. True, transition is a work in progress but spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and his bowling mates must be hoping to have more runs to defend from their batting colleagues.

Every democracy faces moments when two values, both legitimate and which are deeply held, collide. The case of Lieutenant Samuel Kamaleesan, dismissed from the Indian Army for refusing to enter the sanctum of his regiment's temple or gurdwara during mandatory parades, is one such clash. The Delhi High Court upheld the dismissal (*Samuel Kamaleesan vs Union of India*), and the Supreme Court of India declined to interfere. The legal result is clear. The moral unease remains.

The Court relied on military necessity, discipline and the power given by the Constitution under Article 33. The judgment places his refusal within the frame of disobedience of a lawful command rather than the practice of personal faith. Seen through that narrow lens, the courts acted exactly as they believe they should in military matters: defer to the generals. But that deference should not end the national conversation. When two legitimate values collide – conscience and cohesion – the tragedy is not simply that one side must lose. The tragedy is when institutions forget that accommodation is often possible, and often wise.

The Army's perspective

No one can dismiss what the Indian Army told the Court. A commanding officer in a fixed-camp regiment must be accepted by the men he leads into war. Ritual and ceremony, though rooted in faith, serve as instruments of morale. Officers are expected to participate fully to strengthen their bond with the troops. The Indian Army saw the officer's stance as distancing, even if he meant it respectfully. The Court accepted this view. Military ethos demands unity. And no institution in India has preserved unity more honourably than the Indian Army. Whether in Kashmir or in Ladakh, whether rescuing civilians in floods or leading missions of the United Nations, the Indian Army has had a proud record of respecting diversity while building common purpose.

A recent example bears repeating. Colonel Sofiya Qureshi was projected by the Indian Army as the face of Operation Sindoor during press briefings. Her leadership, confidence and professionalism were celebrated nationally. It was a reminder that the Indian Army has often been ahead of civilian society in giving space, honour and responsibility to women and officers from every faith and region. That inclusive spirit is one of the Indian Army's strengths, and the country takes pride in it. Which is why the Kamaleesan case stings.

One cannot read the facts without seeing



Sanjay Hegde

is a Senior Advocate designated by the Supreme Court of India

When duty meets conscience, the real test lies in finding a way for both to coexist

sincerity in his stance. He attended the parades. He respected the customs. He removed his shoes, tied the turban and stood with his troops. His only request was not to enter the sanctum during ritual worship, a core doctrinal issue for many Protestant Christians. The situation brings to mind *Charlots of Fire*, the story of Eric Liddell, who would not race on a Sunday. Instead of punishing him, the British Olympic team reorganised its entire plan. He competed on a different day. He won gold. The world did not fall apart. A small accommodation upheld both conscience and team spirit. If an Olympic team could bend, even slightly, to preserve a sincere belief, could the Army top brass not have done so here?

A lost officer and a lost signal

The loss in this case is larger than one career. The Indian armed forces may have lost a potentially fine officer. But, more importantly, the message the decision sends to minority soldiers is unsettling: that even when you attend the parade, stand with the unit, and show respect, your personal limit of conscience counts for nothing. India's military unity has never been built on majoritarian comfort. It has been built on trust. Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Christian soldiers fought as one in 1965 and 1971, stood together in Kargil, and served together today across insurgency zones. Soldiers from minority faiths should never have reason to wonder whether they will be asked to cross a line that their beliefs prohibit.

The courts may not have intended this message. The Indian Army may not have intended it either. But messages do not depend solely on intention.

The judiciary's instinct to defer to the military is understandable. Courts lack the tools, experience and institutional knowledge to second-guess tactical or disciplinary decisions. Yet, it is not correct to say that courts have always stayed away. In the cases of women officers, the Supreme Court forced a fundamental rethink of long-standing military practice. It has intervened in recruitment rules, pension rules and promotion policies. Courts have reshaped the Indian Army before, when equality demanded it.

In this case, the issue was modest: a sincere religious objection to entering a sanctum during worship. The officer did not refuse duty, did not leave his post, and did not weaken the chain of command. He stood respectfully outside, visible to the men he led. The Court could have asked whether the Indian Army's approach satisfied the test of proportionality, or whether a lighter touch

could achieve the same purpose while respecting conscience. The *Bijoe Emmanuel* had room, if it had chosen to use it.

The principle in *Bijoe Emmanuel* and *Ors. vs State of Kerala* and *Ors.*, where children who would not sing the national anthem were still protected because they stood respectfully, comes to mind. Justice Chinnappa Reddy reminded the nation: "our tradition teaches tolerance, our philosophy preaches tolerance, and our Constitution practises tolerance." It is difficult not to hear those words echo in this case.

A lesson from Dreyfus

The parallel to the Dreyfus affair is not exact, nor should it be. But the warning it carries is real. France's military, proud and strong, allowed itself to drift into prejudice one small step at a time. Victor Hugo warned that armies lose their edge when they lose their sense of justice. Even the strongest institution can fall into a pattern where ritual becomes rigidity and rigidity becomes exclusion. India must guard against that drift. The Indian Army is respected because it rises above communal and political divides, because its officers lead by example, and because it has never demanded that faith be abandoned at the barracks gate.

The most troubling part of this entire episode is not the Court's judgment, but that the matter reached a court at all. This was a problem that the senior leadership could have solved with one conversation, one directive, or one thoughtful accommodation. Instead, the issue hardened. Positions froze. And the court became the battleground for something that should have been resolved within the walls of the regiment. The Indian Army's greatness has always come from its ability to blend tradition with modernity, discipline with empathy, authority with fairness. In this case, that balance slipped.

The Kamaleesan case offers a simple lesson. When duty meets conscience, the real test is not choosing one over the other but finding a way for both to coexist. The Court stayed within its lane. But the Indian Army, which has often shown large-heartedness and flexibility, could have shown it again here. A small accommodation would have strengthened trust, preserved discipline, and affirmed the message that every soldier, of every faith, stands equal in the uniform of India.

Justice Reddy said that "our Constitution practises tolerance". We honour that practice not by forcing uniformity, but by understanding when uniformity need not be forced.

Enabling a modern and future-ready labour ecosystem

November 21, 2025 will go down as a milestone in India's journey of *Viksit Bharat* – a day when the much awaited Four Labour Codes were made effective by the Government of India. India has taken a giant leap in labour rights with the implementation of four modernised Labour Codes (the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020). These reforms create a fair, modern and future-ready labour ecosystem – one that empowers workers, enhances enterprise competitiveness and strengthens India's path towards a *Viksit Bharat* and *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.

India's labour framework has evolved gradually over several decades, leading to the creation of multiple pieces of legislation operating across different time periods and economic contexts. While these laws have played an important role in shaping employment relations, the growing size and diversity of India's workforce brought to the fore the need for simplification and consolidation. The Second National Commission on Labour recommended grouping existing laws into broader functional codes. Extensive consultations with industry, employers, trade unions and State governments between 2015 and 2019 led to these four comprehensive Labour Codes being enacted.

A workforce that is both large and young India today has one of the world's largest and youngest workforces, with more than 643 million workers, and is expected to contribute nearly two-thirds of new global workforce entrants in the coming years, as in the World Economic Forum. Recent labour market trends point to a positive momentum: between 2017-18 and 2023-24, India created 16.83 crore jobs, the unemployment rate declined from 6% to 3.2%, and formal employment expanded significantly.

Given that a large share of India's workforce still remains in the informal sector, the need for a simplified and coherent labour framework has been particularly important to help extend protections and improve productivity of the unorganised sector. The coverage under the Code



Harsha Vardhan Agarwal

is President, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)

The Four Labour Codes will result in a modern labour regulatory system that supports the growing dynamism of the Indian economy

for Social Security has been extended to the unorganised sector also. These developments reflect the growing dynamism of the economy and emphasise the need for a modern labour regulatory system that supports this trajectory.

For workers, the Labour Codes provide a stronger and more consistent set of protections. Universal minimum wages, a national floor wage, mandatory appointment letters, timely payment of wages, and clear rules on working hours – including the 48-hour work week – reinforce fairness and security. The OSH Code's emphasis on safety committees, free preventive health check-ups and improved workplace standards strengthens the focus on well-being and productivity.

The Code on Social Security, 2020 provides for universal Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) coverage with no geographic restrictions, streamlined Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) procedures for quicker resolutions, and support for the construction sector through simplified cess payments. It also establishes a National Social Security Fund for various worker categories.

Another major reform under these codes is the simplification of compliance requirements. The shift to single registration, single licence and single return significantly reduces administrative burdens, particularly for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME). A uniform definition of wages introduces clarity across multiple laws, helping reduce disputes and improving predictability in wage-related calculations. Decriminalisation of minor offences and the introduction of digital processes such as algorithm-based inspections encourage transparency and trust-based compliance.

Preparing for the future of work

India's workforce is diversifying, with the rapid growth of gig and platform-based employment, flexible working models and digital-enabled livelihoods. In this context, the Social Security Code's inclusion of gig and platform workers is timely. With the size of this workforce expected to grow from one crore in 2024-25 to 2.35 crore by 2029-30, establishing a framework for social protection is a forward-looking measure that

aligns with the changing nature of work.

The Codes also emphasise formalisation, which remains vital for long-term economic progress. Clearer rules, standardised definitions and transparent processes encourage more enterprises to enter the formal economy and help extend protections to a larger share of the workforce.

A boost for women in the workforce

Women's participation in the workforce has improved yet remains below its potential. According to the International Labour Organization's India Employment Report 2024, India's female labour force participation rate stands at 32.8%. The Labour Codes help strengthen the enabling environment by reinforcing equal remuneration, enhancing maternity benefits and expanding social protection to unorganised, gig and platform workers. The OSH Code also allows women to work at night with their consent and has adequate safety arrangements, thereby widening opportunities across several sectors. Together, these provisions support greater access and continuity of employment for women as the economy evolves. A modern labour framework must balance the need for worker protection with the requirements of a competitive business environment. The Labour Codes aim to provide this balance by offering clearer industrial relations norms and faster dispute resolution, while ensuring that workers have access to essential rights, safety and social security. This balanced approach supports investment, promotes stability and helps strengthen India's position in global value chains.

The next few days will be crucial as the implementation process for these Codes moves forward. It will be important for States to align with the minimum thresholds and guiding principles laid out in the Codes to ensure uniformity and clarity across the country. After the Goods and Services Tax (GST) reforms, this represents one of the most significant structural reforms. This reform momentum should continue, supporting greater investments, and thereby contributing to higher employment generation in the country.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Assam Bill

At a time when Assam is burdened by high unemployment, chronic underinvestment and an administrative culture still hobbled by corruption, the government's decision to prioritise a harsh anti-polygamy law sits oddly with the State's real needs (Front page, November 26). Polygamy,

by all credible accounts, is a statistically marginal practice. To elevate it into a legislative centrepiece is to mistake symbolic combat for governance. Its significance lies instead in its political grammar. The move extends a familiar pattern of gestures calibrated to reassure the State's most vocal right-wing constituencies:

from aggressive eviction drives to the closure of madrasas and recurring alarms about demographic 'imbalance'. These interventions share a common logic – they foreground cultural vigilance over developmental ambition and recast governance as a form of ideological custodianship. The deeper

loss is one of administrative focus. By devoting scarce policy attention to identity-laden legislation, the government risks entrenching the very developmental stagnation it claims to remedy. Assam needs transparent institutions, job-creating investment and sustained planning far more urgently than another round of

symbolic interventions dressed up as reform. **M. Jameel Ahmed, Mysore**

Dismissal of officer

The very system of religious activity/practice in the armed forces needs a relook. The military establishment cannot take cover by stating that all personnel are to follow all

religions/practices. Religion/spirituality should be one's personal choice/right and no one can compel any one to do this in our country. The Ministry of Defence needs to initiate a rehaul of this practice. **Prince Ganathilagam, Coimbatore**

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

Are the labour codes labour-friendly?



Amarjeet Kaur

General Secretary, All India Trade Union Congress



R. Mukundan

President designate, Confederation of Indian Industries

PARLEY

On November 21, the Union Labour Ministry announced the implementation of the four labour codes: The Code on Wages, 2019; The Industrial Relations Code, 2020; The Code on Social Security, 2020; and The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020. Several trade unions have expressed concern over the notification of the four labour codes, with many of them demanding that they be revoked. Are the labour codes labour-friendly? Amarjeet Kaur and R. Mukundan discuss the topic in a conversation moderated by A.M. Jigeeesh. Edited excerpts:

What necessitated these codes? Trade unions have been maintaining that they never demanded such a codification. But industries were keen for reforms.

R. Mukundan: The labour codes are an integral part of India's economic growth. Many labour laws were framed way back in the 1940s and 1950s and needed a revamp in the current context. Fundamentally, the labour codes will benefit both workers in the traditional industry as well as new-age workers. It is important that workers are protected, empowered, and the workplace becomes conducive to productivity. The labour market has become diverse due to rapid industrial growth, formalisation of work, more contract workers, platform workers or gig workers, e-commerce, logistics... Labour laws, which were fragmented, with overlapping definitions, multiple compliances, inspections and different interpretation across States, have been simplified, harmonised, and modernised to make it easy to create jobs. They will ensure social protection and maintain industrial harmony in a fast-advancing economy.

Amarjeet Kaur: Workers in India fought for labour laws from the 19th century. The struggle was about working hours, wages, workplace safety, social security... In the 20th century, we got laws such as the Trade Unions Act, 1926; the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923, and more, after workers' struggles. Now, the government says that it wants to liberate workers from a colonial mindset and that is why it has brought in labour codes. Labour unions in India fought against British rule and got their legal right of organising. The labour codes snatch these rights from workers and will actually take us back to the colonial era. For instance, codes nullify the powers of State governments by centralising powers on issues such as regular employment. The codes legalise fixed-term employment and promote hire and fire. We have been demanding



A file photo of delivery men of food aggregators in India. PTI

regular employment. The government has failed to handle the economy well and to create jobs. It has not been able to create decent working conditions. Employers were repeatedly saying there is difficulty in complying with the laws, while trade unions demanded the formation of a labour commission. During the neoliberal economic era, the Second Labour Commission submitted its report to the A.B. Vajpayee government. But the positive suggestions of this report were ignored and all the employer-friendly suggestions have been accommodated in the codes, such as fixed term employment. In the last India Labour Conference (2015), the Prime Minister promised that no law will be amended without consulting trade unions. But this did not happen at the all-India level. No trade union was involved in the drafting stage. The government pushed these codes in a total undemocratic manner.

The government's argument is that the labour codes will attract investment. Will making changes in industrial and labour laws attract investments?

RM: This is a signal of policy stability and predictability. Today, we are not just competing within India. We are also competing with other countries and these laws make it much more competitive for global investors who compare the regulatory environment in countries such as Vietnam and South Korea with ours. When companies know what rules to follow, how to comply, what costs to expect, they can make long-term decisions. The uniformity across States, digital filings, reduced disputes, and emphasis on flexibility will make India a more attractive destination for the manufacturing and for supply chain. Investment depends on many other elements such as infrastructure, skills, taxation. But labour is an important part of that.



How many people are covered by social security today in India? Only up to 7%. These new laws are not going to cover 93% of the other workers. Gig workers are only a small share of informal economy workers. All informal economy workers need protection

AMARJEET KAUR

AK: I don't think it will attract investors when in our own country, the situation is volatile and workers are unsatisfied. How much FDI has come in since the government allowed 100% FDI in insurance and other sectors? We have already begun to lose out since the start of the tariff war. If India signs a bilateral treaty with the U.S., it will be opening a path for neo colonisation.

Will the codes enhance or expand social security? How prepared are our industries to share more for workers or towards a corpus that would help workers?

RM: The social security net is currently being widened to include platform and gig workers and informal workers in small establishments and fixed-term employees. About 40 crore workers who will have access to minimum wages and social security under the new codes. The preparedness would vary from sector to sector as well as the size of the companies. Organised sector companies are very well prepared. We are working very closely with MSMEs in terms of the implementation process.

AK: Our existing social security schemes have a mechanism of dispersal, have their own administrative setup, and there is no government funding involved. It is the employers and employees who contribute to these schemes, and the government should discuss this issue with us and seek our consultation. The existing schemes are being dumped into the Code on Social Security.

How many people are covered by social security today in India? Only up to 7%. These new laws are not going to cover 93% of the other workers. Gig workers are only a small share of informal economy workers. All informal economy workers need protection. Social security to all is a mirage. Fixed term employment will undermine the concept of job security and weaken trade unions.

Will the codes negatively impact worker-employer relations?

RM: Any reform will bring about certain shifts in

the work relationship. And there will be certain sections which will view it with a bit of a trepidation. I think it's important to hear their voices. Fundamentally, we have to progress and embrace the changes. These include deployment of women across all shifts and fixed-term employment and certain hiring and layoff thresholds. The codes strengthen notice period. They improve retrenchment compensation. They create reskilling funds because many of the industries are going through a massive shift today with AI.

AK: The codes are not going to create a conducive environment. Instead of bringing industrial peace, they are likely to create industrial unrest. Rights such as collective bargaining are not protected under the codes. Employers and employees need to sit together, which is why the Indian Labour Conference is essential. This is the right moment for employers' organisations to urge the government to call for it.

Minimum wages have been a long-pending demand. The S.P. Mukherjee Committee is yet to submit its report on this. So, will the codes help with basic minimum wages?

RM: There are nuances which cut across various regions and various industries. And the concern is around implementation, not principle, especially on what we call as living wages. In my view, it should reflect variations in the cost of living across regions, as well as sectoral differences where relevant. These are important nuances, and there should also be some link to productivity. Adjusting wages for inflation is important. We must ensure that the methodology used for this is clear and transparent so that it does not lead to disputes.

AK: The code on wages has diluted the minimum wage guarantees. Instead of ensuring a minimum living wage, the codes empower the Centre to fix a floor level wage. And how much of our workforce is being covered? Almost 90% of the workforce is not getting minimum wages and now more and more people will be out of minimum wage cover because under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, the threshold to obtain license for factory has been increased from 10 workers to 20 workers with power and 20 workers to 40 workers without power. This will exclude a number of workers from the purview of minimum wages law.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the QR code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

A former Minister and his "vada case"

Reporting from court is always exciting, especially during criminal cases, as K.A. Sengottaiyan's trials from the late 1990s showed

D. Suresh Kumar

Covering court proceedings is exciting for reporters for the sheer variety it offers. Unlike other specialised beats, it gives us the opportunity to follow developments on everything under the sun. A legal correspondent is privy to fine arguments by the best legal minds on constitutional provisions, issues of governance, interpretations of law in criminal cases, spirited public interest litigation, and, of course, judicial sermons. What is truly thrilling, though, is covering criminal trial proceedings. This is where a reporter encounters the ingenuity of criminal lawyers, the desperation of the accused, the smartness or sometimes even collusion of state prosecutors, the innocence of witnesses, and the straight-faced court staff.

Interesting courtroom encounters became staple fare when the M. Karunanidhi regime in Tamil Nadu (1996-2001) set up three special courts in Chennai to try 46 corruption cases against former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, some of her erstwhile cabinet colleagues, and IAS and IPS officers. The trials were conducted daily. The accused and their lawyers tried every trick to prolong the proceedings. Many of us would see accused politicians suddenly fall sick on crucial hearing dates. Fed up with such tactics, a special judge once went to a hospital, with lawyers, court staff, and journalists in tow, to frame charges against a former Minister, who was lying in bed.

In another case, just as the judge began to read out the charges, Jayalalithaa sneezed loudly. For a moment, everyone in the courtroom believed she was in real distress. She kept sneezing until the judge finished his part.

K.A. Sengottaiyan, one of Jayalalithaa's fiercest loyalists and a former Transport Minister, was facing three cases then. An uncrowned king in the Gobichettipalayam constituency, he had joined the AIADMK as a fan of its founder and actor-turned-politician M. G. Ramachandran

(MGR). He imbibed MGR's habit of loosening his purse strings. He enjoyed significant goodwill in his hometown, Erode district, for liberally tipping government employees. Journalists there would narrate tales of how the Telephone Department lineman would occasionally "discover" a faulty connection at his home to earn a princely tip.

Each time he appeared in court, dozens of supporters would accompany him, standing behind him and the other accused. Quite coincidentally, many prosecution witnesses would turn hostile. Rattled by the continuing volte-face of witnesses, the prosecution at one point decided to file a perjury case against a hostile witness to deter others.

During court hearings, Mr. Sengottaiyan's personal assistant would arrange lunch for his supporters from a popular vegetarian restaurant chain. Some journalists were also shown patronage. On one occasion, hot vada with sambar and chutney was distributed not just to his supporters, but also to a section of the special court staff. A now-defunct Tamil newspaper published a report with the headline: "Sengottaiyan buys vada for court staff." The story created quite a sensation. Special Judge-I Sambandham was furious. He issued a memo to all the staff, irrespective of whether or not they had eaten the vada. From that day, whenever journalists asked the court officer which case was listed for hearing the next day, if it was one of Mr. Sengottaiyan's, the reply would be: "Nalalikkuvu vada case, sir (Tomorrow is the vada case, sir)."

Eventually, Mr. Sengottaiyan was convicted in one of the "vada cases" and could not contest the 2001 Assembly elections. Later, he was acquitted by the Madras High Court, giving his political career a fresh lease of life. On Thursday, the leader, who was recently expelled from the AIADMK, which he served for over 50 years, joined actor-politician Vijay's fledgling Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

A dark chapter



The Mumbai Police pay homage to the those killed in the 26/11 terror attack, at the Mumbai police headquarters on Wednesday. EMMAANUEL YOGINI

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 28, 1975

Complete take-over of Burmah-Shell by Dec. 31

New Delhi, Nov. 27: The ownership of the Burmah-Shell refinery in Bombay and all its marketing undertakings in the country will be completely transferred to the Government of India by December 31, 1975, under a memorandum of understanding signed between them. Mr. P.K. Dave, Secretary, Union Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals, and Messrs. R.H. Kilbey and M.A. Cooke, Directors of Burmah-Shell, have signed the memorandum.



The question of the price payable to Burmah-Shell will be settled during the next five weeks. The Government has given an assurance that the officers and staff working in Burmah-Shell in India and on temporary overseas assignments will continue in the service of the new Government-owned company. The existing terms and conditions of their service will continue, unless duly altered by the Government or the new company. The provident fund, super annuation benefits, welfare benefits, etc. will similarly be maintained. The new company will take over Burmah-Shell's obligations to its employees including retrenchment compensation benefits relating to termination of services and pensions including supplementary retirement benefits.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 28, 1925

Wireless operators

London, Nov. 27: Telegraphists' Associations have issued strike notices in the case of all wireless operators on board British ships and instructed men not to sign for further voyages pending the settlement of the dispute regarding conditions of service, including proposed reduction of wages by 22sh 6d per month.

London, Nov. 27: The strike of wireless operators does not involve land stations, but the Association of Wireless and Cable Telegraphists, which has called the strike, claims as its members 98 per cent of the wireless operators on British merchantmen.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Anti-smog guns installed at metro construction sites

82 In a post on X, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation said on Thursday that it is among the first major construction agencies in the region to introduce these machines and now, it has mandated their use in all civil contractor agreements. PTI

Names in Bengal electoral roll that did not match with 2002

26 in lakh. The discrepancy emerged after the State's latest voter list was compared with the those prepared across different States between 2002 and 2006 during the previous SIR exercise, an official said on Wednesday evening. PTI

Magnitude of earthquake that hit western Indonesia

6.6 An earthquake hit an island off the coast of Sumatra in western Indonesia on Thursday, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), with no immediate reports of damage or tsunami warning. AFP

India's investment plan to boost rare earth magnet production

800 in \$ million. The plan involves offering incentives and subsidies to help establish manufacturing capacity of around 6,000 metric tons per year. China's export curbs had earlier raised alarm among some Indian firms. AFP

Schools in Assam that lack drinking water, toilet facilities

1,391 In all State-run schools in 'char' and rural areas across Assam, almost 28,000 teaching posts are also lying vacant, the State Assembly was informed on Thursday. PTI

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Why India struggles to clear its air

India confronts a recurring pollution crisis shaped by quick fixes such as cloud seeding, smog towers and odd-even rules; fragmented air-quality governance, scattered accountability and short-term political incentives keep long-term progress out of reach

FULL CONTEXT

Ajay Singh Nagpure

Each winter, as Delhi slips back into its familiar grey haze, India reaches for the same set of quick fixes, treating the pollution crisis as if it were temporary. Cloud seeding, smog towers, water sprinkling, odd-even rules, and festival crackdowns reappear in a predictable cycle. These are all high-visibility steps that promise urgency, but they change little on the ground (or in the air).

Public debate breaks down just as quickly: scientists are blamed for weak solutions, politicians for weak will, and administrators for blindly importing Western ideas. There is some truth in each charge, but none explains the full picture by itself. Over the last couple of weeks in Delhi, the public response has also included small public protests. In the November 24 edition, 50-60 protesters gathered near India Gate under heavy security presence; the police eventually detained five people, even though the protests were peaceful.

Slices of control

The repeat pattern of short-term interventions points to a structural flaw: the country's air-quality institutions — scientists, governments, regulators, cities, and communities — operate largely on their own. With no clear ownership or shared authority, lasting progress remains elusive.

This disconnect is no accident; instead, it is the product of how India's air-quality governance has taken shape. Unlike countries such as the U.S., the U.K., Japan, or China, where strong national laws and empowered regulators drove decades of steady progress, India's system has been fragmented from the start. The responsibility for clean air is scattered across a long list of bodies: the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change; the Central Pollution Control Board; the State Pollution Control Boards; the Commission for Air Quality Management; the Delhi Pollution Control Committee; municipal bodies such as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the New Delhi Municipal Council; and various State departments overseeing agriculture, transport, industry and energy. Sectoral agencies such as the National Highway Authority of India, the Public Works Department, the power distribution companies, and planning authorities add yet more layers.

Each agency oversees a slice of the problem, and no single institution holds full authority or full accountability for air-quality outcomes. The result is uneven enforcement across States, weak inter-state coordination in the National Capital Region, and frequent contradictions between court orders, Union government directives, and local decisions.

Policymakers also face real constraints. The environmental powers are constitutionally shared, budgets and staffing are uneven, and judicial pressure often pushes immediate action over long-term planning. In a system where many actors are involved but none is empowered to lead, progress becomes slow, inconsistent, and easily overtaken by short-term, high-visibility measures that step in to fill the governance vacuum.

The dominance of short-term measures is not simply the result of weak institutions: it reflects the incentives that drive Indian governance. Quick fixes allow governments to show visible action within a single news cycle, avoid confronting powerful sectors such as construction, transport, and agriculture,



Fight for rights: People protesting against air pollution near the India Gate in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

and postpone politically risky reforms. They also fit comfortably within annual budgets, unlike long-term investments in clean fuel, waste systems, or industrial upgrades.

This is why cloud seeding, smog towers, water sprinkling, and odd-even schemes return each winter: they are inexpensive to announce, easy to deploy, and rarely provoke resistance (notwithstanding the recent protests). Tools such as anti-smog guns and festival crackdowns help officials demonstrate responsiveness, even if they do little for public health. In effect, these interventions serve the politics of pollution more than the science of it, masking structural failures with momentary action, while public exposure to harmful air remains largely unchanged.

Two traps

Another reason India's pollution response struggles is what can be called the intellectual trap: the belief that solutions conceived within elite institutions, think-tanks, multilateral agencies, or top scientific organisations will automatically translate into effective action on the ground. Much of India's clean-air discourse is shaped by people who are analytically rigorous but often removed from the day-to-day realities of municipal administration, enforcement bottlenecks, informal economies, and political constraints. Their proposals may be technically sound, but they frequently underestimate the complexity of implementation in cities that lack staff, budgets, regulatory continuity, or even basic record-keeping. As a result, many "expert-designed" strategies rarely move beyond pilot stages or are adopted without the institutional scaffolding they need to succeed.

This disconnect becomes clearer when these ideas encounter the lived systems that actually produce pollution: scattered governance, informal construction practices, diesel-dependent freight, fragmented land markets, and the economic pressures faced by farmers, transporters, and small industries. Elite policy frameworks tend to assume a level of administrative capacity and social compliance that simply does not exist uniformly across Indian cities. They focus on what should work in theory rather than what can work in practice. In doing so, they risk producing policies that are ambitious on paper but unmanageable for the institutions expected to implement them.

The second distortion is the Western trap: the tendency to import global "best

practices" without redesigning them for Indian realities. Many of these models come from cities with abundant resources, stable public finance, strong regulatory credibility, and high institutional trust. When adopted wholesale, these approaches often carry assumptions that do not hold in India: consistent enforcement, reliable public transport, low informal activity, or predictable administrative coordination.

Technologies and regulations that function smoothly in European or East Asian settings encounter vastly different constraints in India's dense neighbourhoods, politically negotiated spaces and overstretched agencies. The issue is not the foreign origin of ideas but the lack of adaptation.

Together, the intellectual trap and Western trap shape a policy environment where strategies acquire their legitimacy by sounding sophisticated or globally aligned rather than by being grounded in how Indian institutions actually work. They produce initiatives that attract attention, secure funding, and generate impressive documents, yet struggle to scale or endure. Many fade quietly after a few months when confronted with routine bureaucratic churn, unclear mandates or resistance from stakeholders whose behaviour the policy sought to change. In the process, India's clean-air agenda becomes heavy on conceptual ambition but light on operational traction — a landscape of ideas that travel well but land poorly.

Indian constraints

Escaping the intellectual and Western traps means learning from global and expert ideas as well as accepting that even strong solutions must be redesigned for India's administrative and social realities. That requires institutions capable of planning beyond election cycles, coordinating across sectors, and staying focused even when political priorities shift.

For this, India needs clearer rules about who leads on air quality, who is accountable, and how decisions move between national, State, and municipal levels. A modern clean-air law with explicit mandates could create this basic clarity. The goal is not another powerful regulator but a coordinating body that can be trusted enough to align policies, resolve routine jurisdictional overlaps, and make sure implementation remains steady. Public access to compliance data and visible enforcement would make environmental rules credible while stable multi-year funding would allow agencies

to build staff, maintain monitoring systems, and sustain long-term programmes instead of reacting to crises.

Effective institutions also need the right expertise. India needs a professional layer of science managers, i.e. people who understand science, governance, and political constraints, and can convert knowledge into workable, context-specific decisions. Their role is not to generate more studies but to adapt existing insights to local capacity, guide ministries through complex transitions, and keep reforms coherent despite bureaucratic turnover. Without this bridging function, India's scientific strengths, including its models, sensors, and analytical tools, remain disconnected from day-to-day decision-making.

What India lacks, ultimately, is not ideas but alignment: between ambition and capacity, between what experts recommend and what institutions can actually enforce. Imported frameworks and elite prescriptions often fail because they assume levels of staffing, coordination, and public compliance that vary widely across States and cities. Indian solutions must therefore begin with Indian constraints: uneven municipal capacity, informal labour markets, competing development pressures, and diverse regional priorities. Policies must be designed to be implementable, not just elegant, which means they must be built around what agencies can realistically enforce, what communities will accept, and what local budgets can support. Without this grounding, well-intentioned initiatives will continue to stall once they leave conference rooms and meet real-world conditions.

What India needs

Clean air is not a seasonal aspiration: it is essential to public health, economic productivity and basic functioning of cities. India can learn from global experience and from its own scientific advances, but lasting progress depends on institutions and policies shaped for Indian conditions. Technology may offer moments of relief but only governance built for India's complexity can deliver durable change. The tools exist and the demand for cleaner air is unmistakable. Thus, what India needs now is the confidence to design solutions that reflect its own realities and the commitment to sustain them long enough to make the air genuinely breathable.

Ajay S. Nagpure is an urban systems scientist at the Urban Nexus Lab at Princeton University

THE GIST

India's repeat cycle of cloud seeding, smog towers, odd-even rules and festival crackdowns reflects a structural flaw in air-quality governance, where responsibilities are scattered across many bodies and no institution has full authority or accountability.

India's response is weakened by the 'intellectual trap' and the 'Western trap' — expert and global ideas that look good on paper but fail in practice because they don't account for India's limited municipal capacity, informal economies, and complex political and administrative realities.

What India needs is institutions designed for Indian constraints: clearer rules on who leads, a modern clean-air law with explicit mandates, steady multi-year funding, credible enforcement, public access to compliance data, and science managers who can bridge science with governance and politics.

EXPLAINER

Why are Srinagar's traditional livelihoods struggling to survive?

How are wetlands, lakes, and mountains shaping Srinagar's economy? What role did Article 370's dilution play in local livelihoods? Why are tourism, horticulture, and artisan trades struggling? What strategies can build a resilient, locally rooted economy?

Tikender Singh Panwar

The story so far:

If paradise is to be found on earth, Kashmir is it." Yet today, Kashmir's paradise is fraying – and in Srinagar, we find the fault-lines of a regional economy at a crossroads: between beauty and breakdown; between traditional livelihoods and externally imposed growth models. Srinagar is facing mounting ecological stress, weakening traditional sectors, and the after-effects of governance disruptions since the dilution of Article 370. Wetland loss, supply-chain breakdowns, urban sprawl, and joblessness have intensified economic fragility.

Why is Srinagar ecologically fragile?

Srinagar, nestled in a Himalayan valley, carries deep ecological vulnerabilities. Wetlands, lakes, and mountains have kept the city alive – as a horticultural belt, tourist beacon, and artisan hub. But unchecked urban expansion, sprawl, flood risk, and infrastructure stress are now compromising that fragile base. A local report notes that formerly natural sponges have been overtaken by construction; "encroached wetlands and choked drains... amplify flood damage, while unchecked sprawl hikes living costs."

Meanwhile, the horticulture sector – once a pillar of Kashmir's rural-urban interface – has been hammered. One study points out that despite the abrogation of special status, the annual growth rate slumped, supply chains broke down, and the backbone of thousands of livelihoods cracked.

What changed after the dilution of Article 370?

Since the dilution of Article 370 in August 2019, the region has experienced a dramatic governance shift. The dissolution of the Statehood status, communication blackouts and prolonged curfews have disrupted not only everyday life but also economic institutions. For instance, a qualitative study of women entrepreneurs in Srinagar and Ganderbal shows how the communication blackout, network restrictions and lockdowns crushed their ability to market crafts, connect with customers, and sustain a business.

In Srinagar, the private sector has remained stunted, while over 32,000 government posts remain unfilled as of March 2025. Urban unemployment stands at 11.8%, youth unemployment at 32%, and women's unemployment at 53.6%.

Then came the collapse of the three pillars: tourism, horticulture, and artisan trades.

Tourism is projected as the engine of revival, yet it remains highly seasonal and vulnerable.

A recent article reports that in 2025 alone, landslides and highway closures stranded 800+ fruit trucks, resulting in over ₹200 crore losses in a few days – demonstrating the fragility of the entire local supply chain.

Supply disruptions, climate risk, poor market access, and policy neglect have reduced horticulture's share in GDP and hampered its role as a stable driver.



Horticulture requires reliable cold-chain infrastructure, climate-adapted crops, and farmer cooperatives. MIRAN NISSAR

Artisan trades are similarly suffering. A qualitative study found that women artisans in the handicraft industry face exploitation, lack of access to markets, scarcity of raw materials, and breakdown in supply chains. Many street vendors and women workers in informal markets earn as little as ₹250-300 a day.

Economic disruptions have pushed certain marginalised and transgender communities into sex work, as other income sources disappear.

Why does the metropolitan capital infusion model fall short?

Many growth plans for Srinagar treat it as a recipient of large capital flows – real estate, tourism mega-projects, urban infrastructure – on the assumption that spending automatically leads to upliftment. But when local governance is weak, traditional livelihoods are ignored, and the ecological base is compromised, this model fails.

In Srinagar's "smart city" push, for example, artisan spaces and vendors are often squeezed out while the facade beautifies; green spaces vanish, older trees are removed; livelihoods are disrupted.

Hence, unless growth anchors itself in the local economy, the "integration into a metropolitan capital" approach risks increasing fragility rather than alleviating it.

What are the plausible directions for sustainable growth?

Horticulture requires reliable cold-chain infrastructure, climate-adapted crops, and farmer cooperatives. Wetlands, floodplains, and lake systems must be protected and integrated into urban

planning. Instead of sprawl, we should invest in green infrastructure.

Tourism can grow through community-led, heritage-based, and ecologically sensitive models that place artisans and local hosts at the centre.

Srinagar's artisan and craft-based economy needs institutional support that values its cultural depth. Traditional clusters of weavers, shawl-makers, wood-craft workers, papier-mâché artists and brassware makers require design assistance, accessible digital marketing channels and systems that reduce dependence on exploitative intermediaries. The State must also facilitate micro-finance, raw-material common-pools, craft-export linkages, and protection of workshop spaces rather than treating artisan neighbourhoods as "peripheral" to modern development.

Urban planning should integrate artisan quarters, preserve workshops, not criminalise street vendors or force them into oblivion. What Srinagar needs is a managed transition rather than displacing them.

Restoring meaningful local governance is essential for any sustainable economic revival. Without a local voice, top-down capital flows will only deepen alienation.

State policy should ensure reliable connectivity, functional marketing platforms, skill upgrades, and helplines for women entrepreneurs.

The growth slump and joblessness have pushed vulnerable groups into the margins. A coordinated social protection, vocational training and livelihood diversification strategy is needed.

Most importantly, Srinagar's future depends on building a balanced economic base rather than relying on

tourism or real estate alone.

Horticulture, artisanship, small-scale manufacturing, niche tourism and services must grow together to reduce vulnerability. For example, horticulture alone engages more than three million people in the region, and ignoring it weakens the entire economic foundation.

Tourism, meanwhile, should be made resilient to frequent disruptions through stronger links with local crafts, digital outreach, homestays, and off-season offerings.

Urban job creation should focus not just on high-capital projects but on upgrading the informal economy and creating linkages with village-town interactions.

What does all this mean for Srinagar's future?

Srinagar is at an inflection point. It strains under the weight of ecological, economic and governance vulnerabilities. To restore its promise, growth cannot simply mean "capital inflow and smart city facade". It calls for reviving the soils, the workshops, the crafts homes of Srinagar, listening to its women entrepreneurs, artisans, and small farmers; empowering them through connectivity, governance, market access, and ecological protection.

In doing so, we shift from fragility to resilience – from a "metropolitan cash-influx" model to a locally rooted, sustainably scaled economy.

The question for policymakers, for civil society, for the local economy is: Will we walk that path – or will Srinagar's paradise slip through our fingers? *Tikender Singh Panwar is a former Deputy Mayor of Shimla and currently a member of the Kerala Urban Commission*

THE DAILY QUIZ

Friedrich Engels, considered to be the co-author of the Communist Manifesto, was born on this day in 1820. Here is a quiz on the socialist philosopher

Vighnesh P. Venkitesh

QUESTION 1

What term denotes the idea that progress arises as a synthesis of opposing views, which was substantial in Engels's works?

QUESTION 2

Name the German philosopher known for his concept of the above-mentioned synthesis, who influenced Engels?

QUESTION 3

The condition of the working class in which country is considered to be the first major socialist work by Engels?

QUESTION 4

Name the organisation, regarded as the first communist political party, in which both Engels and Marx were key members and on behalf of which the Communist Manifesto was written?

QUESTION 5

Name the unfinished work of Engels, which was published in the Soviet Union in 1925?



Visual Question:

Name the city, which had a profound connection with Engels, where this statue is located? WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Questions and Answers of the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This week, the International Astronomical Union decided that a 3.5-billion-year-old crater on Mars will be named for the first Indian who served as the director of the Geological Survey of India. **Ans: M.S. Krishnan**
2. This Indian physicist from Hooghly district was known for his studies of light under CV Raman's guidance and on radiophysics with Camille Gutton. **Ans: Sisir Kumar Mitra**
3. Homi Jehangir Bhabha has a 64-km-wide crater named for him on the moon's far side. The crater is of scientific interest because the impact that formed it penetrated deep into the floor of the basin it is located in, excavated materials, and distributed them on the surrounding plains. Name this famous basin. **Ans: South Pole-Aitken Basin**
4. This astronomer is noted for estimating the value of pi with an accuracy high for his time, for his study of Diophantine equations, and for his studies of the epicycles of motion governing the planets, among others. **Ans: Aryabhata**
5. This physicist, born in Varanasi in 1929, was best known for founding and developing the field that uses isotopes produced by cosmic rays, e.g., in rocks and ice, to trace rates of erosion, sediment transport, and other planetary processes over long periods. **Ans: Devendra Lal**
Visual: Name this physicist. **Ans: Meghnad Saha**
Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan | Sudhir Thapa | Arun Kumar Singh | Sunil Madhavan | Ajay Majumder



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

Did you manage to pay the telephone bill before 1-00 o'clock?"

"No, I didn't. I was late. I reached the office at 1:30. But luckily for me, the concerned clerk allowed me to pay the bill."

"That was nice of him. But tell me why was the clerk worried?"

"I didn't say he was worried. All I said was..."

"...you said that the 'concerned clerk' took the cheque from you."

"But I never said..."

"...when you say, 'The concerned clerk took the cheque from me', it means, 'The worried clerk took the cheque from me.' 'Concerned' means 'worried' in that sentence."

"Really? So, if I say, I went to school and met the concerned teacher, does it mean that I met the worried teacher?"

"That's right! I took the child to the concerned parent, means I took the child to the worried parent."

"But tell me, how do I say, I gave the cheque to the clerk who was responsible for collecting the telephone bills?"

"I gave the cheque to the clerk concerned."

"I see. If I say, I went to school and met the teacher concerned, it means that I met the teacher responsible for some particular thing."

"Exactly! It could be that you met the teacher who was responsible for making arrangements for the party."

"Or the teacher who failed me in Physics!"

"Yes"

"Can you give me another example?"

"The General nearly killed a thousand people. In that sentence..."

"...that sentence means that the General was responsible for the death of nine hundred and..."

"...no. You see, there's a difference in meaning between 'The General nearly killed a thousand people' and 'The General killed nearly a thousand people'."

"What is the difference?"

"The first sentence, 'The General nearly killed a thousand people', means that the General came close to killing that many people. But he didn't kill any at all. He managed to avoid killing anyone."

"I see. So, if I say, 'I nearly ran two miles', it means that I didn't run at all?"

"Yes, maybe somebody gave you a ride and saved you the trouble of running."

"I never have such luck. 'I nearly bought the entire set' would mean that I almost bought the complete set, but for some reason I didn't! In fact, I didn't buy anything at all!"

"That's correct. You had planned to buy the set, but you changed your mind."

"But what if I actually ran approximately two miles?"

"You say 'I ran nearly two miles.'"

"So the sentence, 'The General killed nearly a thousand people', means that he did kill some people. Maybe he succeeded in killing over nine hundred and..."

"And for the final example, 'I bought nearly the complete set'..."

"...it means that although you didn't buy everything that was a part of the set, you bought most of it."

"Very good! You're not nearly as dumb as I thought!"

"That's not a nice thing to say."

"I'm sorry. You'd better run along home."

"I know. I don't want concerned parents waiting for me at the doorstep."

Published in The Hindu on October 27, 1998

Word of the day

Hedging:

a way of avoiding giving a direct answer or opinion

Synonyms: uncertain, unwilling, hesitating

Usage: Her hedging made it clear she didn't want to answer.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/hedgingpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /hedʒ.ɪŋ/

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

SCIENCE

Learning from centenarians: new study unveils secrets of longevity

Healthy diets, active lifestyle, avoiding tobacco and alcohol, and social connectedness foster longevity, according to the findings from the Longitudinal Ageing Study of India; more scientific and policy-based ageing research however, is needed, as India's senior population continues to grow

Sunil Rajpal
Shreya Ronanki

The oldest-olds group (especially centenarians, aged 100+ years) can offer valuable insights and learnings towards

understanding longevity via health and healthcare behaviour, social security, dietary patterns, and lifestyle habits. While research investments aimed at understanding the secrets to longevity have grown substantially in high-income countries, developing and populous nations such as India are yet to witness such research advancements.

Although India's traditional knowledge systems hold abundant insights into longevity characteristics, persistent gaps in research and reliable statistics continue to hinder efforts to decode existing wisdom. A recently-published paper on profiling the health and well-being of centenarians, utilising data from the Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) offer some learnings.

Health markers

India's sample centenarians reveal striking patterns of superior health markers and resilience. Interestingly, most were found to be in good health, reflecting optimal biomarker profiles. More than half (55.5%) of centenarians had a normal Body Mass Index (BMI), while about 41% were underweight.

Further, more than 91% of centenarians (100% of female centenarians) had a normal waist circumference. The absence of overweight and high-waist-circumference centenarians in the sample clearly indicates the importance of weight management and lean lifestyles (dietary restrictions and physical activity) for a healthier and longer life.

Chronic ailments that dominate discussions of ageing were virtually absent, with zero cases of high cholesterol, stroke, or heart disease, and only a few with diabetes (1.7%). More than 90% of centenarians had never consumed alcohol, and about 68% had never smoked tobacco. Collectively, these findings highlight the absence of major risk factors as a defining marker of longevity. Global studies have also observed that centenarians either completely avoided or markedly delay the onset of chronic diseases.

These findings add heft to the growing calls from experts to shift the public health discourse in India in order to promote healthy dietary habits and an active lifestyle at the population level, especially among older adults in urban areas. Nutrition policies and programmes need to pivot toward behavioural interventions to promote awareness of the benefits of weight management via healthy diets – reducing consumption of foods containing high fat, sugar, and salt; restricting alcohol and tobacco intake; and developing a consistent health



Shades of grey: India will be home to the highest number of centenarians (superagers) by 2050; therefore, the subject domain warrants timely research and policy attention. IMRAN NISSAR

routine. Active policy engagement in this regard has to start now, to mitigate the health burden in the coming decades.

Activities of daily living

Only about a third of the centenarians reported difficulties with basic activities of daily living (ADLs), including walking (33.3%), eating (33.3%), bathing (36.1%), and dressing (36.1%). However, more complex instrumental activities of daily living posed substantial barriers. A large proportion of centenarians struggled with housework (88.9%), managing money (83.3%), making calls (77.8%), shopping (75%), and finding addresses (69.4%). From a gender perspective, the findings are alarming, as most of the sample centenarians were female widows from rural areas.

The duality of resilience in health but dependence in daily function carries direct implications for ageing-related policies. The findings warrant sustained efforts towards promoting formal caregiving, community-based day-care services, accessible transport, nursing, and ambulatory care. These ADL limitations also indicate the requirement of an age-based tailored approach to providing elderly care and functioning assistance from a policy standpoint.

Behavioural interventions are also required to promote and destigmatise extra-familial services, such as outside help for formal nursing care of the elderly, to ease the workload on family members. This becomes especially important for tasks that require mental and cognitive abilities, including managing finances and calling for help in case of emergencies.

Advancements in modern technology can also be leveraged to provide remote monitoring support, as well as specialised geriatric aids and equipment to manage urgent healthcare needs.

Finally, a focus on improving social security nets for the oldest-old is critical to promote paid caregiving, along with enhancing the self-respect and subjective well-being derived from financial autonomy.

Well-being profile

Subjective self-assessments are known to be important markers of longevity. Several studies have shown that people with positive ratings toward self-health assessment and life satisfaction levels have a higher likelihood of better health markers and a longer life. The majority of the sample centenarians in India expressed moderate (36.8%) and high (51.2%) levels of satisfaction with their lives. More than 75% of the sample centenarians believed that they were healthy and happy.

Such findings point towards the need to promote discussions around socialisation activities and engagement, family care and bonding, living arrangements, and mental health issues. Potential pathways could be in the form of devoted elderly day-care platforms to encourage voluntary helping activities, augmenting a sense of purpose, and hence enhancing the self-assessment of well-being.

Additionally, spiritual gatherings are an essential platform for elderly Indians to socialise and connect at later stages of life. Fostering such congregations can be beneficial for both psychological and

emotional well-being. Finally, a high well-being rating by the oldest-olds also indicates the importance of mental wellness. Possible learning points from this could be adopting better sleep routines, more outdoor recreational activities, and limiting screen time.

The way forward

India will be home to the highest number of centenarians (superagers) by 2050; therefore, the subject domain warrants timely research and policy attention. To emerge as a global economic powerhouse requires a long-term perspective on research in longevity and well-being. The first step forward is to build a strengthened database on the oldest-olds, their distribution across geographies, demographics, and socioeconomic groups, and their basic lifestyle habits.

India has demonstrated remarkable success in generating reliable demographic and health statistics on infant births, vaccinations, and maternal health. This capacity now needs to be extended to longevity and scientific, policy-based ageing research. Global evidence indicated that longevity secrets cut across clinical, biological, physiological, genetic, and socioeconomic factors. India, with its sheer scale and diversity, is uniquely placed to contribute to this understanding.

(Sunil Rajpal is an assistant professor of economics & director, Centre for Research in Wellbeing and Happiness (CRWBH), FLAME University, Pune. sunil.rajpal@flame.edu.in Shreya Ronanki is research analyst, CRWBH, FLAME University, Pune. shreya.ronanki@flame.edu.in)

THE GIST

Research investments aimed at understanding the secrets to longevity have grown substantially in high-income countries, developing and populous nations such as India are yet to witness such research advancements. Persistent gaps in research and reliable statistics continue to hinder efforts to decode existing wisdom in India

India's sample centenarians reveal striking patterns of superior health markers and resilience. Interestingly, most were found to be in good health, reflecting optimal biomarker profiles. These findings add heft to the growing calls from experts to shift the discourse in order to promote healthy dietary habits and an active lifestyle at the population level

To emerge as a global economic powerhouse requires a long-term perspective on research in longevity and well-being. The first step forward is to build a strengthened database on the centenarians

BIG SHOT



Protective shot: A girl being vaccinated against diphtheria at the Al-Afad camp for displaced people in the town of Al-Dabba, northern Sudan. AFP

India's food colouring woes and steps being taken to combat recurring issue

Athira Elssa Johnson

India continues to face recurring episodes of chemical adulteration in food, particularly through the use of non-permitted synthetic dyes. One of the most persistent among them is auramine O, a bright yellow industrial dye banned under Indian food safety regulations.

Recent inspections by State food safety departments, academic studies and even everyday observations have again uncovered its presence in food items.

What is auramine?

Auramine O is a synthetic yellow dye extensively used in industry, including textile and leather processing, printing inks, paper manufacturing, and certain microbiological staining procedures. It has a vivid colour and is inexpensive, but is not approved for use as a food colour in India. Toxicological research has linked its ingestion to a range of health risks, including liver and kidney damage, enlargement of the spleen, mutagenic effects that can alter genetic material, and potential carcinogenic outcomes. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies auramine as a substance that is possibly carcinogenic to humans.



Despite longstanding prohibitions, auramine O continues to enter the food chain largely due to its easy availability and low cost. GETTY IMAGES

Despite longstanding prohibitions, auramine continues to enter the food chain largely due to its easy availability and low cost. Industrial-grade colours are sold informally in local markets, and small-scale sweet makers or vendors often rely on these unlabelled powders because they provide a bright, appealing yellow that mimics saffron, turmeric, or permitted synthetic colours. In many cases, producers remain unaware of regulatory restrictions or view enforcement as avoidable.

While the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, provides stringent provisions against adulteration, enforcement

remains uneven due to variations in laboratory capacity, staffing, and surveillance systems across States.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) periodically intensifies sampling, surveillance, and enforcement efforts, particularly during festive seasons when colour adulteration peaks. Several States have launched targeted drives against illegal colourants, leading to seizures of unlabelled dye packets and prosecution of violating units. Alongside enforcement, awareness programmes for small food manufacturers and street vendors are being expanded to encourage safer manufacturing practices. There is also a push to strengthen laboratory infrastructure and develop rapid testing kits that can detect industrial dyes at the point of sale.

Eliminating auramine O from the food chain will require a multilayered approach. This includes tighter regulation of chemical markets selling industrial dyes, sustained community-level education for small manufacturers, broader deployment of easy-to-use testing tools, and stronger penalties for chronic violators. Consumer education will also be crucial. (athira.elssa@thehindu.co.in)

thehindubusinessline.

FRIDAY • NOVEMBER 28, 2025

Rupee outlook

RBI deploys right tools to control currency volatility

The weakness in the rupee is back in focus. The currency is down by about 4 per cent against the dollar since the beginning of 2025. A double whammy has been at work here: the trade deficit has widened this fiscal, while capital flows too have dwindled. The latter has dipped for geo-political reasons, apart from sentiment perhaps taking a hit as a result of the trade-tariff deadlock with the US. The stress on the external account is likely to stay till a deal with the US is struck.



The merchandise trade deficit widened to \$197 billion in the April to October 2025 period compared with \$72 billion in the same period last fiscal year, as exports to the US declined. Simultaneously, foreign portfolio inflows have been flat this fiscal, even as investors pulled out \$5.8 billion from equity and debt this calendar year. Net foreign direct investment flows have turned negative in recent months, and incremental NRI deposits have declined 40 per cent in the first half of this fiscal year. Further, the weakness in the dollar has resulted in the appreciation of other currencies against the rupee. This has resulted in the rupee losing 15 per cent against the euro and 10 per cent against the pound in 2025. The rupee currently features among the worst performing emerging market currencies against the dollar.

However, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has done well to ensure orderly depreciation of the rupee, using the tools at its disposal judiciously. The RBI has struck a good balance here — between letting the rupee depreciate to improve the competitiveness of exporters, while also ensuring that the depreciation does not impact capital flows or importers too much. The central bank has net sold dollars worth \$21.8 billion so far this calendar year, which is far higher than the sale of \$12.3 billion in 2024. It had accelerated its dollar sales between October 2024 and January 2025, when the rupee came under stress due to massive foreign portfolio outflows, selling \$55.7 billion in four months. But it has reduced direct interventions in the spot market since February, choosing to manage the currency through the rupee futures and forwards market. The net short positions in the rupee forward market have increased three-fold over the past year and outstanding positions in exchange traded currency futures are also increasing.

While the interventions in spot market appear to have increased again since September, the use of other markets to influence the currency has led to limited depletion of the reserves. The foreign exchange reserves are at \$692 billion now, having recovered from the low of \$624 billion in January. The IMF has also acknowledged in its recent staff report that the RBI is only intervening to curb excessive volatility, while classifying its forex policy as 'crawl-like arrangement'. This is a vindication of the RBI's policy of allowing the rupee to depreciate slowly and intervening only to prevent sharp one-way movement. A trade deal will, however, alter the situation.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



"Last week, I had a running nose. This week, I think I am suffering from a breathing nose!"

Manufacturing — the Fibonacci Way

POWERFUL PATHWAY. By validating academic research early with industry, this approach reduces time-to-market, lowers import dependence, strengthens hi-tech capabilities



VIPIN SONDHI
ANURAG SRIVASTAVA

A manufacturing renaissance is within India's grasp. Global supply chains are recalibrating, technology cycles are compressing and the demand for resilient, sustainable production has never been greater. With proven digital capabilities and a strong science and engineering base, India has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to emerge as a global hub for industrial innovation.

Yet to lead in next-generation manufacturing — robotics, semiconductors, advanced materials and green mobility — we must dramatically accelerate the journey from idea to impact. Our challenge is not a lack of ambition or creativity, but the absence of a structured, cumulative process that consistently connects research institutions, industry partners and policy enablers.

This is where the Fibonacci Innovation Acceleration (FIA) model offers a powerful new pathway; one inspired by the logic of natural growth and the discipline of industrial execution.

GROWTH THAT BUILDS ON ITSELF
Leonardo of Pisa's Fibonacci sequence — 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13... — is a pattern where each number is the sum of the two before it. It appears throughout nature: in spiralling shells, the blooming of flowers, or the branching of trees. What makes it special is its principle of cumulative, self-reinforcing growth.

The FIA model borrows this principle to accelerate industrial innovation. Each step is designed to strengthen what came before, ensuring that scientific advances evolve organically into engineered products, scalable solutions and competitive manufacturing

capability. Practically, FIA moves innovation through a cumulative sequence — concept, simulation, prototype, testing and deployment — each stage reinforcing the last, just as in Fibonacci progression.

A COLLABORATIVE MODEL
The FIA framework has been operationalised at the Centre for Advanced Manufacturing Research and Autonomous Systems (CAMRAS), a programme of the Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore. It brings together academia, industry and government, overseen by a Project Review and Monitoring Committee (PRMC) of technical experts appointed by MHI. This triad is essential for translating fundamental research into industrial capability.

Through this model, multidisciplinary teams — engineers, materials scientists, roboticists and data experts — co-develop prototypes with industry, test them in near-real industrial environments and iterate rapidly. The result: technologies that are not only cutting-edge but also ready for local manufacturing.

Unlike conventional industry-academia collaborations, FIA is execution-oriented. It compels co-design, co-validation and co-ownership from day one, ensuring that manufacturability, cost, quality and application needs are embedded early in the innovation cycle.

By mirroring the additive logic of the Fibonacci sequence, the FIA process creates momentum, a self-sustaining loop where each success strengthens the foundation for the next.

BRIDGING THE INNOVATION GAP
India's relatively modest public investment in research often remains confined to laboratories. Public and private put together, the investment is less than 1 per cent of GDP on R&D, significantly lower than innovation-driven economies. This gap affects the pace and scale of

commercialisation. Indian industry frequently looks overseas for validated technologies instead of tapping domestic R&D capability. The gap between early research and market-readiness — i.e. the 'Valley of Death', between TRL 3 and TRL 7 — is where many promising ideas stall.

The FIA approach is designed to bridge this divide. By validating academic research early with industry, it ensures co-ownership and shared accountability. This reduces time-to-market, lowers import dependence and strengthens national capabilities in high-technology areas. A clear example is the advanced robotic arm developed under CAMRAS; conceived, simulated, prototyped and validated within 12-15 months and not several years. Entirely designed and made in India, it is now being adapted for applications across manufacturing and healthcare. Parallel efforts for sensors, controllers, actuators, advanced charging for large & nano drones and quadcopters, demonstrate the breadth of industrial impact possible under this approach.

WHY THIS MOMENT MATTERS
India's ambitions across manufacturing — from semiconductors to electric vehicles and defence — demand innovation at scale. Global companies are seeking resilient, diversified supply chains and we have the talent and capability to fill this need. But we must operate as a coordinated, convergent innovation system.

FIA is not just a research method; it is a mindset shift. It asks whether every breakthrough, prototype and pilot

Our engineering diversity is unmatched. Over a million engineers graduate annually. This creates fertile ground for applying FIA model at national scale

project feeds into a larger national innovation engine.

A national approach is essential; one where institutions, start-ups, corporates and government programmes align to scale technologies that matter: clean mobility, intelligent automation, digitalised manufacturing and energy-efficient systems.

This model offers particular advantages for our tens of thousands small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the backbone of the industrial supply chain. Through FIA-linked platforms, SMEs can gain access to advanced prototyping, testing and validation infrastructures typically out of their reach, enabling them to produce globally competitive components and systems.

Our engineering diversity is unmatched. Over a million engineers graduate annually. This creates fertile ground for high-velocity iteration, essential for applying the FIA model at national scale.

Government initiatives, from Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes to the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), further strengthen this foundation. The imperative now is disciplined execution, translating policy ambition into collaborative innovation.

THE WAY FORWARD
Institutionalising the Fibonacci approach — cumulative, adaptive and collaborative — can transform research institutions into engines of industrial growth. Each successful project then becomes the foundation for the next, creating a compounding effect.

Industry's role is pivotal. By engaging early in the innovation cycle, companies can steer research directions, secure intellectual property and ensure manufacturability from the outset.

The task now is to ensure that ideas, institutions and industries grow in harmony. In perfect Fibonacci rhythm.

Sondhi, Chairman, PRMC, CAMRAS at IISc, Bangalore and former MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland; Srivastava is Programme Head, CAMRAS at IISc. Views are personal

Labour codes could have achieved more

They leave too much to the rules and let small industries off the hook in compliance

KR Shyam Sundar

The entire debate on labour law reforms was pitched on 'ease of doing business' (EoDB). However, EoDB and labour rights (LR) can coexist. Adequately, even well-paid, healthy workforce assured of social security coverage and safe workplaces would be far more efficient than otherwise. Sadly, the lawmakers used the four labour codes (wages, industrial relations, occupational health and safety and social security) to enhance EoDB, while tinkering with labour welfare clauses.

The threshold for the application of the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 has been relaxed from 100 to 300. This law, apart from making regulations transparent and uniform, provides security against unfair dismissals. The government has also legalised fixed term contracts to provide numerical flexibility to employers. Though it has some provisions favouring labour there are no caps on the number of renewals. In China, post-two renewals, workers should be given an open-ended contract.

The major objective of industrial relations laws is to devise institutions and mechanisms to deliver quick justice



SAFETY. Small factories ignored

to workers/employers. The CIR dispenses with Labour Courts and retains only Industrial Tribunals (ITs) among others. IT will have two presiding officers (judicial and administrative). Workers first go to an IT and in the absence of unanimity between two officers wait for the third officer to join the IT. The high number of vacancies for officers and bureaucratisation will only delay the process of workers getting justice. The IT system can confuse legally illiterate workers.

TALL PROMISES

The Wage Code (WC) has universalised minimum wages (MW). The Central government shall notify the National Floor Level MW and no State shall have MW below it. However, these are

gigantic promises given the huge workforce of around 500 million (MW applicable to agriculture also) and poorly staffed enforcement machinery.

The government has claimed that workers' safety has been increased in the Occupational Health and Safety and Working Conditions Code (OSHWCC). OSHWCC is applicable to factories with 20+ workers using power and 40+ not using power. The coverage of OSHWCC is much less than that covered by the Factories Act.

The Factories Act, 1948 stipulates the compulsory constitution of a bipartite safety committee in every factory in which hazardous processes/substances are used. The appropriate government "may" by a general or specific order require the constitution of a safety committee (s.22). OSHWCC requires the appointment of a safety officer in a factory with 500+ workers and a factory carrying on a hazardous process (250+), (s.22)(a,b). What was once an enshrined legal right is now subject to the pleasure of the executive. Is safety not a concern in smaller factories?

In line with its presumption that workers in smaller establishments do not need legal coverage, the OSHWCC has relaxed the threshold of contractor/principal employer from 20 to 50 contract workers. It has virtually

allowed contract labour in all activities (perennial/non-perennial). It is well-known that smaller contractors are less dependable in law compliance. In China, in the reform in 2013, the government raised the minimum registered capital from ¥500,000 to ¥2,000,000. It also capped dispatch labour at 10 per cent of the total workforce and provided for equal pay for equal work (dispatch and directly employed).

In the SSC, the thresholds concerning EPF and ESI have not been changed, which is regrettable. The only positive aspect is the inclusion of gig/platform workers for social security. But they have been left out in the other codes, so issues like minimum wages are left unanswered. SSC does not contain labour welfare schemes for the unorganised workers, does not mention the sources for funding and has not determined the rate of contribution by the sources to the Fund. These are left to the rules.

The government boasts of fewer clauses primarily because procedural and substantive issues have been left to rule-making. The codes shift the legal power from the Parliament/Assembly to the executive. This is troublesome.

The writer is Professor of Practice, MDI, Gurgaon

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G-Sec yields

This refers to G-Sec yields and the forces at work (November 27). The government securities yield curve is shaped by market expectations and influenced by both global and domestic factors. Movements in US Treasury yields, driven by concerns over the widening US fiscal deficit and uncertainty around trade and tariff policies have added volatility to global bond markets and have had a spillover effect on Indian G-Sec yields. On the domestic side, the scale and timing of Central and State borrowing programmes vary

according to their fiscal pressures, influencing the trajectory and shape of the yield curve. Any widening of India's trade and fiscal deficits increases the government's reliance on market borrowings, which in turn exerts upward pressure on interest rates and yields.

Srinivasan Velamuri
Chennai

Approach to cybersecurity

Apropos the cartoon 'Pocket' (November 27), the humour lands because it mirrors a larger truth: cybersecurity cannot be outsourced

to a lone expert or reduced to a label on a door. As digital risks grow sharper and breaches more frequent, organisations need disciplined systems, not symbolic shows of caution.

K Sakunthala
Coimbatore

Embed ESG standards

This refers to 'Govt clears ₹3,300 crore scheme to produce critical rare earth magnets' (November 27). By targeting 6,000 TPA capacity and linking support to actual sales, the scheme attempts to build a full value

chain rather than just subsidise imports in another form. However, rare earth mining and processing are environmentally intensive. A sensible next step would be to hard-wire robust ESG standards, transparent disclosure and independent monitoring into every project approval, so that self-reliance is achieved without sacrificing environmental and social safeguards.

M Barathi
Bengaluru

Auto emission

Apropos 'Clash over cars'

(November 27), the push for stricter fuel efficiency targets is timely but risks being misaligned with market realities. Using fleet weight as a compliance metric inadvertently disadvantages domestic players, even as they invest in electrification. The assumption that EVs will offset inefficiencies overlooks gaps in infrastructure. A more nuanced approach — one that incentivises hybrid transitions — could balance environmental goals with industrial viability.

A Mylismami
Coimbatore

{ OUR TAKE }

Move to secure a rare resource

Incentivising production of rare earth permanent magnets is an economic necessity and a strategic choice

In an ideal world, a country need not manufacture everything at home. It need not even manufacture everything it needs to make things it wants to export to the outside world. But we do not live in an ideal world anymore. It is a world where the largest economy, the US, is on a tariff rampage, and the second-largest economy, China has tried to counteract some of this by holding back what is arguably the most critical component in modern manufacturing: Rare earth minerals.

India, like most other major economies in the world, is having to deal with both problems. It is still in trade dialogue with the US and, hopefully, an amicable solution will be achieved soon. However, the supply constraint side of the problem is more difficult to solve, mainly because most of the rare earth supplies are located in China. This, however, can't be an excuse for doing nothing and remaining at the mercy of others.

It is in this larger context that the Union cabinet's decision to incentivise production of rare earth permanent magnets (REPM) is welcome. The scheme, from details that are public, pretty much follows the larger framework of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes: Companies will get subsidies to set up production facilities and even more subsidies if their production crosses a certain threshold.

To be sure, this is not going to solve India's problem of not having enough rare earth raw material deposits. What it can do is to take care of second-order supply-side vulnerabilities by setting up manufacturing facilities for REPMs once raw material supplies have been taken care of. To oppose this kind of a policy would be tantamount to opposing expansion of India's petrochemical refinery prowess on the grounds that we do not produce enough crude oil. It is not just economical — on things such as saving foreign exchange, easing logistics costs for domestic electronic industry, etc — but also strategic in a way.

Understandably, no such initiative on its own can get rid of the potential impediments to India's aspirations to boost its domestic manufacturing and expand its export footprint — but what is important is that the policy framework is gradually expanding to address such gaps.

Why India must host global sports events

It's official now. Ahmedabad will host the Commonwealth Games (CWG) in 2030, which also marks the centenary of the mega event. This is in step with India's bid to host the 2036 Olympics in Ahmedabad, and the ambitious National Sports Policy (NSP) 2025 that envisions sports as a public good, a driver of economic development, and seeks to make India a global sporting powerhouse. The choice of Ahmedabad also suggests a push to expand sporting infrastructure beyond the national capital, which has been the preferred city for large international sporting events: Asian Games in 1951 and 1982 and the CWG in 2010 were held in New Delhi. Hyderabad hosted the Afro-Asian Games 2003, which saw representation from close to a hundred countries, though many single-event international tournaments, including cricket and hockey World Cups, have been held in cities across India. What distinguishes CWG from single-sport tournaments is the scale: For instance, over 4,000 athletes from 71 countries converged in Delhi in 2010.

India's concerted bid to become a global sporting hub is welcome for multiple reasons. One, sport is not just about podium finishes; it is also a major economic activity that generates business, creates employment, and helps brand a city. Two, a major sporting event attracts capital and enables urban renewal. A big turnaround of Delhi, for instance, happened during the 1982 Asian Games. Corruption scandals headlined the 2010 CWG, but the latter also led to an overhaul and expansion of the national capital's creaking infrastructure. It's time other metros enjoy the pleasure of hosting mega sporting events. Three, the NSP wants to turn sports into a mass movement. Sport is intrinsically connected with national pride and often acts as a glue to hold people together. Olympics and CWG can birth a sporting culture, and back it by offering quality infrastructure. A spectacle by the Sabarmati can surely help raise India's stature as a sporting hub, and, hopefully, a sporting power.

Towards a transparent, accountable judiciary

The backlog of reserved judgments signals broader systemic dysfunction. In this context, the Supreme Court's direction that high courts must disclose adjournments, causes of delay, and time taken to upload judgments is justified

Days ahead of being sworn in as the Chief Justice of India (CJI), Justice Surya Kant called for high courts to make public the time judges take to pronounce reserved verdicts and more. The trigger was a case from Jharkhand, where four life convicts — two from Scheduled Tribes and two from OBC communities — had waited two to three years after their criminal appeals were heard, with final judgments left in limbo.

These observations are not the first time the top court has raised alarms over reserved judgments in Jharkhand. Expressing "shock" at rising backlogs of reserved cases, it had urged judges to use sanctioned leave to clear criminal and civil appeals and pressed for regular public reporting on matters involving death sentences and life imprisonment. Needless to say, Jharkhand does not stand alone in the dock. In Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Delhi, for example, the backlog of reserved judgments signals broader systemic dysfunction.

In this context, the Supreme Court's direction that high courts must disclose adjournments, causes of delay, and time taken to upload judgments is entirely justified. After all, there appears to be no reason why performance data should be shielded from the very people who suffer its consequences.

Justice Kant's remarks on transparency and timeliness point to deeper, long-standing malaises. With a little over a year's tenure, he will have more breathing time than his two predecessors.

But given the task ahead, he will bite at his heels. He will want to leave the institution better than he found it. What he inherits is daunting: Staggering vacancies, mounting pendency, threatened infrastructure.

As of 2025, one in four district judges is missing. High courts face worse, with nearly one in three posts vacant. In Jharkhand, vacancies run at 40% in the high court and nearly 50% in district courts. The worst-affected high courts — Allahabad, Patna, Rajasthan, Odisha, Telangana — have vacancy levels exceeding 40%.

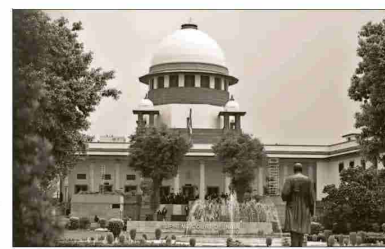
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Maja Daruwala

convicted persons sometimes less than 30%. Average undertrial stays have lengthened — from around three months in 2019 to more than 10 in 2025 — with a significant share staying far longer. Despite judicial handling, nothing suggests that the tide is turning.

Filling vacancies is part of the remedy, but far from sufficient. Recruitment cycles stretch from months to years; judiciary-executive friction can stall the process entirely. Even if every judicial vacancy were filled overnight, courtrooms and staff would still fall short of hands. One missing registrar, clerk, stenographer or data entry operator can halt the machinery. In an effort to break the familiar tarry-tarry-tarry (date after date) cycle, the judiciary increasingly acknowledges the need for systemic reform: Stricter timelines, better case management, stronger accountability for unreasonably delayed judgments by litigants and counsel.

Reaping technology's full value will rely on the speed at which reliable infrastructure is in place and the pace



The judiciary is too often decried. But respect for the bench — high or low — in a rule of law country, is non-negotiable.

of its wholehearted embrace by the legal fraternity. Interventions must be able to demonstrate unequivocally that they further fair and equal access to justice. Video-conferencing in criminal hearings has reduced administrative inconvenience, but has yet to show it can meaningfully reduce prison time or uphold fair trial norms.

Together, cheque bounce and motor vehicle cases account for 10-12% of all pendency, including 43 lakh cheque bounce matters. To reduce the backlog by up to 40% within five years, pilots — summary trials, fast-track courts, contract judges, digital summons, structured complaint formats — are being deployed. But the impact remains limited by uneven rollout, untrained mediators, weak follow-through, and inconsistent judicial buy-in.

Judicial speed is set by its slowest link, and there are many — not least legal counsel. A 2017 study found that nearly 80% of trial delays in Delhi stem from adjournments, absenteeism, and late filings, mostly by lawyers. Strictness in imposing costs is one way to wean them off habitual expectations of automatic adjournments. The revised procedural codes now clarify and reinforce the court's powers to limit adjournments and

impose costs. But courtroom power dynamics have long nurtured judicial reluctance to enforce sanctions firmly.

Judicial loads would ease if judges were better trained — and left to judge, not manage courts and their add-ons. Court managers and permanent senior functionaries, common elsewhere, remain underused in India. Earlier experiments fizzled, but the idea merits revival.

The judiciary is too often decried. But respect for the bench — high or low — in a rule of law country, is non-negotiable. It rests on two pillars: Transparency and accountability. Judges, like Caesar's wife, must show themselves above reproach — not cloaked in robes and rank, but answerable in the public square.

If the CJI's call is to carry weight, the Supreme Court's lead will set the national example. It has the platform the National Judicial Data Grid — and the capacity. Publishing its own real-time data on reserved judgments and time taken to dispose of cases would be a small act with large consequences. Reform, after all, follows the leader.

Maja Daruwala is chief editor, India Justice Report. The views expressed are personal

Hindon and the case for efficient, low-cost airports

A latecomer on India's aviation map, the Indian Air Force (IAF) owned and operated Hindon airport in Ghaziabad saw its first commercial flight in October 2019 — after much debate and discussion between the ministry of civil aviation (MoCA), IAF, and Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL). Initially, the idea was to promote regional connectivity and give a fillip to the UDAN scheme. While a few airlines started operating flights from Hindon, the pandemic caused curtains to fall after a short appearance on the aviation stage.

It was only in March 2025 that commercial operations were revived, when the low-fare airline of the Tata, Air India Express (AIX), unable to secure time slots at the DIAL airport, began operating flights from Hindon. Now, the air-line operates over 50 flights a week, to five destinations, from the airport. Soon after, Star Air (20 departures a week, to four destinations), and Indigo (52 departures a week, to six destinations) also began operating flights from the facility, transforming the sleepy airport into a mini aviation hub in the national capital region.

The good news is that its popularity seems to be on the rise. Even though the airport is a far cry from the fancy private airports India's elites have got accustomed to, people are beginning to appreciate its advantages.

A frequent Delhi-to-Cochin flier recently wrote saying that she opted for Hindon when the tickets for her family on their preferred date of travel worked out to be cheaper overall than flying from the DIAL airport. The price differential was big enough for her to pick the one-stop option Hindon presented. She added that many budget-conscious yet regular travellers she knows personally are using Hindon to reach Chennai. A Cochin-based businessman told this writer that he regularly uses Hindon to meet clients in Jalandhar (flying to the Adampur airport) and finds the airport "adequate" for his needs. Another reader assigned to say that barring the longish bus drive from the parking bay to the terminal, the airport is far easier and quicker to enter and exit (short

walks, easy access to cabs) than DIAL and works better for him locationally as he lives close to East Delhi. He saves time, if not money. For budget-conscious fliers (a growing segment) living in and around East Delhi and even Noida, Hindon is a lifeline, with its geographical advantage. Even train passengers are now recommending the airport to fliers.

Airlines, too, say that operating out of Hindon is cheaper in several ways. Since it is a no-frills, no-fuss facility, there is no user development fee.

Tax on fuel is 1% compared to Delhi's 25%, making it a haven for refuelling. Landing and navigation charges are far lower than DIAL, and what the National International Airport Limited (NIAL) will likely offer once it is functional. Back-of-the-envelope estimates from industry sources suggest that the airport is at least 15% cheaper to operate from than DIAL.

Keeping all this in mind, here are some suggestions to the authorities that can make flying from Hindon a preferred option for many. While it might make India proud to showcase the fancy, over-the-top structures that Indian airports have evolved into after privatisation, the costs of operating from these have also been soaring, and many are beginning to feel the pinch.

In a country with varied income segments, there is a large mass of travellers who can afford air travel but not a cup of tea (tea bag, at that) for ₹300 — which is available for ₹10 when the money you step out of the airport terminal. We need to look at setting up low-cost, no-frills airports in the metros, to begin with, and later, across other big towns.

Why don't we start with sprucing up the Hindon airport (avoiding private players' tendency to turn airports into grand shopping malls), expand over the top structures that Indian airports have evolved into after privatisation, the costs of operating from these have also been soaring, and many are beginning to feel the pinch.

Let's up the game without making it a gold-plating exercise, add some conveniences (a few more food and seating options), remove hurdles travellers face, and address their complaints. Dirty toilets, the list (which has become something of an Airport Authority of India signature), poor customer service in terms of information on delays and cancellations is a major issue too. Pilots say that IAF traffic often leads to excessive delays and hold-ups in the air, making it more coordination with the IAF would be essential. This translates into close to 30-minute delays in almost all departures and, often, landings as well. There are airside issues that need resolving, including the lack of parking bays and the widening of taxiways, among others.

None of the above, however, is anything more than a small, niggling issue that can be easily tackled through sensible planning and organisation. It might be worthwhile for the authorities to welcome this new kid on the block and get it to thrive.

Anjali Bhargava writes about governance, infrastructure, and the social sector. The views expressed are personal

| RAJNATH SINGH | UNION DEFENCE MINISTER

Values of pluralism, inclusiveness, and the rule of law are common to both our countries (India and Indonesia)

Speaking at the Third India-Indonesia Defence Ministers' Dialogue

HT

Bihar women's vote was for dignity, not freebies

The recent Bihar election will be remembered for the quiet, firm resolve of the state's women voters — Bihar recorded its highest-ever turnout since 1951, at around 66.9%. 71.6% of eligible women cast their vote, compared with 62.8% of men. Women's choices are reshaping the nation's political landscape. Bihar is a powerful witness to this. However, almost immediately, a familiar narrative surfaced: Women "voted for money", attracted by cash transfers and welfare schemes. It is both factually shallow and deeply disrespectful. Bihar's women endorsed a new type of governance that finally sees them, puts their name on bank accounts, gas connections, house-ownership documents — and, by extension, in the decision-making.

Across Western European countries, regular cash support to families — child benefits, parental leave, income support — is accepted as the backbone of a humane society. It helps mothers stay in the workforce, protects children from poverty, and gives families stability. No one there calls it "vote buying".

Nobel laureate economist Esther Duflo in her research has shown that when women control money in the household, they invest more in their children's education, nutrition and health. Women's empowerment and economic development reinforce each other. That is exactly what putting money into women's hands is meant to do.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India has built one of the world's largest and cleanest social delivery systems, powered by the Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile (JAM) trinity. The International Monetary Fund describes India's Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system as a "logistical marvel" that reaches hundreds of millions of low-income citizens, with programs "specifically targeting women, the elderly and farmers".

Cruelly, women are not peripheral to this system; they are at its heart. Jan Dhan Yojana brought crores of women into the banking system. Ujjwala Yojana protects their health and saves time, which can go into paid work, self-help group activity or children's education. Awaaz Yojana encourages house registration in the woman's name, individually or jointly. Maternity and nutrition schemes protect both mother and child at a critical time.

Under chief minister Nitish Kumar, Bihar has followed a clear "women-first" approach — from pioneering 35% reservation in govern-

ment jobs to cycles for schoolgirls, from the Mukhyamantri Kanya Uthyan support to girls from birth to graduation to the Jeevika debt initiative for economic empowerment of rural women. These organisations women to claim their rights and access schemes without fear.

Policies made in New Delhi and Patna have reached the last mile with unusual speed and credibility. Bihar's women saw that both the Union and the state governments were pulling in the same direction, towards dignity, security and opportunity. And they voted accordingly. To call this "voting for freebies" is to refuse to see the transformation inside the household.

The support from women is the result of years of consistent work not just in Bihar's villages and towns but across India, where women's voices have been heard and taken seriously.

Women have been asked simple but powerful questions: What is troubling you the most, what is your dream for your children, and what do you expect from your government? They rarely spoke about "freebies"; instead, they spoke of safety for their daughters, honest ration delivery, decent houses, toilets, smokeless kitchens, good schools, and a small financial cushion against illness or loss.

Volunteers, workers from the ruling parties' women's units, and grassroots organisations could, therefore, treat these conversations as an agenda for action. Over time, this has quietly created a strong, women-led ecosystem. Many began as homemakers or daily-wage earners and, with a little support, became problem-solvers in their neighbourhoods now rely on it. Their network is not flashy, but women know it is there. In many places, when a ration dealer cheats, when a widow is denied her due, or when a girl is stopped from studying, the first call is to a trusted "didi" who knows how to intervene. That kind of trust is built patiently, over years — and it is precisely this trust that the ruling dispensation's women-centred governance has been able to tap into and strengthen.

Women are informed citizens who weigh performance, delivery and respect. Saying they "voted for money" demeans the judgement of millions of women who voted for hope, security and respect. The Opposition should constructively debate welfare design, strategy, and priorities rather than demeaning Bihar's women.

Vanathi Srinivasan is national president, RPI Mahila Morcha. The views expressed are personal



For budget-conscious fliers living in and around East Delhi and even Noida, Hindon is a lifeline.

Policy framework

Sustained improvement will boost confidence

The broad assessment in the International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) country report, released on Wednesday, reflects India's macroeconomic stability and provides some useful pointers for policy discussion. The IMF expects the Indian economy to grow 6.6 per cent in the current year. Growth is expected to moderate to 6.2 per cent in 2026-27. The IMF's baseline assumption reckons on a prolonged 50 per cent American tariff, which the government has rightly objected to. India is negotiating with the United States (US) with the objective of arriving at a deal soon. The IMF further notes that the corporate and financial sectors have remained resilient with an adequate capital cushion. The government is moving forward on fiscal consolidation, and the current account deficit has remained moderate and manageable.

The report also has suggestions for India's macroeconomic managers. Some are worth discussing here. In the context of currency management, the IMF has argued that allowing greater flexibility will help absorb external shocks and reduce the need for foreign-exchange accumulation. The IMF in 2023 had classified India's foreign-exchange management as a "stabilised arrangement". Although the IMF notes that the intervention has declined, it has still classified the arrangement as "crawl-like". The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) stated position is that it does not target any level and intervenes in the market only to contain volatility. It is worth noting that India witnessed large inflows during the pandemic because big central banks reduced policy interest rates to near-zero and flooded the system with liquidity. It also witnessed large outflows in 2022 as global central banks raised interest rates in a coordinated fashion to combat high inflation. It can be argued that if the RBI had not intervened as it did on both these occasions, the rupee would have seen large volatility, negatively affecting businesses. Thus, a lot of what the RBI does in the foreign-exchange market is to insulate India from policy externalities of the West. But it must also be accepted that some amount of volatility is necessary, and the RBI's intervention should not impede the development of a deeper foreign-exchange market.

In the context of fiscal management, the IMF noted that with a revision in the gross domestic product base in 2026, India should revisit debt targets to make them more ambitious. It's hard to quibble with the idea of a faster reduction in public debt. It will help create policy space and improve spending quality. It has also been recommended that the debt anchor should be broadened to include state-government debt. This would require some adjustment in the current framework to also focus on reducing the state-level debt stock. Further, an annual fiscal-adjustment path will inform financial markets as to how the medium-term targets will be achieved. The IMF has also argued in favour of an independent fiscal oversight body. An independent fiscal body indeed is a missing piece in India's overall policy architecture, which has improved significantly over the years. Such a body would be a major confidence booster for financial markets and should be actively considered by the government. Overall, some of the recent reforms, such as the simplification of goods and services tax and the Labour Codes being made effective, will support growth. The government is negotiating agreements with various trading partners, including the European Union, apart from the US. An early conclusion of these agreements will improve medium-term growth prospects.

Banking on a bargain

Sandesara settlement raises important questions

The Supreme Court's recent order closing all criminal cases against Ahmedabad-based Sterling Biotech's fugitive promoters Nitin and Chetan Sandesara if they deposit ₹5,100 crore by December 17 has raised critical questions concerning the treatment of businesspeople who abscond with large sums of public money. The order refers to a one-time settlement that the promoters had agreed to repay a consortium of banks in return for the state to quash all criminal proceedings against them, including their designation as economic offenders. The brothers, who had managed to abscond on the Albanian passport in 2017 and were running an oil and gas business in Nigeria, had a long list of cases against them filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation, Enforcement Directorate, Serious Fraud Investigation Office, and the Income Tax Department.

At the very least, this order raises critical moral issues. In its order, the Supreme Court has argued that since public money is being returned to the lenders, no useful purpose would be served by continuing criminal proceedings against them. This reasoning, effectively decriminalising the offence, may privilege hard-headed pragmatism. But it is hard to justify this in terms of probity, which is the basis of a healthy business environment. The order, thus, effectively rewards defaulters and diminishes the incentives for well-connected borrowers to repay their loans either on time or at all. In fact, the order could be considered a windfall for the brothers because it does not impose a meaningful monetary penalty for their wilful acts of fraud and defalcation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act. The dues owed to Indian banks, according to the CBI, were ₹5,383 crore, which the promoters mostly diverted overseas via shell companies to build their Nigerian business and for personal gain such as acquiring private jets and upscale real estate. They have already deposited ₹3,507 crore in an earlier legal proceeding, and lenders recovered ₹1,192 crore under the insolvency process, implying an element of penalty in the settlement amount.

The one-time settlement, submitted to the court in a sealed envelope by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, was said to be a "consensus" figure following discussions with banks. Since the sums owed involve public money, some level of transparency is warranted as to how this number was arrived at. Second, these calculations overlook the interest payments over the intervening period, making the recovery a fraction of the amount owed to banks. A punitive penalty could at least have served as a salutary deterrent to other potential defaulters. The apex court has stated that this judgment is based on the "peculiar facts" of the case and cannot serve as a precedent. It is unclear how the Sandesara brothers and associates are any different from other absconding defaulters such as Vijay Malviya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, or Jatin Mehta. These absconders could as well seek similar bargain deals as the price of returning without seeing the inside of an Indian prison. It also comes at a time when Indian lenders have just emerged from a painful recovery from the burden of non-performing assets. Such orders run the risk of taking the banking system back to square one.



Income tax compliance: Gains and gaps

Despite mandatory compliance provisions, the share of nil returns remains high for both individuals and companies

One of the primary concerns of the income-tax regime is to expand the coverage — have a larger number of taxpayers within the scope of the regime. A broad-based tax regime is expected to be more stable and serve as a buoyant source of revenue. Income tax statistics provide information on the number of taxpayers as a part of the time series data dissemination. This is a superset of PAN holders who either paid tax or filed a return in a given assessment year. Income tax return statistics, on the other hand, provide information on the total number of individuals or PAN holders filing returns during a given financial year as well as their distribution according to various parameters, including the amount of tax paid.

From these different data series, it is possible to define three categories of interactions between the income-tax system and taxpayers: Those who pay taxes and file return, those who pay taxes but do not file returns, and those who file nil returns, implying no tax is payable. In this piece, we explore the trends in these three categories for three classes of taxpayers: Individuals, firms, and companies.

The Indian income-tax regime has an extensive system of tax deductions at source (TDS) and tax collections at source (TCS). These provisions were introduced to improve tax collection and compliance in return filing. These provisions have had a significant impact on revenue collections — TDS as a percentage of total revenue collections increased from 32 per cent in 2013-14 to 41 per cent in 2022-23. To understand the impact of such deductions on compliance behaviour, we look at the share of taxpayers who haven't filed a return. During the period 2013-14 to 2023-24, the share of this category has declined for all three classes of taxpayers. For individuals, it has dropped from 32 per cent to 23 per cent. A similar decline is evident for firms —

from 15 per cent to 9 per cent. For companies, in 2013-14, the share was 11 per cent but in subsequent years, it fluctuated around 6 per cent. These trends are heartening, but the levels might need some attention.

Turning to the other two categories, the first point to note is that for firms, nil returns account for a smaller share of total returns filed — 28 per cent. In contrast, the share of nil returns for both individuals and companies is significantly higher. The following figures show the evolution of different categories of taxpayers across these three categories. For firms, the predominance of tax-paying returns is evident.

For Individuals, the trends are quite dramatic. About 20 million taxpayers on average, pay taxes but do not file returns.

This level has not changed much over the years. Nil returns have surged sharply since 2016-17 and have sustained the higher level with some increase observed even in 2023-24. This could be partly attributed to changes in compliance requirements, where the rules require filing of returns if certain high-value transactions are undertaken. In contrast, the number of returns with positive tax liability peaked in FY 2019-20, i.e., for FY 2018-19, after which there is a sharp fall. Gradual increases in subsequent years have brought it back to pre-demonetisation levels. Tweaks in tax policy, like exemption thresholds, and in rebate regimes do not seem to account for these changes. These divergent trends need some attention. The introduction of the mandatory compliance provisions does not seem to be translating into higher tax payments.

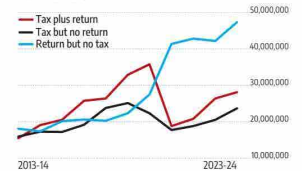
Turning to companies, the trends are significantly different. Demonetisation and the introduction of goods and services tax (GST) seem to have pushed up the number of tax-paying returns, with a moderation



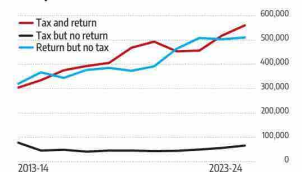
R KAVITA RAO

Tax Trends

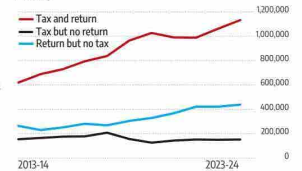
Individuals



Companies



Firms



Source: Income Tax Department's time series data

in the number of nil returns. As expected, the Covid crisis flipped this trend. It was only in 2023-24 that tax-paying returns began to command a larger share. What is noteworthy, however, is that both these series are trending upwards with nil returns moderately below 50 per cent. Policy changes like the introduction of the new income-tax regime with reduced tax rates don't seem to have changed this composition. Whether this is the normal course of evolution of tax systems needs to be examined. In particular, it would be interesting to explore whether companies evolve from a nil return status to a tax-paying status over the lifecycle, with adjustments made for changing economic conditions. It could throw light on the drivers of the persistence and growth of nil-return companies, even when the tax regime shifts from a regime with significant incentive provisions to one with fewer built-in incentives.

The author is director, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, New Delhi. The views are personal.

Right direction, but the road is long

Mumbai in the 1970s and '80s was a warning written in soot. Mills and factories that had once powered the city were in lockouts or declared sick. India's industrial licensing regime would not allow those firms to live. India's labour laws would not allow those firms to die. While waiting for closure permissions from labour inspectors, job opportunities ossified. Rules that claimed to protect workers in practice, killed jobs and trapped capital.

This history of industrial disputes has cast a long shadow over every debate on labour reform. On November 21, India to great credit brought into force four labour codes, replacing 29 previous laws. The new codes promise a more coherent regime. But how far do these codes expand economic freedom for workers? Seen through that lens, the new regime has made excellent breaks with the past, but some challenges remain.

New freedoms for workers

The most beautiful change is the law's recognition of women as persons with formal jobs in growing firms. For decades, Indian law treated growing beyond 100 workers as a kind of original sin. Factories with 100 or more workers needed government permission to retrench workers or close units. Many firms simply stayed below 100 on paper. The Industrial Relations Code shifts the main threshold to 300 workers. Below that number, basic protec-

tions and compensation rules still apply, but the state no longer stands between a failing firm and an honest exit. When employers know they can close if they must, they are more willing to hire. Workers gain when there are more employers to choose from.

There are other quiet gains. Fixed-term employment is now clearly legal, expanding the choice of arrangements for workers. Workers on fixed-term contracts must receive the same wages and statutory benefits as permanent workers for the period of their contract.



BHUVANA ANAND

Where freedom still falls short

Working hours are the sharpest example. The new law sets a daily limit of eight hours and a weekly limit of 48 hours, and it holds on to an overtime premium of twice the ordinary wage. On paper, this looks like strong protection. In practice, a very high overtime premium and rigid daily limits make it difficult to secure extra hours in the formal system. Workers who want longer shifts and higher monthly earnings cannot get them in a legal, transparent way. Economic freedom would give workers more room to negotiate hours within a clear weekly cap at a more moderate premium.

The new codes have also not internalised that economies of scale are good for job creation and worker prospects. By keeping heavy controls on establishments with 300 or more workers, the law still treats large firms as a problem to be contained rather than as engines of opportunity. Workers then end up in a landscape of dwarfs, with fewer large employers who can offer internal mobility, training ladders, and more formal bargaining power. A framework that encouraged size and scale would give workers more choice across employers and a

better chance of moving up over a working life. The codes also retain a paternalistic picture of what a good job should look like. They mandate in-kind benefits such as canteens, welfare officers, and committees even in relatively small establishments. Many workers would rather have more cash in hand and choose their own mix of food, childcare, or savings. Let freedom lie in letting workers bargain for the mix of wage and benefits that suits them.

The unfinished work

Parliament has taken an important step. It has replaced a mess of laws with a more coherent framework, raised some thresholds, and expanded important freedoms, especially for women. But if the test is economic freedom for workers, the job is not done.

The next stage of reform should cement more economic and earning freedom for workers. Our overtime rules need to be reset so that a worker who wants to earn more by working a little more, can do so in a legal, predictable way instead of through off-book arrangements. Intrusive controls and welfare mandates should apply only at much higher thresholds so that more firms can grow to a size where they offer training, promotion ladders, and real bargaining power to their employees. Inspectors should spend their time on serious violations, so that the law protects workers where the risks are greatest and leave more space for free agreements elsewhere.

Labour law is not only about employers and factories. It is about how much control the state claims over ordinary people and their decisions about work. The new codes do increase economic freedom for workers. Whether that promise is realised will depend on what Parliament does next and on how states use the discretion they now hold.

The author is cofounder and CEO of Prosperiti, an economic freedom think-tank in Delhi

Innovation as a moral imperative



AMRITH MUKHERJEE

Every morning, across India, thousands of hands descend into darkness. Sewers don't clean themselves, though we live as if they do. The infrastructure of our comfort — drains, manholes — functions on that oldest hierarchy of all: Caste. Manual scavengers, belonging to communities marked "untouchable" for millennia, breathe toxic fumes so we don't have to think about what happens after we flush. Infections, respiratory collapse, cardiovascular damage, death — they're the terms of employment. On paper, manual scavenging has been illegal since 1993. In practice, it remains India's open secret, a violence so routine it doesn't even reg-

ister as violence anymore.

Rashid, Vimal, Arun, and Nikhil decided to take matters into their own hands. In 2017, they founded Genrobotics with a robot called Bandicoot, a machine capable of cleaning 10 manholes daily without human exposure to toxins. But manual scavengers saw the robot as an existential threat. The founders' response was to redesign the implementation model, so manual scavengers could become robot operators, their expertise retained while the risk disappeared. The solution has been deployed across multiple states and municipalities. This is what Raghunath Mashelkar and Sushil Borde call *More from Less for More*: Innovation that doesn't choose between efficiency and justice.

We live in a world of contradictions. Gated communities with imported marble sit kilometres from settlements without running water. One India orders groceries via app, another India walks hours for drinking water. Can technology do anything to bridge this divergence? Mr Mashelkar and Mr Borde say yes.

Their philosophy — More from Less More — dreams audaciously.

The book begins thus: "How much more can we get? As much as human imagination allows. How much less can we use? As little as even zero. For how much more? For everyone, everywhere, without end. That is the power — and the promise of MLM: More from Less for More."

As the authors explain: "Companies are often confused: 'Given our cost structure, what segment can we serve?' They could well ask, 'Given that we need to cater to the unserved, what should our cost structure be?' This framework shifts innovation from a market response to a moral imperative, from profit maximisation to problem-solving. The authors identify two dominant innovation paradigms that have shaped global capitalism and deepened inequality. The first is More from More for Less: Premium products for premium customers, innovation designed for exclusivity. The second is Less from Less for More: Cheap products for poor people, mediocrity

packaged as affordability. MLM refuses this binary, taking a third path instead, rooted in what the authors call Gandhian Engineering, the principle that inventions must benefit everyone while respecting resource limits.

Take Jaipur Foot. Traditional prosthetics in developed countries can run \$10,000 or more, what with precision engineering and premium materials. Jaipur Foot questioned that very premise. Why not design for farmers who need to work fields, for labourers who can't afford months of recovery? The result was a prosthetic that costs a mere \$20 and restores mobility better than far more expensive alternatives. Or consider Reliance Jio, which saw a nation locked out of the digital economy by artificial pricing. By making data essentially free, Jio created an entire digital infrastructure of users and entrepreneurs who suddenly had access to tools previously unimaginable. The book catalogues dozens of such examples: Swana (respiratory diagnostics via smartphone for ₹1), iBreast (cancer screening for \$1), Dozee (ICU-grade monitoring using any bed), SanketLife (ECG tests for ₹10–20). Each demonstrates that the barrier was merely imaginative.

This is fundamentally different from *jugaad*. The authors clarify, "Jugaad often disregards aesthetics and professional standards, which can lead to subpar products and services. A mindset that values makeshift solutions over quality innovation can hinder industries from competing in global markets, where adherence to high standards is essential." While *jugaad* says make do with what you have, MLM tells you to reimagine what's possible. The difference is the gap between temporary workarounds that reinforce inequality and permanent solutions that shatter it.

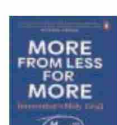
But how do organisations actually implement MLM? The authors offer strategic levers. Constraint-based innovation, the principle that limitations force creativity drove Indian Space Research Organisation's Mangalyaan Mars mission, which cost less than the film *Gravity* while achieving what only a handful of nations have managed. Business model innovation freed Google's search from

per-use fees, bringing it to billions through advertising revenue. Workflow innovation remade Aravind Eye Care into one of the world's most efficient surgical

systems, performing cataract operations at costs Western hospitals can't comprehend. National policies like Aardhaar and UPI created a digital infrastructure that startups could use without building from scratch. Each lever addresses a different barrier to affordable excellence, together forming a toolkit for organisations.

The authors conclude on a note of urgent appeal. "The twenty-first century is destined to be a century of hope, driven by the audacity of visionaries and the unstoppable momentum of innovation. The time to act is now. The century of hope begins today. The limitless human mind will shape a limitless future."

The reviewer is a journalist, writer, and editor fascinated by the stories that shape our world. Instagram/X: aroomofwords



More from Less for More

Innovation's Holy Grail

by Sushil Borde and Raghunath Mashelkar

Published by Penguin Business

280 pages ₹799

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Happening today

● **GOVT WILL** release GDP data for the July-September quarter (Q2). The Q1 GDP growth rate was at a five-quarter high of 7.8%. Economists see it declining to 7.3% in Q2. For FY26, RBI sees GDP growing 6.8%.

● **GOVT WILL** also release industrial production data and Central government finances for October.

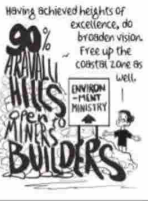
● **PRESIDENT DROUPADI** Murmu will attend a Brahma Kumaris event in Lucknow. She will also attend a Bharat Scouts & Guides Diamond Jubilee programme later in the day.

● **PM NARENDRA** Modi will visit Goa and Karnataka. In South Goa district, he will inaugurate a 77-foot bronze statue of Lord Ram. And in Udipi district, he will visit the Sri Krishna Math.

● **TMC DELEGATION** will meet the Election Commission in New Delhi over the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal.

Business as Usual

By EP UNNY



WORLD PAGE 18



2 TROOPS SHOT IN DC, AFGHAN MAN IN CUSTODY

HONG KONG TOWER INFERNO TOLL RISES TO 83

CENTRAL EMPOWERED COMMITTEE

Before SC stepped in, Ministry was told to let Law Commission decide future of green committee

Nikhil Ghanekar
New Delhi, November 27

A FORTNIGHT before the November 19 direction of the Supreme Court that the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), which advises it on environmental issues, can only be disbanded with its approval, the Cabinet Secretariat had asked the Environment Ministry to refer the matter of the CEC's future to the Law Commission,

INDEX RECORDS 86,055.86 IN THURSDAY EARLY TRADE, CLOSES AT 85,720.38

After 14-month turmoil, Sensex breaches 86,000 mark first time

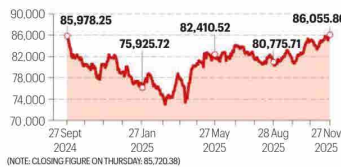
Behind turbulence: Trade & geopolitics abroad, GST & insurance Bill at home

George Mathew, Hitesh Vyas & Sandeep Singh
Mumbai, November 27

AFTER A long wait of 14 months, the Sensex at the Bombay Stock Exchange breached the 86,000 mark for the first time during Thursday morning trading, hitting a record high of 86,055.86 before finishing at 85,720.38—up 0.13 percent from the previous close of 85,609.51. The broader Nifty 50 also

scaled a lifetime peak of 86,310.45 during intraday trade but settled to end at 26,215.55, marginally higher than Wednesday's close of 26,205.30. The previous all-time highs on an intraday basis, for the Sensex was 85,978.25 and Nifty 50 26,250.90, both on September 27, 2024.

It was exactly 14 months ago that the Sensex first crossed the 85,000 milestone following a strong run that began in De-

● **SLOW ROAD TO 86K** (intraday highs over 14 months)

ember 2023, when it surged from 68,000 to 85,000 over the next ten months. Having gained 17,000 points—nearly 25 percent—between December 2023 and Sep-

tember 2024, the subsequent 14 months proved elusive for Indian markets. During this period, the Sensex oscillated between 71,000 and 85,000, hitting a low of 71,425 in April 2025 and the high of 85,978 in September 2024.

This turbulent movement indicates that while global factors kept the Indian markets under check, there were concerns on the domestic front about overvaluation of Indian equity markets. Hence, when global concerns arose on account of tariffs and oil prices, the Indian markets moved

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

SC for autonomous online regulator, Govt says amending rules on digital obscenity

Ananthakrishnan G
New Delhi, November 27

OBSERVING THAT "self-styled" mechanisms "will not be effective" in regulating online content, the Supreme Court Thursday suggested that an autonomous body "free from influence" oversee social media platforms while ensuring protection of free speech. It also suggested using the Aadhaar number or income tax PAN to verify the age of the user.

These suggestions were made by the bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi while hearing pleas by YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia and others challenging the FIRs against them over alleged obscene comments on Samay Raina's India's Got Latent show.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, in a note to the court, said it is planning to amend the Code of Ethics published with the Information Technology Rules, 2021 to incorporate guidelines on obscenity for digital content, on accessibility for online-curated content and on AI and deep fakes.

The proposals include rating of online content for different age groups and a bar on anti-national digital content. It said this was being proposed "in accordance with Article 19(1)(a) and the reasonable restrictions imposed under Article 19(2)." The note said an insertion will be made in Rule 2—

"obscene digital content" means any digital content shall be deemed to be obscene if it is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest or if its effect, (where it comprises two or more distinct items) the effect of any one of its items, is, if taken as a whole, tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it.

The bench, also hearing a plea by M/s SMA (Spinal Muscular Atrophy) Cure Foundation accusing satirists Samay Raina, Vipin Goyal, Balraj Paramjeet Singh Ghai, Sonali Thakkar and Nishant Jagdish Tanwar of mocking persons with disabilities (PwDs) on their show, told Solicitor General

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Disruptions a disaster for Opp: Rijiju ahead of House session

'If agenda driven by one or two failed leaders, it is very difficult..'

Express News Service
New Delhi, November 27

AHEAD OF the coming Winter Session of Parliament, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has said the Opposition should give up frequent disruption of proceedings, claiming that such measures have proved to be "a disaster politically" for it.

Speaking at The Idea Exchange session of The Indian Express, Rijiju said: "By disrupting parliamentary proceedings, they are losing election after election... Missing the Parliament forum for driving a



Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju at the Idea Exchange session on Thursday. RENUKA PURI

political agenda does not necessarily bring political dividends." With the Opposition expected to raise the Election Commission's ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the House, Rijiju said: "The discussion about any constitutional authority which

is clearly an autonomous body (the EC) is not advisable, number one, because the government cannot speak on behalf of the authority. Suppose you want to discuss the Supreme Court's functioning... it is different from judicial reforms... So that is why, when there are matters sub judice or

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FUELLED BY JAUNDICE SCARE, CLEANLINESS CONCERNS

Behind violent VIT protests: Fact, fiction, months of anger

Anand Mohan J
Sehore, November 27

SECURITY GUARDS and wardens watched in disbelief on Tuesday night as teenagers tore through hostel gates, uprooted elevator doors and torched vehicles—angry over the alleged lack of clean water and food and a jaundice contagion scare at Vellore Institute of Technology in Madhya Pradesh's Sehore.

It was the culmination of weeks of anger which had been brewing over what students say are legitimate concerns, even though the spark was a rumour: That three people had died of jaundice after 23 fell ill in the past two weeks. The administration had time to dispel the rumours, but by most accounts, failed to take the students into confidence.

On Thursday, University



A vandalised room at Vellore Institute of Technology in MP's Sehore.

Registrar K K Nair broke his silence on the deaths and clarified they were not due to jaundice. "As regards the death of a student, Ms Neha, it occurred on November 24 due to TB while at her home in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. It has nothing to do with jaundice. We are processing a

fee refund. Regarding the death of Dr Sangram Kesari Das, faculty, it was a natural death after prolonged illness. He has been on medical leave since May 2025 and returned a few days ago. He was found dead at home; he died of typhoid," Nair said.

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

HOUSE PANEL HEARING ON DEC 4

Basic structure not violated: Law panel firms up view on joint election Bills

Not in favour of statutory backing for Model Code of Conduct

Damini Nath
New Delhi, November 27

AHEAD OF its scheduled briefing before the Joint Committee of Parliament on the simultaneous elections Bills on December 4, the 23rd Law Commission is learnt to have

firmly up its view that the Bills do not disturb the basic structure of the Constitution, when it comes to federalism and the right of the voter. The commission's view, it is learnt, is that the Bills, which will enable simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State and Union Territory Assemblies, do not need ratification by states as they do not propose to make any changes to subjects under Article 368(2), clauses (a) to (e), relating to subjects that require ratification by states.

In response to a query by the committee, which is chaired by BJP MP P Chaudhary, the com-

mission is also learnt to have found that there is no requirement to give the Model Code of Conduct statutory recognition.

The committee on the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment), known as the One Nation One Election Bills, is set to meet on December 4.

Representatives of the Law Commission and the Election Commission are scheduled to brief the committee, according to the meeting notice.

The two Bills were introduced by Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal in December last year and referred to the committee. The Bills provide for synchronising the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections by curtailing the terms of state Assemblies that

are elected after a particular Lok Sabha to end with the term of that Lok Sabha. Once the terms of the legislatures align, the next general election would be held simultaneously.

In the commission's view, it is learnt, the Bills affect the duration or frequency of voting and not the right to vote, which does not violate the basic structure.

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

10 YRS AFTER DEATH OF PHD SCHOLAR

Up to 3 yrs jail, fine on institutes: Karnataka's Rohith Vemula Bill to curb campus caste bias

To be tabled in House Winter Session

Nikhila Henry
Hyderabad, November 27

NEARLY 10 years after the death of Dalit PhD scholar Rohith Vemula by suicide at the University of Hyderabad (UoH), the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government in Karnataka has come up with a Bill named after him in order to curb caste-based discrimination and harassment in public and private colleges and universities in the state.

The Siddaramaiah government is likely to table the Bill in the state Assembly during its Winter Session to be held during December 8-19. The legislation is being brought following a nudge from Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

The Bill, called The Karnataka Rohith Vemula (Prevention of Exclusion or Injustice) (Right to Education and Dignity) Bill, 2025, seeks to address the "caste realities" in higher educational institutions (HEIs). Some academic and legal experts, who have gone through

● **BILL PROVISIONS**

THE TABLING of the Bill will come months after a nudge by Cong leader Rahul Gandhi. **IT SEEKS** to curb "discrimination, harassment and atrocity on the basis of caste" in higher educational institutions.

E. AN AGGRIEVED person can be a student, faculty member or non-teaching staff.

BILL PROPOSES penalty for individual offenders, ranging from written apology to 3 years in prison and fine.

ALSO IMPOSES penalty on institutions for violations, which includes a cut in govt aid.

the Bill, say that upon its enactment, this law would curb "discrimination, harassment and atrocity on the basis of caste".

The proposed legislation

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

● LIST INCLUDES SEVEN INDIAN NAMES FOR GEOLOGICAL FEATURES ON MARS, INCLUDING CRATER NAMED AFTER RENOWNED GEOLOGIST M S KRISHNAN

On Martian surface, a slice of Kerala: Periyar river, Varkala beach, ISRO birthplace

Anjali Marar
Bengaluru, November 27

WHAT'S COMMON to Kerala's largest river, its largest fort, its most popular beach and two of its towns that helped propel India's space dreams? They all now have a second address—225 million kilometres away on Mars.

All these places—Periyar river, Bekal fort, Varkala beach, and Thumba and Vallamala—are among the newest names for

geological features on Mars, according to an announcement by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) on November 24.

In all, seven Indian names feature in the latest list prepared by the IAU's Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature. The names of two other locations on Mars honour the renowned geologist M S Krishnan, the first Indian to become the director of the Geological Survey of India in 1951. The crater named after

Krishnan measures 77 km in diameter and is believed to be over 3 billion years old. And a plain surface to the southeast of this crater, about 50 km in diameter, will be known as Krishnan Plains.

According to the nomenclature rules for Mars, large craters, of the size 50 km or larger, are named after scientists, while smaller craters are to be named after small towns and villages anywhere in the world with populations of about 100,000 or less. "This category is simply a large source of



The newly named geological features. INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMICAL UNION

crater names. No commemoration of specific towns or villages is intended," the rules say.

There are more than 2,000 features on Mars that have been named until now, according to the Gazetteer of Planetary Nomenclature maintained by the US Geological Survey, one of the most authoritative databases on the subject. About 50 of them have Indian references, including names of Indian towns and villages.

For naming stars or planets or cosmological features on the

planets, the IAU issues a 'Call for Proposals' seeking names from researchers worldwide. Along with the name, its origin and description of the feature needs to be submitted along with a short scientific explanation. The submission must also include the astronomical and unannotated images of the feature, the feature type, latitude or longitude in the correct coordinate system, and its size, if known.

In some cases, there are country-specific groups to whom the names are first sub-

mitted after which it is sent to the IAU. In some other cases, the proposer sends the names to the IAU. The final selection is done by the highest officials of the IAU after deliberation and committee-level meetings.

In case of the latest Martian crater naming, the proposal was sent by scientists at the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST) based on their ongoing research.

In the latest addition, the IAU has chosen a 9-km wide

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The Editorial Page

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

IN 1932
BECAUSE THE TRUTH
INVOLVES ALL

Step into the waiting middle ground

LOOK AGAIN at the snapshot from the Constitution Day celebrations at Parliament's Central Hall Wednesday. It didn't merely capture what has become an annual event since 2015, marking the adoption of the Constitution by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949. In times of great political polarisation, and with the dust of the campaign for Bihar yet to settle, the photograph brought together Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, among other leaders from both sides of the political divide, along with the President, Vice President and Speaker — all reading from the Constitution's Preamble, with Mahatma Gandhi gazing kindly down at the proceedings from a frame on the wall behind them.

Of course, that photograph is also descriptive. At the very least, it does not tell the whole story. Outside the shared frame, the BJP still paints spectres that fold in an ostensibly unfinished agenda of decolonisation with the supposed dangers to national integrity posed by alleged Congress pandering to extremist ideologies. And Congress says that the BJP's show of respect to the Constitution is only hypocrisy and the document needs to be saved from the ruling party. It is true that the political middle ground, anchored by constitutional values and ideals, remains largely unoccupied. And yet, at the same time, the Constitution's uplifting and moderating influence can also be seen and heard in other occasions and spaces. Listen to the new Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, hearing pleas in the Supreme Court challenging the SIR of electoral rolls in states. The CJI recast the villainous "intruder" or *ghuspathiyas* in the ongoing citizenship debates, in a more compassionate tone — "somebody working as a poor rickshaw puller, somebody working as a labourer on a construction site". If an Aadhaar card is issued to them, "that's something part of our constitutional ethos, that is our constitutional morality", said the CJI, even as he asked whether or not that means he can also vote in this country.

As a new Parliament session opens on Monday, it is the common ground and the compassion that need to be amplified and given more play. Of course, that is easier said than done. But both the writing of the constitutional compact all those November days ago and the institution of Parliament that contributes towards making it meaningful, reflect a despite-it-all optimism in the possibilities of democracy. After celebrating Constitution Day, and on the eve of the House opening its doors again to dialogue and debate, that's the challenge — and hope.

Hosting CWG is a test and an opportunity

EXACTLY 20 years after India last held the event in New Delhi, Commonwealth Sport formally named Ahmedabad the host of the centenary Games in 2030. India is now cast in the role of the unlikely saviour of the troubled Commonwealth Games. This can only be good news, for it means further investment in public infrastructure, a chance to promote sports tourism and provide a generation of Indian athletes the experience of competing in shiny new stadiums, in front of home fans. Hosting an event like the CWG will also mean increased funding for the athletes, which could translate to better performances not just at the Commonwealth level, but also in Asia and at the Olympics, as seen in 2010. This will be essential for India, especially as the country is eyeing the 2036 Olympics.

The 2030 CWG can make an impact even beyond the sporting field. The Games will offer India a chance to exorcise the ghosts of 2010 and repair its reputation as a credible sporting destination. Allegations of corruption, shoddy planning and delayed infrastructure once sullied India's global image so deeply that even the lawlessly staged Formula 1 races, the U-17 FIFA World Cup, and the cricket and hockey World Cups in the last 15 years couldn't fully erase the blemish. After it was awarded the event on Wednesday, the Indian delegation promised a controversy-free Games — insisting they are "well prepared" and have learnt the lessons of 2010. Chief among them: Don't over-commit, don't oversell, and remember that the Commonwealth Games are just that. As Commonwealth Sport CEO Katie Sadleir bluntly put it, "We are not the Olympics." It's a message India, yet to reveal the detailed plan and budget, must heed, and build a Games that matches ambition with realism.

After all, it is the build-up to the 2030 CWG, as much as the event itself, that will show how ready and efficient India is. The officials are conscious that the eyes of the world, not least the International Olympic Committee, will be on Ahmedabad for the next five years. If it lives up to the promise of delivering a smooth Games, the 2030 CWG can be a starting point for India towards becoming a trusted arena for global sport.

The buddy movie Hollywood did not need

DONALD TRUMP understands entertainment, never mind the three Razzies he's scored over the years (including "Worst Supporting Actor" for his cameo as himself in the 1989 film *Glengles Can't Do It*). Long before he became President of the United States for the first time in 2016 and gained the largest audience of his career, Trump was a pop culture insider thanks to his many film appearances and his hit reality show *The Apprentice*. Which is why it is not surprising that he has found the time, in the middle of brokering international "peace deals" and keeping his MAGA flock together, to greenlight a film. Or rather, express the wish to see it made — given the President's trigger-happy approach towards those who thwart him, it elicited immediate acquiescence.

What is baffling, however, is the choice of film, *Rush Hour*, for all its frothy fun and humorous action sequences, is hardly anybody's idea of a movie franchise that deserves a reboot. The cop/buddy comedy films starred Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan and grew progressively less funny and less successful with each new release (1998, 2001 and 2006). The 2017 sexual assault allegations against franchise director Brett Ratner, which appeared to end his Hollywood career, were only the final clod of mud thrown on the coffin of an IP that had long been nailed shut and lowered into the ground.

But Ratner is back — he's busy putting the finishing touches on his documentary about First Lady Melania Trump — and so, apparently, is Rush Hour, with the fourth film in the series being officially confirmed by Paramount Skydance. While the revival of a dead franchise may not be the worst news for Hollywood at the end of one of its worst years, the path to its creative rejuvenation certainly does not go through the White House.

THE WRITING on the wall for the Group of Twenty was clear in Indonesia in 2022. The failure to craft a joint statement due to differences on the Russian invasion of Ukraine alerted the next year's host, India, to camouflage that uncomfortable reality by focusing on the "Global South".

This month at Johannesburg, the G20 was reduced to a gathering of "middle powers" with the Big Three — the US, China and Russia — staying away. The decision of US President Donald Trump to seek a new detente with China and Russia, his declaration of a G2 with China and his Ukraine peace proposal suggesting a return of Russia to the G8, seem to have combined to reduce the relevance of the G20 for all three.

It is instructive to recall how and why the G20 summit came into being. It was in the autumn of 2008, just weeks after Lehman Brothers imploded, that French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the President of the European Commission rushed to Camp David for a meeting with US President George Bush. They sought a joint response to a financial crisis that had enveloped both the US and western Europe.

The then existing Group of Eight (G7 plus Russia) would normally have been considered an adequate platform for a consultation among major economies. However, by 2008, China had emerged as a major economy that had the financial resources to deal with the fiscal challenges the crisis posed.

Expanding the G8 to G9, including China, would have been an option. However, the US was not yet willing to give China that status. Perhaps Bush, who was in the midst of concluding a strategic partnership with India, was also conscious of how India would respond to such an elevation of China. Sarkozy reportedly told Bush that there was a plurilateral group of finance ministers that included several middle powers, including China, India, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, so why not elevate that group to a summit level? That is how the G20 finance ministers group became a G20 heads of government summit. The first meeting was convened by Bush in Washington, DC in November 2008.

China subsequently played a vital role in the management of what was essentially a "trans-Atlantic financial crisis", misleadingly dubbed the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) by Western economists. The G20 leadership met again in London in April 2009 and in Pittsburgh in September 2009. These three summits were the most focused in terms of policy response and created new financial institutions and empowered existing ones.

India enthusiastically welcomed the elevation of the G20 since it was for the first time that it had been admitted to a heads of government summit of such importance. Frustrated with the lack of progress in the reform of the United Nations and India's induction into the UN Security Council, it viewed the G20 as a substitute.

Initially, the G20 summits did have the feel of a UN "economic security council". However, after the first few summits, G20 gatherings essentially became talking shops. They have not been able to meaningfully address other global challenges like climate change and global trade. Trump's launching



SANJAYA BARU

If the Big Three have no interest in the G20, this group will wither away, with patchy attendance at future summits. Few such groups ever shut shop, but their meetings acquire less relevance for their members

of a trade war against China in his first term (2017-21) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine dealt a wounding blow to the G20. At the 2022 summit in Indonesia, Russian President Vladimir Putin did not turn up.

The news headlines that came out of the 2022 summit focused primarily on the bilateral meeting between China's President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden. The 2023 summit in New Delhi was marked by the absence of both Putin and Xi. India made something of the summit with a focus on the Global South and securing the admission of the African Union. While most heads of government, barring Putin, were present at Brazil's 2024 summit, nothing much came out of it in policy terms.

The absence of Trump, Xi and Putin at the Johannesburg summit has made the G20 meeting a gathering of what may be termed "middle powers". Trump is largely responsible for this for three reasons. First, his unilateralism. By declaring a tariff war against the rest of the world and asserting US primacy on a range of geopolitical and geo-economic fronts, he has sought to downgrade the relevance of plurilateral platforms.

Second, by suggesting a "G2" condominium with China, he has elevated a country that the US was not ready to admit into the G8 in 2008. Finally, by recommending the re-induction of Russia into the G8, from which it was evicted in 2014 after its repositioning of Crimea, Trump has reduced the relevance of the G20 to Russia.

If the Big Three have no interest in the G20, this group will wither away, with patchy attendance at future summits. Few

such groups ever shut shop, but their meetings acquire less relevance for their members. This fate awaits another group of which India is a member — the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).

Trump's new geopolitics in Asia and global geo-economics have forced India to re-examine its own approach to China. While India is scheduled to host the next Quad summit, postponed from this year to the next, its approach to the Quad may change depending on the new dynamics of the US approach to East Asia, on the one hand, and India's own outreach to China, on the other.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose to stay away from the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Malaysia, seemingly to avoid bumping into an unpredictable and Twitter-happy Trump, this group remains an important platform for India. The EAS brings together important countries from East and Southeast Asia, as well as major global powers. It is today a far more important gathering than the G20 or the Quad.

It is unfortunate that the G20 has been unwilling to address the major global economic challenges of climate change, the rise of mercantilism in international trade and restrictions on migration. Each of these geo-economic challenges can only be addressed through a global consensus that the G20 could have crafted. However, by failing to meaningfully focus on them and seek solutions that address both developmental aspirations and economic security concerns, the G20 has made itself increasingly irrelevant.

Baru was editor, The Financial Express. His most recent book is *Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India*

Childhood has changed, society must catch up



ROOPALI SINHA

THE RECENT death by suicide of a student from a prominent Delhi school is a deeply shocking and tragic event, compelling us to confront where we may be going wrong. If the school or its teachers bear any responsibility, they must, of course, be held accountable. Yet, this case is far from isolated; similar incidents are reported from across the country. Such tragedies underscore the urgent need to examine the challenges facing school education today.

Education, like many other fields, is undergoing transitions at multiple levels. Old values are fading, while new ones are yet to take firm root, making a clash of values inevitable. Significant gaps also exist between the value systems at home and in school, and these contradictions often affect children's personalities negatively.

Most parents tend to take their children's words at face value, often forming opinions without fully considering the teacher's perspective, a task made harder by the understandable difficulty of being objective about one's own child. This is where the teacher-parent tug-of-war begins. Parent-teacher meetings often feel like battlegrounds, and in this conflict, there is only one casualty: The child. Yet, the truth is, teachers and parents have to work together to build a bridge along which a child can walk with balance and confidence. Unfortunately, this collaboration is all too rare.

School is a microcosm of life, a place where children learn academic as well as personal lessons. It is unrealistic to expect it to be insulated from the wider world. Children today are deeply influenced by the rising tide of violence and diminishing empathy in society, by the pervasive echo chamber of social media. They bring these influences into the classroom. Behavioural and mental-health challenges no longer emerge only in adolescence. Egotism, violence, anger, and frustration increasingly manifest much earlier, sometimes leading to self-harm or physical or verbal aggression towards others. We have come a long way from the time when corporal punishment was an accepted prac-

tice in schools, but lack of empathy or kindness still exists — alongside sensitive and concerned teachers, cruel or biased teachers unfortunately remain a reality.

In elite urban schools, the dynamic differs, though of course there are exceptions. Most schools operate as service providers, with parents as clients. Teachers are reduced to employees, expected to ensure the convenience of the clients. This raises critical questions about the broader education system, which has multiple layers and complexities.

Another challenge is children's growing awareness of their rights. While this is largely a positive development, sometimes it is misused to justify unruly behaviour. Parental support is essential here — they must work with the teacher to guide the child. When parents dismiss inappropriate behaviour as freedom of expression or children acting their age, it only serves to reinforce misconduct.

Alignment between parents and teachers is essential for a child's healthy growth. Consider the example of social media: Most schools prohibit the use of cell phones on campus, but children spend the bulk of their time at home. The responsibility for guiding and monitoring their online presence during those hours rests with parents. Today, children are far more inclined to broadcast their thoughts than to sit with quiet reflection; they are constantly drawn to the spotlight, to visibility and validation. At the same time, children from disadvantaged backgrounds grapple with an entirely different set of struggles that bear little resemblance to the concerns of their upper-class peers.

The bottom line is this: The responsibility of raising children cannot be left to the children. It rests with the adults around them — teachers, parents, and society at large. Blame games serve no one. What is required instead is mutual understanding and a shared concern, between schools and homes. Only through this collective care can we truly safeguard the well-being of our children.

The writer is a Delhi-based teacher

What each side hears when Xi and Trump talk



ANUSHKA SAXENA

THE RECENT phone call between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping pointed to the differences in each side's perception of what matters. A month after the two leaders met in Busan, South Korea, the call acted as a reminder of the common ground they are required to follow through in two main domains — trade and technological exchanges.

What is most interesting in Xinhua's re-read of the conversation is that Xi used the call to forcefully reiterate that Taiwan's "return to China is an important component of the post-war international order", tying it not just to China's sovereignty but to the legacy of Allied victory in World War II. This framing signals to the US that support for the "One China Principle" remains non-negotiable for Beijing.

In the aftermath of tensions stirred between China and Japan over Taiwan, with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi pledging military support to the island in the event of a conflict with China, it is ironic but understandable why Beijing thought it necessary to file an official complaint with the US. To Trump's credit, he soon also made a call to Takaichi, where she spoke highly of close US-Japan ties.

Xi also stressed China's support for "all efforts conducive to peace" in Ukraine and expressed hope for a "fair, lasting, and binding peace at the root". Despite the friendly ties with Russia, such an articulation fits with China's standing-diplomatic message that it seeks negotiated settlements and opposes protracted confrontation. It seeks an active role in new global security arrangements.

With Washington intensifying efforts for a Ukraine peace initiative by Thanksgiving, and China maintaining robust ties with Moscow, Beijing is carefully signalling willingness to align with US diplomatic efforts while not alienating Russia. Potentially, it is also China's way to assuage American concerns on something that matters to them — ending Russia's campaign — in exchange for Washington's acknowledgement on China's Taiwan red line.

While an official White House press release is awaited, it is interesting that Trump's main takeaway from the meeting is that China has conceded to the bidding of the US's "Great Farmers". Other linguistic and material differences in the two sides' articulations are essential to note: Trump calls his relations with China "extremely strong". Xinhua comments that Trump called Xi a "great leader". Trump's post mentions Ukraine, but makes no mention of a discussion on Taiwan. Xinhua's release makes no mention of fantasy or soybeans, while those turn out to be the main issue areas from Trump's perspective. Finally, Trump discusses leaders of the two sides visiting each other's countries in 2026, but the Xinhua release says nothing on that front.

The signalling on either side is firm and pertains only to self-interest. Even as a temporary truce between the two countries is underway, structural faultlines persist, and neither side seems to even illusorily agree to concessions.

The writer is staff researcher, Indo-Pacific Studies Programme, Takshashila Institution, Bengaluru

40 YEARS AGO

November 28, 1985



Golden Temple priest shot

THE HEAD priest of the Golden Temple, Giani Sahib Singh, sustained a bullet injury when an attempt was made on his life in the temple park area by three unidentified assailants. His bodyguard, Nanak Singh, who was following him with a stun gun in his hand, was killed on the spot. Two of the three assailants opened fire from revolvers as Giani Sahib Singh bowed towards the sanctum sanctorum of the most sacred Sikh shrine at about 4.40 am.

President, PM condemn attack

THE PRESIDENT, Zail Singh, expressed shock over the murderous attack on the Golden

Temple head priest, Giani Sahib Singh, and described it as most unfortunate. The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, condemned the attack on Giani Sahib Singh and expressed relief at his providential escape.

Gorbachev on arms race

THE SOVIET leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, said that he and the American President, Ronald Reagan should prepare for their next summit in Washington next year by observing the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and SALT-II, and otherwise reversing the arms race and reducing nuclear weapon stocks. Reviewing before the USSR Supreme Soviet the outcome of the Geneva summit, Gorbachev said a real possibility exists for reduction of

armaments. He hastened to add that there could, however, be no reversal of the arms race without keeping space unutilised.

Indian wheat for Vietnam

INDIA AGREED to provide 1 lakh tonnes of wheat and soft-term credit of Rs 15 crore to Vietnam. In addition, India will give Rs 5 crore to Vietnam for interest rescheduling over the next two years. The fresh supply of wheat over a period of two years will be in addition to the 50,000 tonnes of grain agreed to earlier in June this year. The agreement providing for the supply of wheat and credit was endorsed at a meeting between the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and his Vietnamese counterpart, Phan Van Dong.

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A weekly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate

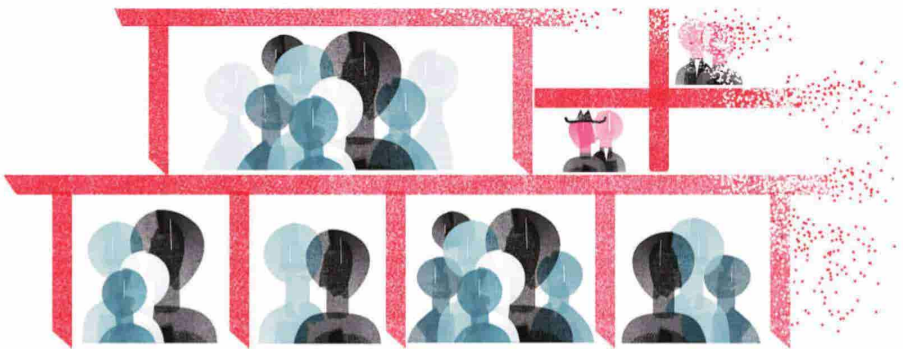


ILLUSTRATION: R SAKSHI KUMAR

Is Macaulay to blame for the 'colonial mindset' or is he a convenient strawman in politics?

India must exorcise Macaulay's ghost



VINAY SAHASRABUDHE

ABOUT A decade after Independence, there was a popular refrain that while the "White angrez" had been sent back, the "coloured angrez" were still around. Many would also add that while the angrez have gone, angrezat continues. "We, the people," and the systems in India continued to be under colonial influence. Recognising this fact and analysing the impact of the BJP's victory under Narendra Modi's leadership in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, The Guardian commented, "Today, 18 May 2014, may well go down in history as the day when Britain finally left India. Little wonder, then, that PM Modi gave a clarion call to liberate India from the sinister influence of T B Macaulay, a symbol of colonial forces that almost compelled Indians to hate everything that was essentially Indian. On the one hand, promoters of Macaulay's thinking created an acute sense of inferiority. On the other hand, they tried to divide Indians, and while leaving, they left behind a much more fragmented society."

Sadly, thanks to the inertia of rulers after Independence, the content of education mooted by Macaulay was allowed to continue for decades, only to be drastically altered with the new National Education Policy. It's a fact that our entire discourse about knowledge traditions, including the history, content and conduct of education, smacked of a deep influence of Macaulay's Minute. So much so that Mahatma Gandhi, in his 1931 speech at Chatham House, bluntly told the British how they had destroyed the Indianness of Indians. He said, "We have the education of this future state. I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was 50 or 100 years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished." What the PM is calling for is re-nourishing the roots of this beautiful tree.

PM Modi's critique of Lord Macaulay is not confined only to education. It is targeted at everything that reflects the colonial mindset. From the content of education to our model of public administration, from parliamentary

procedures to courtroom mannerisms, there are several things that need to be liberated from colonial influence. PM Modi's appeal to end the colonial impact in the next 10 years could also be seen as a sequel to his "Panch-Pran" appeal and his emphasis on promoting the mother tongue in education. It is important to note that PM Modi also said the government was not opposed to English as a language.

Pro-status quo elements often deny the continuing impact of colonialism. They would do well to take a closer look at our governance structure, our parliamentary practices and facets of the public sphere at large. Many may not know what happened in 1999. Till then, the budget used to be presented in Parliament at 5 pm to suit the London time. It was thanks to then PM A B Vajpayee that the practice was abandoned.

From referring to the district magistrate as district collector to addressing judges presiding over courts of law as "My Lord" to the robes a lawyer is expected to wear in the courtroom, there are several imprints of colonial rule we need to discard. This is because ideas of racial supremacy, leading to an all-pervading Eurocentricism, were the foundational ideas of most colonial powers.

Thanks to British rule, the sinister impact of this Eurocentric thinking could make quick inroads in our consciousness. As a result, indigenous became synonymous with inferior. More than reading and writing, we relished speaking English as it quickly gave us a pseudo-satisfaction of being from the elite classes. This made us hollow from within, and we started disrespecting not just our mother tongues but our mother culture as well. From climatically unsuitable three-piece suits to hygienically ill-advised Western-style multi-course lunches and dinners, we pushed everything traditional to the periphery. Unthinkingly and needlessly, we started officially calling allopathy "modern medicine," making Ayurveda, Siddha, etc., "un-modern," for no fault of these indigenous medicinal systems. Ironically, in severely famine-affected parts of rural India, children relished singing poems like "rain, rain go away".

PM Modi's call for liberating our thinking from the influence of Macaulay is not against all that is foreign. Gandhi had quite eloquently written on this issue in 1924 in *Young India*: "My Swa-raj (self-rule) is to keep intact the genius of our civilisation. I want to write many new things, but they must all be written on the Indian slate. I would gladly borrow from the West when I can return the amount with decent interest."

The writer is a national executive committee member of the BJP

Long live Mahatma Macaulay



CHANDRABHAN PRASAD AND ASHISH GAUTAM

WITH THE onslaught on the "Macaulay mindset", the vilification of Lord Macaulay has returned. He is, by implication, called a cultural enslaver. His admirers are derided as "Macaulay Putra" and for having "internalised inferiority". The "mindset" theorem suggests that English-educated Indians are traitors to an imagined civilisational essence. Yet, few critics have read the primary text that grounds this outrage: Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education (1835). Selective quotations over two centuries have ensured that his arguments are understood only through subterfuge.

In 1813, the British parliament ordered the East India Company to spend at least Rs 1 lakh annually "for the revival and promotion of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories". This mandate split British officials. Orientalists argued in favour of Sanskrit and Arabic education. Anglicists, led by Macaulay, argued that funds must support education aligned with economic modernity, empirical science and universal knowledge. This debate has been reduced to a language issue. Macaulay demonstrated, using accounts from Calcutta, that Sanskrit and Arabic colleges required stipends to attract students, while English schools drew fee-paying students voluntarily. His argument was based on economic viability and intellectual returns.

The distortion was led by NCERT books, which claimed Macaulay sought to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". Bipan Chandra used this quote as proof of cultural subservience. Sumit Sarkar repeated it. Students were never shown the full paragraph that reads: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowl-

edge to the great mass of the population." This sleight of hand is reminiscent of the Ashwathama episode. Lord Krishna instructs Yudhishtira to declare "Ashwathama is dead". Yudhishtira does so, muttering "the elephant" under his breath. The visible and concealed truth coexist. Mythology often treats such misdirection as a divine sanction when the cause is deemed righteous.

The second quote routinely weaponised against Macaulay is: "... a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia". Yet, the same Minute contains a line, "A country once superior in knowledge to the nations of Europe," referring to Egypt, which had declined. He notes that the West was "in a state as barbarous as that in which our ancestors were before the Crusades". He observes that "almost everything that was worth reading was contained in the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans", and he lists Thucydides, Plato, Cicero, and Tacitus as intellectual superiors. He famously argues: "The languages of Western Europe civilised Russia. I cannot doubt that they will do for Hindoo what they have done for the Tartar." That was not a claim of racial hierarchy. It was a statement about how languages that carry modern science and philosophical knowledge transform societies.

Macaulay reinforced this point in his July 10, 1833, House of Commons speech. He described caste as a system that "pronounced some men to be by birth the lords of the soil and others to be by birth hewers of wood and drawers of water". He mocked the idea that a nation could advance while "the highest honours of the state were reserved for a favoured caste". The outrage against Macaulay is not solely rooted in colonial injury but also in his attack on caste codes. That's the reason I love scholar D Shyam Babu's coinage of "Mahatma Macaulay". It recognises that English disrupted caste-based social hierarchies. It reassigned moral authority to the figure who initiated the first structural breach in caste's history.

English didn't merely replace Sanskrit. It diluted caste. Sanskrit preserved hierarchy. English entered India without ritual barriers. It opened access to science, law, administration, and global imaginations. What caste society refused Dalits, English offered. Sanskrit pretends to defend authenticity while smuggling caste codes back into public discourse.

The Ashwathama analogy completes the picture. Deception is legitimised for Dharmic urgency. Only a Mahatma like Macaulay can imagine Punjab better than the England of his grandfathers. Ashwathama is dead. Long live Mahatma Macaulay.

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Rollback of quality control orders is good, but don't make haste



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

AFTER SPENDING the past eight years erecting one of the world's most expansive regimes of mandatory product standards, the government has now begun dismantling a significant portion of it almost overnight. More than 20 quality control orders (QCOs) covering key textile, plastic and metal inputs have been withdrawn, with more rollbacks expected.

This reset was overdue. But the way it is being done risks repeating the very errors that created the problem. India made haste in imposing nearly 700 QCOs with little preparation after 2017. It is now making haste in removing a quarter of them overnight, without consultation or transition time for the industries affected. What was once regulatory overreach may now become regulatory whiplash.

Until 2014, QCOs were marginal in India's import system. The country relied mainly on tariffs, anti-dumping and safeguard duties to manage import flows. The 2017 Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Act changed this dramatically, giving ministries broad discretion to impose mandatory Indian standards. Since then, QCOs have proliferated across consumer goods, industrial materials and capital equipment.

Some were justified on safety grounds — children's toys, medical devices, ships, vessels, and domestic appliances. But a striking feature of India's approach was its decision to extend mandatory quality rules deep into the upstream value chain. About 25 per cent of QCOs covered raw materials and intermediates. Steel QCOs covered more than 1,300 grades. India is an outlier in regulating industrial inputs through mandatory quality-level certification.

This choice created severe unintended consequences. MSMEs were hit by a double-certification trap: Both final products and every upstream input needed BIS approval. A June 2025 steel ministry order required every supplier to a BIS-certified foreign mill to be certified, too. For example, if a Thai company sold coils to an Indonesian mill, the Thai firm also needed BIS approval, otherwise, the Indonesian exporter, who is BIS-certified, couldn't sell steel to India.

In the plastics industry, QCOs disrupted entire supply chains. India produces only a small share of the specialised polymer grades exporters need, yet foreign suppliers were still required to undergo expensive factory audits. Many refused because India was a tiny market. As imports fell, a few local firms gained significant pricing power, pushing prices above global levels and hurting MSMEs in packaging, auto parts, electricals, and medical devices.

Textiles saw the same fate. QCOs on inputs, fibre, and yarns introduced in 2023 choked imports, raising Indian fibre prices above world prices. Synthetics account for 70 per cent of global apparel trade, but India's exporters found they could not obtain the exact blends required by international buyers. These QCOs had nothing to do with consumer safety — they choked India's participation in the fastest-growing segment of the global textile trade.

Implementation failures worsened the

problems. The steel ministry's no-objection certificate (NOC) regime became the worst example of licence raj. Although only 1.76 per cent of steel imports are covered by QCOs, NOCs were required for almost all steel imports, including grades not made in India. At ports such as Nhava Sheva and Mundra, containers sat for weeks pending approvals.

Meanwhile, the BIS's foreign-factory audit system developed a reputation for inconsistency and opacity. Audits were slow, cancellations were frequent, and approvals were uneven. Some foreign suppliers linked to large Indian buyers moved quickly through the system; others waited indefinitely. In some countries, the BIS approved a single mill — effectively granting a monopoly to one Indian importer.

The result was predictable: Shortages, higher costs, unpredictable sourcing, and widespread anger from MSMEs. International criticism also grew. The government appointed a committee chaired by former Cabinet Secretary Ravi Vaidya.

Reportedly, the Committee's October 2025 report recommended action on 208 QCOs relating to raw materials, intermediates, and capital goods — revoking 27, suspending 112 and deferring 69. It is said to have called for scrapping the steel NOC regime.

This review triggered the withdrawals of QCOs from many sectors — a necessary correction. But did India err in the process? The Gauba report was not made public. There was no industry consultation on a large domestic producers were given no transition period. Even though most QCO withdrawals were justified, India has again shifted policy too abruptly.

The risk now is the opposite of the earlier problem: a surge of dumped raw materials, particularly from China. With QCO barriers gone, suppliers with excess inventory may offload stock in India at cut-rate prices. Industrial raw materials are capital-intensive; sudden exposure can trigger closures. This is why reforms should have been phased, predictable and transparent. The government should have announced the review to withdraw QCOs given industries time to adjust, and simultaneously outlined a protective framework to check predatory imports.

India must now rebuild a credible quality regime around three priorities. First, limit QCOs to genuinely safety-critical or consumer-facing products, and review the remaining that the Gauba Committee did not. Second, streamline the types of QCOs on steel, many of which promote monopoly behaviour and hurt MSMEs. Second, overhaul BIS processes. Make inspection time-bound, rules uniform, foreign audits rare, and ensure more accredited labs, global standards and mandatory impact assessments, with clear transition periods. Third, monitor imports closely. India needs real-time customs tracking and DGTR alerts to flag price crashes.

The broader lesson is clear. Industrial policy cannot be built on abrupt shifts or opaque implementation. QCOs were misused and needed reform, but their sudden withdrawal without guardrails risks new vulnerabilities. India must replace regulatory swings with institutional discipline, transparency and careful consultation. Only then can it build a quality ecosystem that supports both its large producers and its millions of small manufacturers — and strengthens, rather than weakens, its global competitiveness.

The writer is founder, Global Trade Research Institute

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Chandigarh's future

THIS REFERS to the editorial, "Centre's lesson from Punjab: Trust comes first" (IE, November 27). It rightly welcomes the Centre's climbdown on Chandigarh, yet understates the deeper message Punjab has just sent Delhi: Trust, once broken, cannot be quietly repaired by shelving one proposal. From the farm laws to the Punjab University Senate and the Lingaraj temple of Chandigarh's half-stated Punjabisees pattern — central overreach disguised as administrative convenience. Treat Punjab as an equal partner, not an errand boy.

Nilesh Dubey, Ahmedabad

Lessons of Nellie

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Nellie massacre reports offer a cautionary tale" (IE, November 27). The fresh spotlight on the Nellie massacre serves as a powerful reminder of what happens

when identity politics mixes with institutional weakness. Forty-two years later, justice remains elusive, and the warnings remain urgent.

Arzoo Rana, Chandigarh

Reclaim Tests

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "In Guwahati, failing the Test" (IE, November 27). The Test defeat in Guwahati is a wake-up call for Indian cricket. Our team, once unbeatable at home, now looks confused, tired and stuck in transition. No standout batting, no memorable bowling spells, and fielding that lacked fire — everything showed that our red-ball game was slipping. While the young players are talented, they are shaped for T20, not for the longer format that demands patience and technique. If we want to rebuild our Test glory, the board must invest in domestic cricket.

Parul Rana, Zirakpur



SADAF HUSSAIN

SOME CITIES scream for attention, others harp on the one thing that they might have to offer. But Lucknow? Lucknow waits for you to slow down and take notice of its richness. So, when UNESCO named it a "Creative City of Gastronomy", it wasn't an unexpected honour. It was a long-overdue acknowledgment of a city that has never changed the spotlight.

Lucknow, unlike other major cities, has never cooked for spectacle. Eateries like Mubeen, Tunday Kababi or even GPO ke Dahi Bade cook with memory, with purpose. Food that has *nafasat* and *nazakat*

Food, nafasat and nazakat in Lucknow

— words that cannot easily be translated into English, because they are less about action and more about emotions and intentions. How you treat your ingredients matters as much as, if not more than, what you are serving.

In a culinary world that prioritises experimentation and novel presentation, Lucknow has "held my chair". This city may not have invented kebabs or kulfi, but it has shown us that restraint is an art form and that the right spice, space and time can change a lot. Traditional cuisine in Lucknow is refined, aromatic, aesthetically creative and served with great *nazakat*. This city is one of the rare places where the classics are still made the way they always were.

Beyond the *nafasat* and *nazakat* of Lucknow, that subtle refinement and deli-

cate grace, runs a deeper thread: *Mehmaan navaazi*. This tradition of gracious hospitality infuses every ritual that is made here. Every walk through old Lucknow reminds me of how much this city values process. Once, just as I had placed my order at a paan shop near Chawal Wali Gali, another customer arrived in a hurry and asked to be served first. The *paanwala*, calm and polite, replied that if he was in a rush, he was welcome to try the next shop. "Paan takes time," he said. "And if someone's ahead of you, they'll be served first."

Everyone has their loyalties. Someone might swear by the jalebi from an old *halwai* near Aminabad, another won't start the day without khasha and chai from their neighbourhood nook. These places have cult followings and whether one is eating

home-cooked dal or aloo gosht, each dish commands the same reverence.

Lucknow has always known how to surprise without losing soul. Take malai goli, which mimics the form of a paan, but instead of using betel leaf and areca nut, folds in sheets of malai, crushed nuts, and bits of crystal sugar. It's not showy — it's thoughtful. It is, in essence, Lucknow.

Only a handful of places in India can genuinely make you feel like time has slowed. Lucknow sits somewhere at the top of that list. The UNESCO title is welcome, but what truly matters is this: Someone finally looked beyond the Instagram loops and noticed the rhythm underneath. The stillness. The restraint. The defiance of speed.

Hussain is a chef and author

• HISTORY

What is the Nellie Massacre, on which Assam govt has tabled inquiry report

Sukrita Baruah
Guwahati, November 27

EARLIER THIS week, the Assam government tabled two key reports on the Nellie Massacre of February 18, 1983 — considered one of the worst instances of mass violence in post-Independence India.

Of these, the report of the 'Commission of Enquiry on Assam Disturbances' led by IAS officer Tribhuvan Prasad Tewary, is the official report that examined the circumstances of the violence.

Context of the Nellie massacre

The violence in Nellie — with an official death toll of 1,800 and an unofficial count of around 3,000, mostly Bengali-speaking Muslims — occurred while Assam was in the throes of the Assam Agitation. Beginning in 1979, the agitation sought the detection of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, their deportation from the voter rolls, and their deportation.

Among the places affected was Central Assam's Nagaon district, where Nellie was then located. It now falls in present-day Morigaon district. Violence — including a crude pipeline explosion at Mirkirhat in February 1981 — was reported throughout the agitation in the district.

Amid this, Assembly elections for Assam, which was under President's Rule since March 1982, were announced for February 1983. The decision was highly contentious and led the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), the organisations leading the agitation, to announce a boycott.

Run-up to the elections

The Tewary report states that officials in Nagaon, in the run-up to the election, had anticipated violence but not its scale.



A protest in 1983 against the Nellie massacre in Assam. ARCHIVE

"The Deputy Commissioner (S K Tewari) stated that it was quite clear from the start that the agitators would apply all possible methods and mostly violent ones to stop the election process," it says. "He also stated that it was equally clear that if the election was held in spite of the opposition, violence against linguistic and religious minorities participating in the election would be attempted and therefore, the district administration had assessed the situation and made preparation."

Ahead of the polls, 1,046 people were held in preventive detention, and another 22 under the National Security Act. Arms licences and ammunition sales were suspended across the district, and daily coordination meetings were held between senior security officials, magistrates, and police.

According to the report, the first clash in the district was reported on February 12, when Assamese Hindus went to Gagalmaru under Morigaon police station to burn a bridge and "local immigrant Muslims" obstructed them. Soon, other incidents followed, leaving several people dead, including Assamese Hindus and Bengali-origin Muslims.

The report quotes DC Tewari as saying that prevention and response were compromised by a breakdown in communications and field information networks.

What happened in Nellie

On February 18, 1983, Nellie witnessed violence between 8-8:30 am and 3-3:30 pm. "Thousands of people had come from all sides with deadly weapons and started attacking Muslims, including women and children, and burnt many houses," the report cites survivors as saying.

However, key police officers deposing before the commission — the OC of Jagrold police station, SDPO Pramod Chetia, Commandant of the 5th Assam Police Battalion MNA Kabir, and DIG P C Sharma — said they received information much after the violence began.

Further, the report notes that intelligence about the possibility of such an attack was received as early as February 15.

The OC of Nagaon police station had been informed by two residents of Nellie and a local Nagaon professor on February 15 about fears of an attack on Muslim villages. He sent a message addressed to MNA Kabir and copied to SDPO Chetia and the OC Jagrold. "Information received that last night about one thousand Assamese people of surrounding villages of Nellie armed with deadly weapons assembled at Nellie by beating of drums. Minority people are in panic and apprehending attack at any moment. Submission for immediate action to maintain peace".

None of these officers admitted to receiving this message before the event. In its report, the commission was critical of the OC Nagaon's omission in not informing the SP Nagaon of this message.

"Had these three officers been careful... they would have come to know of it on 15 February itself and if their knowledge would have been converted into obvious actions, there would, perhaps, have been some effective preventive action at Nellie. In so far as Nellie is concerned, even the plea of lack of previous information cannot be taken," it said.

Before this message, the OC Jagrold said he had received a petition from Hindu villagers of Nellie expressing apprehensions of attack from Muslims and warning of communal clashes. He sent a report to the Circle Inspector on February 15 mentioning apprehensions of clashes at Nellie, Borbori, and nearby villages.

This was brought to the notice of IGP Law and Order K.P.S. Gill, who ordered patrolling and the formation of peace committees. The OC visited Borbori but did not place fixed pickets as requested by locals, citing lack of adequate forces.

The commission was critical of inadequate forces being cited, noting that a CRPF company from Nagaon had arrived at Jagrold on the night of February 17 "but was not utilised effectively and immediately on receiving the information".

LONGER VERSION
indianexpress.com/explained

• ECONOMY

GM crops to genome editing: India's journey



HARISH DAMODARAN

CULTIVATION OF genetically modified (GM) crops in India has not progressed beyond cotton. Even there, no new technology has been approved for commercialisation since Monsanto's Bollgard-II Bt cotton in May 2006. But this isn't so with genome edited (GE) crops.

In May, two GE rice lines were identified for release, after two years of trials to evaluate their field performance in the 2023 and 2024 Kharif seasons under an All-India Coordinated Research Project.

The two lines were improved GE mutants of the popular Samba Mahsuri and MTU-1010 varieties, with the first one claimed to have demonstrated an average 19% yield increase over the former and the second making the latter amenable to grow well in saline and alkaline soils.

There is also a third GE line, in mustard, undergoing the second year of trials in 16 locations in the 2025-26 rabi crop season. If the results are good, this variety — a canola-quality low-pungent mustard that is simultaneously resistant to major fungal pathogens and pests — would be ready for release by around August 2026.

GE versus GM

GM crops contain foreign genes from unrelated species — say the *Bacillus thuringiensis* or Bt soil bacterium that code for the production of proteins toxic to various insect pests in cotton. GE, on the other hand, entails mere "editing" of genes naturally present in the host plant, leading to mutation or changes in their DNA sequence.

The editing is done by protein enzymes that act like "molecular scissors" to cut and modify the DNA of the targeted native gene. Such editing is aimed to bring forth desirable alterations in that gene's expression and function. The enzyme is directed to the specific location/address in the plant genome by a "navigator" guide-RNA, which is a custom-designed molecule having a sequence matching that of the target DNA.

For developing the GE rice and mustard varieties, scientists used so-called CRISPR-associated (Cas) proteins. The Cas9 protein was deployed for editing a 'drought and salt tolerance' gene in the MTU-1010 rice and 10 'glucosinolate transporter' genes in the Varuna mustard varieties. The Cas2a protein was, likewise, used to edit the 'cytokinin oxidase 2' (also called *Gn1a*) gene in Samba Mahsuri rice.

• DEFENCE

INS Mahe commissioned: Features, strategic significance of ships

Sushant Kulkarni
Pune, November 27

THE INDIAN Navy on Monday commissioned INS Mahe, the first of the indigenously designed and built Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC).

Designed and constructed by Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), Kochi, INS Mahe is the lead ship of eight vessels in her class.

At the commissioning ceremony in Mumbai, Army Chief General Upendra Divedi highlighted that the ship will significantly augment the Indian Navy's near-sea dominance, strengthen the coastal security grid, and safeguard India's maritime interests across the littorals — the shallow and near-shore maritime zone that is strategically and economically critical.

The project saw participation from industry partners including BEL, L&T De-

force, Mahindra Defence Systems, NPOL and more than 20 MSMEs and has over 80 per cent indigenous content.

Key features of the Mahe class

The ships are designed for underwater surveillance, search and rescue operations and Low Intensity Maritime Operations (LIMO).

According to the CSL, these vessels are 78 meters long and 11.36 m wide, with a draught of about 2.7 meters (draught is the vertical distance between the waterline and the lowest point of the ship's hull). Fitted with advanced weapons, sensors, and communication systems enabling it to detect, track, and neutralise sub-surface threats with precision, the ship can sustain prolonged operations in shallow waters. Their maximum speed is 25 knots and endurance is 1,800 nautical miles.

The Indian Navy earlier operated the

For or in shallow waters

• In view of India's vast coastline, coastal surveillance, coastal surveillance for anti-submarine warfare is considered critical.

• These ships are bridging a longstanding operational gap by giving the Navy crucial ability to detect and counter diesel-electric submarines operating close to the coastline.

Abhay-class corvettes, which were customised variants of the Soviet origin Palk II-class corvettes. The four ships were decommissioned between 2017 and October 2025. In December 2013, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) gave a nod for the procurement of 16 ASW vessels at a cost of over Rs 13,000 crore. The contracts for 16 ASW SWC were signed, for construction of eight ships each by the CSL and the Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata, respectively.

Strategic significance

In view of India's vast coastline of 7,516 kilometers with 12 major ports, 184 minor ports and 1,197 island territories, coastal surveillance for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations is considered critical.

These ships are bridging a longstanding operational gap by giving the Navy crucial ability to detect and counter stealthy die-

sel-electric submarines operating close to the coastline, an area where larger surface combatants cannot manoeuvre effectively.

Their low draught, advanced sensors and high manoeuvrability make them essential for securing harbour approaches, sea-lanes leading to major ports, offshore energy assets and operational bases that are vulnerable and economically vital maritime assets.

By strategically deploying 16 such platforms along the littorals, the Navy is creating a structured ASW protection wall that will strengthen coastal defence, free up major warships for blue-water tasks (in the open ocean far from the coast), and prevent the adversary's ability to stage covert underwater intrusions.

These would further strengthen the Indian Navy's operational capabilities in the Indian Ocean region. The class also contributes to deterrence.

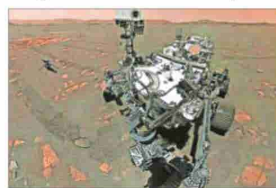
NASA rover's 'shocking' Mars discovery

SCIENTISTS HAVE found that lightning crackles on Mars, but not as the jagged, high-voltage bolts like on Earth. Rather, it is more like the shock you feel when you scuff your feet on the carpet on a winter morning and then touch metal.

"This is like mini-lightning on Mars," said Baptiste Chide, a scientist at the Research Institute in Astrophysics and Planetary Science in France. Chide and his colleagues reported the findings in a paper published Wednesday in *Nature*.

The electrical sparks could play an important role in chemical reactions in the Martian atmosphere. For future astronauts, the electrical discharges — essentially short circuits jumping across gas molecules — could disrupt devices and spacecrafts.

Lightning has been seen on other planets in the solar system. Because Mars is cold and dry, scientists assumed electric charge could build up in its air, especially during dust storms, when particles



Self-portrait of Perseverance on Mars. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

rub against each other and then discharge. The new findings are based on data collected by instruments taken by NASA's Perseverance rover.

Interestingly, no one has yet seen a Martian mini-lightning bolt. Rather, the discovery was made by a microphone on Perseverance that had recorded the sound of the electrical discharge. THE NYT

The bamboo factor in Hong Kong fire

MORE THAN 65 people were reported dead in a fire that broke out in a building complex in Hong Kong on Wednesday. It was undergoing renovations when construction materials and bamboo scaffolding caught fire.

While officials are still investigating the cause, bamboo likely intensified the blaze. In a 2012 paper published by University of Hong

Kong, researcher Frankie Le Hong La noted that "Bamboo scaffolding was drawn into Hong Kong from China in 1930s and was in vogue in the 1960s and 70s". This was a result of growth in labour supply from mainland China and the construction industry, as well as the availability of sturdy, lightweight plants.

Today, the government issues specific guidelines on their usage. But there are several risks linked to it. Ehsan Noroozinejad of the Western Sydney University wrote in *The Conversation* that "Dry bamboo is combustible, and the green plastic mesh often draped over scaffolds can also quickly burn... reports (of the recent incident) indicate the fire quickly raced up the scaffolding and mesh".

An official memo earlier ordered a shift towards metal. Calls for ending the use of bamboo have been made at times, but proponents argue that accidents are rare and consider the technique a part of the city's culture. RISHIKA SINGH



A firefighter in a building covered with nets and bamboo scaffolding on Thursday. AP



Opinion

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2025

Justice for a price

The implied signal in the Sandesara brothers ruling is disturbing, as the law can't be a bargaining counter

THE SUPREME COURT on Wednesday reflected on what it described as a troubling trend: its own verdicts being reopened and overturned within short intervals. Such reversals, the Bench warned, risk eroding the institutional authority that rests on the finality and certainty of judgments. It rightly observed that public faith in the judiciary does not stem from the belief that every verdict is infallible, but from the assurance that when the apex court settles a matter, the law is settled. It is encouraging that the court has shown the willingness to hold up a mirror to itself and acknowledge the dangers of frequent institutional second-guessing. But this welcome introspection would be incomplete without confronting the disquieting questions raised by another recent ruling—the order granting the Sandesara brothers a clean slate, subject to the payment of ₹5,100 crore to settle their dues to public sector banks. The case involved allegations of layered financial fraud, including falsification of accounts, diversion of bank loans through offshore structures, and the accumulation of undischarged assets—even as the promoters left the country and built an energy empire overseas.

The Sandesaras sought quashing of all criminal and related proceedings in return for a one-time settlement with the lenders. The court accepted this bargain, holding that once the amount is deposited by December, all criminal, civil, and enforcement actions would stand extinguished. The Bench reasoned that since a substantial sum of public money was being recovered and stakeholders were willing to end the dispute, continuing prosecution would serve little practical purpose. It also clarified that the ruling was confined to the peculiar facts of this case and should not be treated as a precedent.

That caveat offers little comfort. This was certainly not a case of routine commercial failure. And yet, instead of a trial, the court provided a transaction. The long-term consequences of such exceptions cannot be brushed aside. When business promoters accused of economic crimes are permitted to purchase immunity from prosecution, the message conveyed is disturbing: that criminal law is negotiable, not because guilt or innocence has been tested, but because an acceptable price has been offered. This is where the rule of law begins to fray. Financial crimes cannot be artificially segregated from serious criminality. The fear of imprisonment—rather than monetary loss—is the real deterrent against wrongdoing. A businessman dreads prison far more than a financial settlement. Once the legal system signals that sufficient money can substitute for penal consequences, the incentive structure tilts sharply in favour of risk-taking and abuse.

The cases of Vijay Malviya, Nirav Modi, and Mehul Choksi underscore a harsh truth: when financial fraud becomes a question of settlement value, the rational strategy is to flee, negotiate from abroad, and pay later if cornered. Criminal law then risks morphing from a deterrent into a bargaining tool. The Sandesara ruling therefore raises a deeper question: can restitution alone neutralise criminal culpability? The Supreme Court is right to evolve, review its own judgments, and respond to changing economic realities. It is also right to guard against frequent reversals that dilute institutional credibility. But the same logic demands that justice must never appear contingent on economic muscle. Exceptions carved out for the powerful—however well-reasoned in law—carry the danger of quietly hardening into practice. If large-scale economic crimes come to be seen as financially resolvable rather than legally punishable, the distance between law and power will only continue to widen.

Sam Altman's business buddies are getting stung

AS INVESTORS START to take sides in the AI race, Sam Altman's buddies are getting burned.

SoftBank Group's shares have tumbled 40% from late October, while Oracle's stock has given up all gains made since early September, when the legacy database software company all of a sudden got an AI halo after announcing a \$300-billion computing deal with OpenAI. The trio are partners in the \$500-billion StarGate AI infrastructure project, which aims to build data centres across the US. In addition, in March, SoftBank's Chairman Masayoshi Son managed to strike a venture capital deal with Altman, promising to invest \$30 billion in year-end.

Investors are now questioning the ChatGPT maker's dominance after Alphabet released its newest multipurpose Gemini 3 model—which won glowing reviews—as well as how a weakened OpenAI may affect its partners' businesses.

Valuing OpenAI at \$500 billion, SoftBank's stake in the unicorn accounts for just over 20% of its net asset value, or NAV. But what if OpenAI is not worth that much? It would be a substantial hit to the Japanese conglomerate. In the September quarter, SoftBank reported its best earnings in three years, thanks to a \$12.8-billion fair value gain from its OpenAI shares. That will have to be reversed if the start-up can't maintain its current valuation at future funding rounds.

As an investment management company, SoftBank is assessed based on its NAV. One key metric investors pay attention to is how liquid its portfolio is and how quickly SoftBank can distribute cash back to shareholders. Currently, private holdings, including the 11% OpenAI stake, account for about 36% of SoftBank's NAV, versus 21% at the beginning of the year, according to *Bloomberg Intelligence*.

To get a seat at Altman's table, Son has been selling his most liquid holdings to raise money. He has offloaded his entire \$5.8 billion stake in Nvidia, as well as \$9.2 billion worth of T-Mobile US Inc. Along with new bond sales, SoftBank managed to raise \$30 billion, just enough to complete the OpenAI deal. But does this portfolio reshuffling benefit shareholders? SoftBank's stock is now trading at a 32% discount to its NAV, reflecting market scepticism over Son's investing track record.

As for Larry Ellison's Oracle, the situation is arguably worse. How OpenAI plans to pay the \$300-billion computing contract is anyone's guess. The deal will span over five years, starting in 2027. Meanwhile, the start-up is expected to make just \$60 billion in sales then, even using the company's own rosy outlook, which investors are starting to question with the arrival of Google's Gemini 3.

Earlier this month, Altman said he doesn't want US guarantees for his start-up's data centres, but it might make sense that the government builds and owns its own AI infrastructure, a nod to how expensive this endeavour may become.

At the same time, Oracle is already investing heavily to meet the outsized demand Altman promised. For the StarGate project, Ellison has made over \$100 billion of capital commitments to lease data-centre shells, which will show up on its financial statements over the next three years. Keen to scale up, Oracle has chosen to save upfront costs, lease the land, and concentrate its spending on chip purchases instead. As of August, the company sat on \$105 billion total debt, according to *Bloomberg data*.

AI is quickly becoming a cash game, and those with the best balance sheets naturally have better odds. Despite repeated bond sales this year, Alphabet still has negative net debt. It generates about \$150 billion operating cash flow a year and has close to \$100 billion in cash. By comparison, OpenAI needs to continually raise venture capital to keep up with its expenses. SoftBank sold quality assets to invest in the unicorn, and Oracle resorted to debt-financed land purchases to get data-centre construction going.

Smart money has chosen the cash cow.



SHULI REN

Bloomberg



SPACE AMBITIONS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

When the government opened the space sector, the country's youth, especially our Gen Z, leapt forward to take full advantage of it. Today, India's more than 300 space start-ups are giving new hope to India's space future

INDIA-US TRADE

A FAIR PACT WILL ELUDE INDIA IF US BASES ITS NEGOTIATIONS ON DEALS WITH MALAYSIA AND CAMBODIA

A worrying template

ABHIJIT DAS

The writer is an international trade expert



IN THE CONTEXT of finalising the first phase of the India-US trade deal, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has recently stated that "when the deal will become fair, equitable and balanced, you will hear good news". If the agreements signed by President Trump with Malaysia and Cambodia in the last week of October are indicators, the possibility of the US agreeing to a fair, equitable, and balanced trade agreement with India, or most other countries, appears remote. Let us examine this issue.

At the outset, it is crucial to recognise that there is considerable similarity in the contents of the bilateral agreements of the US with Cambodia and Malaysia. Many provisions in the two agreements are almost identical. It would, therefore, not be incorrect to conclude that President Trump and his officials are negotiating trade agreements with various countries based on a common template—a longstanding tradition of the US in the past free trade agreements negotiations. Consequently, it is unlikely that the substantial contents of the India-US trade agreement would be very different from the Cambodia-Malaysia template. Of course, on certain issues there could be India-specific variations. As discussed below, it is difficult to accept the Cambodia-Malaysia template as being fair, equitable and balanced.

First, with Malaysia and Cambodia making most of the concessions on tariffs and in many other areas, both the agreements are one-sided and riddled with provisions that are overwhelmingly in favour of the US. For example, under the deal, the US will cut its reciprocal tariff to zero on only about 1,700 Malaysian products; all other products will continue to face a 19% reciprocal tariff. Malaysia, however, will eliminate its World Trade Organization-mandated most-favoured nation (MFN) tariffs on US goods, while Washington will retain its MFN tariffs on Malaysian

products. In essence, Trump is rolling back his illegal reciprocal tariffs on a part of Malaysian exports while Malaysia has rolled back its MFN tariffs for US goods.

Second, under the bilateral agreements Malaysia and Cambodia have ceded their right to raise tax revenues through specific policy instruments. Both countries have committed not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions, digital services taxes, or similar taxes that discriminate against US companies. Further, they have given up their right to impose certain internal taxes on imports and collect them at the customs border, especially if the taxes discriminate against imports from the US. This situation could arise, for example, when the US is the exclusive or predominant exporter of a product to these countries. In addition, Malaysia has committed not to impose consumption tax on US exports of agricultural and seafood products. There is no reciprocal commitment from the US on these issues.

Third, in respect of trade in agricultural products, Malaysia has committed to allow imports of dairy, meat, and poultry products from the US if they are accompanied with the sanitary/health certificates from the relevant American authorities. This concession implies that the US certi-

fication would prevail over Malaysia's domestic health and sanitary requirements. This is a one-sided concession, as the US has not made a commitment in respect of imports of these products from Malaysia.

Fourth, and perhaps the most contentious, some provisions in the two agreements firmly align the policy choices of Cambodia and Malaysia in certain areas with the economic and national security interests of the US. To illustrate, if the US imposes a customs duty or import restrictions on a good or service of a third country, Malaysia and Cambodia have committed to regulate the importation of that good or service into their territories through similar measures with equivalent restrictive effect. Consequently, if on the ostensible ground of protecting

its economic security, the US were to impose a punitive tariff of 30% on imports from the BRICS countries, Cambodia and Malaysia would be compelled to impose similar tariffs on imports from BRICS countries. Further, both countries have agreed to cooperate with the US with a view to restricting transactions of their nationals with third-country individuals and entities which have been sanctioned by the US. Both countries are also required to consult with the US before entering into a new digital trade agreement with

Malaysia has committed not to enter into agreements with other countries involving technical or health standards that might disadvantage the US

another country, in order to ensure that the agreement does not jeopardise the essential interests of the US. In addition, Malaysia has committed not to enter into agreements with other countries involving technical or health standards that might disadvantage the US.

An argument could be made that since the Cambodia-Malaysia template is not subject to binding dispute settlement, it provides considerable leeway to countries not to adhere to inconvenient provisions in their bilateral deals with the US. This strand of argument is, at best, naïve. We are living in times when the US does not need the legal backing of international law to enforce its writ. It has used its considerable political clout and economic heft to bend countries to its will. The absence of binding dispute settlement provisions in bilateral agreements is unlikely to hinder the US in compelling signatory countries to uphold their side of the deal.

In conclusion, if the US uses the Malaysia-Cambodia template as the basis of its negotiations with India, it would be very difficult for India to secure a fair, equitable, and balanced bilateral trade deal. Further, there appears to be no middle ground on the four issues mentioned above, which would allow the US to claim victory and India to protect its domestic interest. Tough choices appear to be knocking at the doors of India's trade negotiators.

With President Trump publicly acknowledging that India has sharply cut Russian oil purchases, New Delhi should push Washington to roll back the 25% Russian oil penalty. This single step would ease the pressure on India's negotiators. Thereafter, India should consider whether lowering America's "reciprocal" tariff on Indian goods from 25% to roughly 15-18% is worth the concessions the US is demanding. This approach would help India avoid the kind of one-sided deals struck with Malaysia and Cambodia.

Building a trust-based digital economy



NARAYANAN T

General Counsel India & APAC, Cognizant, and Board Member, Cognizant India

The world will judge Indian innovation on three dimensions—trustworthiness, clear ownership rights, and ethical practices

INDIA'S TECH JOURNEY has reached a fascinating turning point. While the first phase earned global admiration for scale and skill, the next must focus on earning trust in India's integrity as an innovation hub. In an era where algorithms influence economies and data underpins national power, trust has become the real foundation of progress—unseen yet vital.

From scale to substance

India's early IT revolution was powered by efficiency and delivery excellence. Today, as artificial intelligence (AI) becomes the defining technology of this decade, the conversation is shifting from how much India builds to how responsibly it builds. AI has expanded India's role from being the world's IT partner to a co-creator of intelligent systems that shape healthcare, finance, logistics, and governance. But this progress also raises questions about algorithmic ownership, data provenance, and decision transparency—issues at the heart of intellectual property, ethics, and trust.

The task before India is not just to scale innovation but to govern it well. Trust, talent, and intellectual property (IP) integrity will define whether India's AI-led growth becomes a model of responsible innovation or a race for speed without accountability.

Trust as competitiveness

In today's world, businesses assess not

just capability but conduct. Regulations like the Digital Personal Data Protection Act and proposed Digital Competition Bill are key steps in embedding transparency and fairness into India's digital landscape.

These are not mere regulations, they are strategic adventures. Countries that show integrity alongside innovation attract more meaningful investments and forge stronger partnerships. India's ability to deliver AI that is safe, data that is secure, and technologies that respect IP will be pivotal in defining its position in the global tech hierarchy.

IP advantage of owning, protecting, respecting

IP has steadily emerged as a core asset of the global economy. For India, it represents more than legal compliance—it signals innovation maturity. As India evolves from a service-based model to one that creates products and platforms, ethical IP practices will matter as much as innovation itself.

Policies such as the Innovation and IP Protection guidelines, National Deep Tech Startup Policy, and National Research Foundation-led incentives indicate that India now treats IP not just as a shield but as a strategic pillar of global trust.

Integrating education on data ethics, IP practices, and responsible AI will ensure India's talent remains trusted worldwide

Aligned with World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights standards as well as active roles in forums like the WIPO Development Agenda, India is poised to help set norms for responsible innovation. The next step is embedding IP awareness and ethical creation across the ecosystem. Clear ownership and mutual respect in collaborations can turn partnerships into lasting trust.

Talent is India's soft power in code

IP is the fuel of innovation, people are its engine. Over five million Indian tech experts power global transformation. Their reputation for competence boosts India's brand and their integrity is its soft power.

To retain this edge, India must ensure its talent is not future-ready and also values-driven. Continuous upskilling, transparent career paths, and ethical recruitment are key to nurturing professionals who embody both excellence and ethics. Programmes like NASSCOM's Future Skills Prime and the ministry of electronics and information technology's digital skill initiatives already combine technical skill with responsibility. Integrating education on data ethics, IP practices, and

responsible AI will ensure India's most valuable export, its talent, remains trusted worldwide.

Governance as a growth engine

India's evolving digital policies covering data, competition, AI, and IP are forming a "trust architecture for technology". This framework could become a model for other nations, a proof that innovation and good governance can go hand in hand.

Through public-private partnerships, ethical innovation can be embedded into academia, certification can reward compliant enterprises, and IP-secure research can be incentivised. These steps can elevate India from a participant to a leader in global tech governance.

Towards a trusted technology decade

India's past tech success was built on competence, but its future will depend on credibility. The world will judge Indian innovation on three dimensions—trustworthiness, clear ownership rights, and ethical practices. By addressing these through sound governance, IP integrity, and cultivating an ethical culture, India can emerge as a global leader in responsible innovation.

In the next decade, India's success in technology won't be defined by the quantity of code but by the quality of its conduct. Trust, once the result of innovation, must now be its foundation.

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Even We Can Thank God It's Black Friday

Marketers could shape it to local conditions

Black Friday sales, an American import marked by the jumble that follows Thanksgiving Day are picking up in India, but (understandably?) not quite at the pace global brands would like. This is due to the placement of weekend sales in the Indian shopping calendar, and the more spread-out pattern of festival shopping in these shores. The discount shopping day kicks off the festival season in the US, leading up to bigger dates for retail sales in December. In India, Black Friday follows Diwali, our biggest festival of shopping. Again, Indians have more festivals round the year that provide brands more opportunity to push merchandise through sales. The global phenomenon does, of course, add to the list of calendar events in India, allowing retailers to clear inventory. Brands are using 'TGIB!' to pitch to younger consumers whose buying habits are far more global than their elders. It helps push premium brands to a new market segment that's aided by the growth of e-commerce.

The event itself is fighting consumer fatigue in the West. Brands have become sensitive to the downsides of deep discounting, and prefer to spread their marketing budgets over longer periods to build stronger sales pipelines. e-commerce is better able to gauge consumer behaviour at a more individual level, and customise pitches accordingly. New avenues like influencer-led marketing make calendar-based marketing less relevant. Social commerce is pushing boundaries of overconsumption, but is also heading a pushback over concerns of sustainability. India finds itself in the middle of these cross-currents even before Black Friday becomes a desi fixture. Offline channels are yet to jump on the bandwagon. So the phenomenon is unlikely to acquire the dimensions it has in mature markets.

Marketers are, however, unlikely to let go of an event so deeply ingrained in the consumer consciousness, and will shape it to local conditions. A more connected desi consumer won't be isolated from the global trend. But it will take a while before it reaches OMG! proportions here.

Don't Leave Our Kids In Judicial Limbo

Soon after taking over on Monday, CJI Surya Kant raised the alarm over about 5.4 cr cases pending across trial courts and high courts. He underlined this as a sign of deep structural rot in the judiciary, pointing to chronic delays, understaffing, inefficiencies and outdated systems. This crisis is magnified when it comes to minors. A new India Justice Report (IJR) study, 'Juvenile Justice and Children in Conflict with the Law: A Study of Capacity at the Frontlines', reveals the disturbing state of India's juvenile justice system. As of October 31, 2023, 55% of 1,00,904 cases before Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) remained unresolved. Only 45,097 cases had been disposed of.

State-wise disparities are stark. Odisha's pendency stood at a shocking 83%, while Karnataka reported a still-worrying 35%. These are not just numbers. They reflect a system struggling to function. Nearly one in four JJBs operates without the legally required full bench of a magistrate and two social workers. Almost 30% lack a legal-aid clinic. Minors accused of offences are left waiting, confined or institutionalised for months, sometimes years, with their education, mental health and futures put on hold. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 promised child-centred, rehabilitative justice. Instead, children remain trapped in legal limbo.

The apex court, ultimately responsible for ensuring laws protecting minors are properly implemented, must take cognisance of this crisis, demand accountability from state governments, and ensure that those responsible for this scandalous neglect are stirred out of inaction. India can't afford a justice system that fails its young, and yet uses 'demographic dividend' as a disingenuous mantra.

While there is a greater degree of consensus that has already enabled use technology in our courts, its scope, content, context, contours and impact are up for debate and discussion. The most compelling case for the use of AI in courts is in relation to massive pendency. The sheer scale of the number of cases stuck in courts

QCOs were also imposed on raw materials and intermediate goods — so a rollback is welcome

Quality Control Franks



Perna Prabhakar & Laveesh Bhandari

Quality control orders (QCOs) are quality requirements imposed by the government to ensure a minimal specified quality level is maintained. QCO for specified products requires mandatory certification by an appropriate body. Production, import or export trade is illegal without such certification.

Instruments similar to QCOs are increasingly being used by countries across the world to protect their domestic industry. But India has gone over and beyond most. So much so that what was meant to protect has been causing harm across sectors. Both trade and industry specialists MSMEs have been complaining about the overuse of QCOs for some time now. To the credit of concerned departments, an important first step has been taken not in one but across four central ministries.

On November 12, Union chemicals and petrochemicals ministry rescinded 14 QCOs on several key input materials, including terephthalic acid, ethylene glycol, polyester yarns and fibres, and major plastics such as polypropylene, polyethylene, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) homopolymers, acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) and polycarbonate. The next day ministry of mines revoked QCOs on aluminium and aluminium alloys, nickel, refined nickel, tin ingots, refined zinc, copper and primary lead.

On November 18, textiles ministry rescinded QCO on viscose staple fibre (VSP), a critical intermediate for the textile value chain. Further, as per a November 20 notification, steel ministry has extended exemptions of cer-



Scrap the straps

tain steel products from mandatory QCO compliance until March 2026. These actions signal a clear policy intent to support greater openness in trade, and to allow larger firms to face greater competitive pressures emanating from the world. This rescinding will enable greater availability of inputs, reduce costs for both export and domestic markets, and ease supply-chain bottlenecks, particularly for MSMEs.

So, why are small entrepreneurs and traders most harmed by QCOs? Because they are less able to bear certification costs and other requirements, as well as absorb the delays in the process.

According to a recent CSEEP study of December 2024, about half of all QCOs were imposed on raw materials and intermediate goods. Such QCOs should be introduced where there's a significant need to ensure that proper quality is maintained in the market, like pharmaceuticals and safety equipment.

measures increase supply-chain risks for downstream industries that depend on timely and competitively priced inputs. In this regard, the recent withdrawal and exemption of QCOs specifically on intermediate goods is precisely what's required. The analysis further revealed that

QCOs on intermediate inputs led to an import decline of around 30%, over three years after implementation, without any significant long-term export gains for affected products. This evidence suggests that these regulations were disrupting supply chains, rather than supporting development of domestic capacity for production of appropriate quality. The intention that led to the imposition of QCOs.

QCOs should typically be introduced where there's a significant need to ensure that proper quality is maintained in the market. Pharmaceuticals and safety equipment, where there's a risk of significant and irreversible damage to life or property, are an example where QCO-type controls do need to be put up. Beyond that, there are very few cases where a strong conceptual case can be made for QCOs. And when QCOs are imposed on intermediate or basic goods, they are much more harmful for the long-term growth of the industry.

There are several proposed QCOs furniture items, like office chairs, storage units, beds, and worktables. But there's a whole spectrum of furniture quality. Who is to decide what is appropriate for India? Surely, it's the right of the buyer to decide what quality-price combination they want to buy. Why take away this choice

from Indian buyers? If the fear is low-cost Chinese imports, then the right tool to prevent their imports is anti-dumping duties, not QCOs.

A NITI Aayog high-level committee recently recommended the cancellation, suspension or deferment of several QCOs across a wide range of products and sectors, recognising the need to reduce input-cost pressures and strengthen supply-chain resilience. Independent analysis points to the benefits of QCOs on intermediate and basic goods that should be eliminated. Therefore, it's essential to sustain the current momentum and reconsidering additional QCOs that apply to intermediate goods, particularly in sectors like steel, textiles, plastics and chemicals. Many of these items are critical inputs for MSMEs, and for industries engaged in export-oriented production.

Any reform is not easy. It comes with opposition from those who would potentially lose out. In the case of QCOs as well, this holds true. Paradoxically, requests for QCOs come from short-sighted industry and industry bodies, even though there is much evidence that industry is the one most harmed in the long run.

A key learning across many decades has been that greater forces of competition and flexible economic climate are the best mechanisms for quality improvements and cost reduction in the manufacturing sector; much more than protection and subsidies. Overall, the recent withdrawal have laid out a constructive path ahead, one that aligns regulatory priorities with India's broader ambition to strengthen manufacturing competitiveness, enhance ease of doing business, and enable startups and MSMEs to better integrate with global value chains.

Prabhakar is fellow, and Bhandari is president, Centre for Socio-Economic Research (CSEEP) Research



THE SPEAKING TREE

Problems and Solutions

OSHO

There are very few people in the world who can see the problem, the problems. But many are ready to give solutions. Everyone thinks he knows the solution, but it should be remembered that yesterday's solutions are not helpful today. As times change, solutions must be absolutely new. No matter how ancient the essence of a solution may be, the solution itself must always be new.

Some people think the problems are political; they think searching for a political solution will end the problems. But they are wrong. The problems of mankind are basically not political. Some people think the problems are economic. They think if those problems can be resolved, the world will be filled with peace and prosperity. They are also under an illusion.

People's fundamental problem today is spiritual. It is somewhere in depths, connected with their innermost being. We are lacking the deeper vision that is needed to see the problem. We see very superficially, on the surface, and don't enter deeply. Perhaps we don't want to see deeply because, for that, courage is needed. And not only is courage needed, but you need to accept the possibility there may be no solution.

We keep repeating old learned solutions, afraid of a situation that is incomprehensible to us. In this way, people's solutions are always borrowed from the past, while the problems are of the present. This is why no understanding is possible. People whose thinking is based on the past are never capable of solving any problems of the present.

Abridged from Religion's Inspiration Date: Courtesy: Osho International Foundation; www.oshos.com

Artificial Intelligence Haazir Ho!



C Raj Kumar

Earlier this week, after being sworn in as 53rd CJI, Surya Kant talked about how a scientific and comprehensive approach is essential to address the challenge of pendency across all tiers of the judiciary. He had earlier observed that 'the judiciary has begun evolving AI-based tools for research, transcription, and data analytics, always with the guiding principle that technology must augment, not replace, the human mind's discernment, ensuring that the latter, after all, is not a mere algorithm — it is the reflection of human conscience shaped by empathy, moral reasoning, and an understanding of context that machines cannot replicate'.

While there is a greater degree of consensus that has already enabled use technology in our courts, its scope, content, context, contours and impact are up for debate and discussion.

The most compelling case for the use of AI in courts is in relation to massive pendency. The sheer scale of the number of cases stuck in courts

— more than 5 cr — is daunting. A digitally-enabled judiciary already includes the e-Courts project and National Judicial Data Grid. They can serve as a foundation. But they are woefully inadequate to clear the huge pile-up in a time-bound manner.

Making AI a significant part of judicial practice requires recognising causes for delays, and for insufficient impact of technology so far. Procedural delays, insufficient administrative capacity, increased dependency on manual paperwork, high levels of inefficient case scheduling, and limited access for citizens are some of major reasons. Out of the 5 cr cases pending, a large number are in district and subordinate courts (above 4.3 cr), compared to those in the Supreme Court (80,000) and high courts (60 lakh). Hence, AI-enabled tech-driven reforms need to be democratised significantly with a strong emphasis on lower courts.

5 areas of AI use and adaptation within the judicial context can be considered:

• **Case management & scheduling.** There should be a focus on developing automated case lists using machine-learning prediction and real-time and dynamic scheduling to reduce adjournments.

• **Natural language-processing tools for document processing.** This includes, but is not limited to,



All rise

document classification, translation, summarisation, AI-assisted drafting for routine orders, notices, bail formats, and speech-to-text for court transcription. The performance of models can be overhyped and exaggerated, amplifying a common misconception that these algorithms always surpass human-level accuracy. There is a fine balance to strike — once AI justice is inevitably and gradually improved — in boosting popular confidence in these tools while tempering unrealistic expectations of their capabilities.

The new CJI should evaluate the options and opportunities for considering AI use in courts in relation to fundamental and non-negotiable principles of transparency, accountability and ethical compliance.

A 2022 Harvard Kennedy School paper, 'Judges and Judgement: Setting the Scene', observes, "... some public scepticism of AI's extension in the courtroom is useful in ensuring algorithms remain accountable while the performance of models can be overhyped and exaggerated, amplifying a common misconception that these algorithms always surpass human-level accuracy. There is a fine balance to strike — once AI justice is inevitably and gradually improved — in boosting popular confidence in these tools while tempering unrealistic expectations of their capabilities."

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analytics and judicial productivity dashboards can help significantly. But one must ensure that every idea relating to AI use in courts is subjected to fundamental and non-negotiable principles of transparency, accountability and ethical compliance.

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ALGO OF BLISSTECH

Watching Dusk

As dusk descends, your city seems to pause, as if holding its breath in comradeship of the fading sun. The sky, once ablaze with the harsh brilliance of afternoon, softens into a palette of molten gold, rose and violet.

The setting sun lingers low over the horizon, as if in slow retreat — until it's full hours later, when the sun's balcony you can see shadows stretch, weaving through buildings and streets like a gentle game, while the city's digital pulse keeps the promise of a late autumn night.

There is a peculiar magic in this twilight hour. The light doesn't vanish abruptly but dissolves gently, tinting facades and leaves with a quiet glow. The city's noise — traffic, people — strangely softens, as though dusk is testing your senses, sometimes covering it with the choir of returning birds.

With winter approaching, the days shrink, and this twilight becomes more precious, a fleeting spectacle that suddenly turns into a blink. Watching dusk — and nightfall fall — is witnessing the day slowly surrendering to night, the day's warmth to night's coolness. In that brief hour, everything is both eternal and ephemeral at the same time.

The writer is founding vice-chancellor, OP Jindal Global University



For those 'left behind', there's always 'saare jahan se achha'

If Materialism Can't Match, Turn Patriotic

The Indian professional abroad is not a different species. She doesn't sprout extra neurons on the flight to LAX, DKB or Changi. Nor does her PhD or MBA suddenly acquire magical footnotes in transit. Yet, the moment she lands in Silicon Valley, Dubai or Singapore, her psyche inflates like a multi-season streaming series. Economists call this 'labour market dynamics'. We call it happy war to wealth ratio. Even as the 'saare jahan se achha' narrative machine at home churns tirelessly: 'Stay close to family', 'Celebrate Diwali with your own people', 'Don't chase dollars, chase meaning', 'Nowhere will you get as close sabzi tastier than in New Rajinder Nagar'. Translation: accept less money fewer opportunities, and console yourself with 'samosa patriotism', the emotional subsidy for economic asymmetry, a loyalty programme where reward points are nostalgia.

The cruellest irony? Even after adjusting for higher rents and pricier milk abroad, the disposable income gap remains yawning. The average Indian abroad can afford luxuries, savings and travel. The Indian at home is told, instead, that authenticity is priceless, and being near a place of worship and pilgrimage can do what no museum and mountain view can do. Culture is the explanation to convince those 'left behind' that belonging is worth much more than a better life. Spoiler alert: It isn't.

The real trigger for this psychic exile came in January 1974, when Indira Gandhi introduced Foreign Exchange Regu-



Somnath Mukherjee

Blockbuster IPOs are now routine on bourses, with a marquee listing nearly every month. Yet, even in this crowded, VC-fueled, IPO-centric October IPO tureen heads. Oversubscribed 54x, it drew 4.5 lakh cr in bids, more than market capitalisation of many small global exchanges. Hyundai listed its Indian arm last year, and the momentum hasn't slowed. These aren't one-offs but signs of a secular trend. Assets investor firm Rothchild expects about 10 MNCs to list their India subsidiaries within a year.

Veteran socialist leader George Fernandes must be smiling from somewhere. Even in the Great Trade Union in the Sky. He's famously 'blamed' for driving Coca-Cola and IBM out of India in 1977 over their refusal to dilute stakes in their Indian subsidiaries. The episode has since become a convenient marker of India's protectionist streak — even though the reality is far more complex.

The real trigger for this psychic exile came in January 1974, when Indira Gandhi introduced Foreign Exchange Regu-

lation Act (Fera). It required MNCs in low-priority sectors like consumer goods to cut their stake in India subsidiaries to 40%. IBM and Coca-Cola refused. The latter, for instance, claimed that going public would risk exposing the 'secret formula' in its flagship aerated drink.

IBM balked, simply because it was then the world's biggest tech company. In truth, both firms probably saw India as too small a market to justify extra compliance costs of going public. Ironically, most of today's MNCs complied and diluted their stakes, creating a generation of listed Indian companies that have since thrived, some now market heavyweights. And some like Thums Up, founded to offset Coca-Cola's exit, was ironically bought and relaunched by the US giant when it returned to India in 1986.

In hindsight, India gained overall.

Investors got access to a set of professionally-run companies. Indian managers rose to global CXO roles after moving up from local units. Domestic supply chains plugged into global ones, helping spawn a generation of Indian SMEs. Global shareholders also benefited. Many India subsidiaries are now valued at far higher multiples than their parent companies — in other words, a significant share of the parents' equity value comes from their Indian holdings.

This is the single-biggest motivation behind the renewed rush for MNC subsidiary listings in India today. This time it's fully voluntary. Numbers tell their own story. LG Electronics, with a global revenue of \$63 bn, has a market value of \$10 bn. In contrast, the India subsidiary, LG Electronics India, with revenues shy of \$2 bn, has a market value of over \$12 bn.

The depth of India's equity market, higher growth profile and a capital investment push — all factors that have been freely invited overseas — have all contributed to this phenomenon. With an India listing being markedly more profitable than a US listing, MNCs will be incentivised to move larger shares of their global value chains to India.

The writer is chief investment officer, ASK Private Wealth

business here and maximise shareholder wealth?

The George Fernandes-era of MNC listings was mostly in consumer goods. Hence, beneficiaries of the Indian macro economy were more indirect, via managerial talent pool development and integration with limited global supply chains. Newer MNCs are more manufacturing-intensive, which bodes well for technology transfer, job creation and global value-added in India.

Suzuki Motor offers proof. After listing its Maruti subsidiary in 2003, it boosted its stake and made Maruti its largest global export hub.

Financial markets are central to India's story, arguably the only sector that is truly world-class. With Indian capital markets offering MNCs real skin in the game, policymakers should fully embrace this. Targeted policies that incentivise listings in India will yield far higher returns than the usual investment seminars and tax breaks aimed at attracting foreign capital.

Fernandes, in some ways, thought ahead of his time — mostly in the political and geopolitical domains. He wouldn't have predicted this. But the following policy rule first established by a political opponent to have such resonance nearly five decades later.

Chat Room

Talent Flaunters Flunked the Test

Apologies India in Gambhir Condition by Anand Vasu (Nov 27), prior to the Guwahati Test loss, India had only one 'Test series whitewash at home in its entire history. We now have two in 12 months. It's called Test cricket because it tests your temperament, skill and determination to the core. Battering for long hours is an art, and sadly, we no longer have artists of the calibre of Gavaskar, Dravid, Laxman or Pujaris anymore. The role of specialists can never be overemphasised. Having four all-rounders was nothing but a luxury. The T20 format seems to have spoilt our bats. What's ironic is that we now switch to white ball cricket; our next red ball assignment is in August next year — which means there will not be any soul-searching by the team management and qualifying for the WTC final will remain wishful thinking.

The writer is a former Test cricketer, Bal Goidra

The aim's now to reel them in



CONTRAPUNTO

A good review from the critics is just another stay of execution

- DUSTIN HOFFMAN

Pole Position

CWG is returning to India, but what do collapsing basketball poles say about our sporting aspirations?

In his heyday, former NBA ace Shaquille O'Neal weighed over 140kg, yet when he slam-dunked, which he did very often - 2,626 times over a 19-year career - basketball frames didn't collapse on him. Nor do they collapse when NBA players - average weight 98kg - make 11,000-odd dunks every season. How, then, do we come to terms with the deaths of Aman Kumar and Hardik Rathi, wiry slam-dunking teens crushed under the weight of such frames in Haryana, on Sunday and Tuesday?

Let's not call them "accidents", because that pushes both deaths beyond the realm of human agency - factors beyond our control. Did the frames collapse because their steel poles were heavily corroded, and they were no longer fit for purpose? Yes, but that only explains why the frames fell, not the loss of two lives. Aman and Hardik are no more because the authorities - despite being alerted about the rickety condition of the poles - remained unresponsive.

Perhaps because repairing or replacing a few feet of steel pipe in a rural sports complex isn't a major KPI for them, with a ribbon-cutting opportunity at the end.

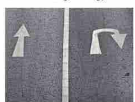
Video of the frame falling on Hardik in Rohtak has horrified the whole country. In losing the two boys we have lost promising players who could have been part of our 2030 Commonwealth Games squad. Basketball is one of the sports under consideration for the Ahmedabad edition of the Games, and Hardik was already a national-level player. For now, officials in Haryana have gone into overdrive, ordering checks across sports facilities, but it's a cue for other states too. They shouldn't wait for something to happen in their jurisdiction - as they did with contaminated cough syrup - before swinging into action.

It's good that CWG will return to India after 20 years, and hopes are already pinned on our 2036 Olympics bid. These mega events make sports a talking point, and can draw new talent to track and field. They also repay their vast outlay by rejuvenating host cities. But after the Haryana tragedies, we must ask, are we merely prepping to be glittering venues for big games, or going in with the determination to win big? If the latter, we must prove it to our players and athletes with actions, not words. There's a lot that needs doing - fixing broken sports isn't only one part. How we select players, train and treat them matters even more.

If It's Broke, Fix It

Reviews are fundamental to running everything better, from courts to govts to science to tech

The Supreme Court must not fret that many of its decisions are being reviewed by other SC benches. Indeed, no one in any position of authority big or small - newspaper editors will figure in the list of those with very small authority - should get miffed if their decisions are subject to another scrutiny. Stuff happens all the time - for better or worse. How will decision-making get better without reviews? Courts, parliaments, scientific bodies, they all rely on the power of review to write better judgments, improve upon legislation, and have research pass the test of peer assessment. Imagine a world without review. The hangman would be terribly busy, it would be a not-so-funny comedy of errors of bad



law, broken software, dangerous medicine. As it is, there are, these days an alarmingly large number of people who believe WhatsApp univ, which reviews nothing, carries the wisdom of Nalanda, even if they can't quite tell you where or what Nalanda is.

Reviews have transformed whole countries. One of the most dramatic reviews ever by India in 1991. Govt discovered its forex wallet, designed as per the best socialist principles, was empty. Liberalisation followed. Industrial licensing? Reviewed. Trade policy? Reviewed. Foreign investment? Reviewed. Cut to the present. Think tech. Recall BSOD. The Blue Screen Of Death hit the world last July. That massive outage knocked out global tech. Windows retired the infamous blue - after Microsoft's review decided it was time to junk it. Even relationships can course-correct only if there is recognition that a pause & pivot is called for - whether with partners or as parents of teens.

So, those in authority mustn't view a call for a review as an affront to their ego, or an insult to their intelligence. This comment, for example, went through a process of pre-publication review. But it may read even better after a post-publication review. The same holds for any number of things far more important than a newspaper editorial. Nothing, including SC judgments, is sacred. None of this is to question that homespun American wisdom: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. But, if it's broke, buddy, and it needs fixing, don't jinx it.

Labour of love

We now have proof that our babudom is renowned for its devotion to work

Jug Suraiya



"I love work," wrote Jerome K Jerome in his *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*. "Come to my study and I'll show you loads and loads of work which I've collected over the years and which I can't bear to part with. I sit and stare at it fascinated for hours on end."

Had he been around today Jerome would have established kinship with India's bureaucracy, our all-pervasive babudom which shares with the English author an attachment to work, a love for labour so great that it cannot afford to part with it at any cost.

Just how great that love is has now been quantified in a report about a month-long 'Cleanliness Drive' of govt offices conducted in Oct.

According to the personnel minister, Jitendra Singh, the sale of the scrap collected in the course of the drive generated nearly ₹800cr, a financial engine of growth sufficient to buy seven Vande Bharat trains.

The clearance of scrap, largely in the form of pending files and other paperwork, freed 233 lakh sq ft of office space.

The Union minister said that in the past five years the special

Campaign for Cleanliness, which was inaugurated

in 2021, earned from the sale of scrap nearly ₹4,100cr, a literally astronomical figure that he said was enough to fund "multiple" Chandrayaan moon missions.

Our babus obviously are so fond of their files and other paperwork, all safely preserved and tied up with red tape, that they cannot bear to part with them until prodded to do so by ministerial dictat.

Indeed the revenue so earned, presumably from the raddiwala, will help in part to pay babu salaries, a consideration that might well induce them to become even more adhesive to their work.

The libertarian aphorism goes that that govt is best which governs least. A bureaucratic version of this could be that that babu works best who works least.

Supreme Change Of Mind

That SC has many times overturned its own rulings should be celebrated, not lamented. The 2-judge bench's critique misses the point. From strengthening fundamental rights to decriminalising gay sex, guaranteeing right to privacy to stopping misuse of sedition, SC reviews have protected citizens

Dhananjay Mahapatra@timesofindia.com



On Wednesday, a two-judge Supreme Court bench overruled the court is pained at the "growing trend of revisiting and overturning of its own verdicts by subsequent benches". Ironically, this obiter dictum came on the day the country commemorated its 75-year-old Constitution, one recognised by SC and jurists as a living document, open to dynamic interpretations with passage of time.

More important, this trend of overturning its own rulings is entirely in conformity with the objective of Article 14 of the Constitution - SC declared law shall be binding on all courts in India. Surely, a change of view by SC, on a specific legal or constitutional issue, can't make Article 14 less potent?

Take, for instance, the AK Gopalan judgment of May 1950. The full court of SC - CJI Harilal J Kania, and Justices S Fazl Ali, M Patanjali Sastr, MC Mahajan, Bijan K Mukherjee and SR Das - with a 4:2 majority, gave limited meaning to fundamental rights, and upheld preventive detention of a person, without disclosure of grounds to him.

Should this view of fundamental rights have gone unchallenged or should it have been reversed? India has been served well by the fact that subsequent judgments have expanded the scope of fundamental rights. In IC Golaknath, SC in 1967 ruled Parliament cannot amend the fundamental rights part of the Constitution. In its largest ever bench of 13 judges in Kesavananda Bharati case, SC in 1973 expanded Golaknath principle to rule that the much larger basic structure of the Constitution, which included fundamental rights, cannot be amended.

But notwithstanding these seminal rulings, in 1976, a five-judge SC bench - with the sterling exception of Justice HR

Khanna - in ADM Jabalpur case, and by 4:1 majority, ruled that proclamation of Emergency suspends all rights, including right to life. Imagine a situation today where in the name of protecting a country from internal disturbances, SC gives such a licence to govt - to essentially kill citizens.

Fortunately, SC reversed AK Gopalan ruling in Maneka Gandhi case in 1978. Two renowned SC judges - YV Chandrachud, longest serving CJI in SC's history, and PN Bhagwati, who invented the tool of PIL to protect rights of voiceless - spoke of the inviolability of fundamental rights. They expanded the right to life, to include dignity within its ambit. Ironically, these two had agreed with majority view in ADM Jabalpur verdict.

Had they held a fastidious view of Article 141, like Justices Dipankar Datta and AG Masih did on Wednesday, they could not have atoned for judicial sins committed through ADM Jabalpur judgment. In fact, ADM Jabalpur judgment remained intact on SC records till the 2017 verdict of a nine-judge bench in K Puttaswamy case. That, apart from holding right to privacy as part of fundamental right to life, also overruled ADM Jabalpur ruling.

Right to privacy was held to be not a fundamental right first by an eight-judge bench in MP Sharma case in 1954. This was reiterated in 1962 by a six-judge bench

in Kharak Singh case. If SC's nine-judge bench had thought that previous rulings were infallible because they are final, it would have given people no judicial protection against digital intrusion. In fact, AI may force another review of privacy rights protection. SC may have to think about it in spite of Article 141.

Take the case of Article 377 of Indian Penal Code. This, infamously, criminalised physical relationship between consenting adults of the same gender. SC, in Suresh Kumar Koushal vs Naz Foundation case in 2013, had upheld the validity of Section 377. It had ruled in favour of banning sexual activity against what the court agreed was the "order of nature". It took SC five more years, and a five-judge bench in Navtej Singh Johar case, to decriminalise sex relationships. That judgment accepted that fundamental rights of consenting adults who are gay, were being violated by the earlier ruling.

Right to privacy and gay rights are key examples of SC's recognition that fundamental rights must be interpreted in the context of ever evolving social norms. These rights, guaranteed by provisions of the Constitution, have textually remained unaltered since 1950. Had SC not reviewed its own judgments, the spirit of fundamental rights would have been violated.

Another landmark judgment by SC was its 2022 direction to govts - don't register new cases on alleged offence of sedition under Section 124A of IPC. This direction came despite the 1962, five-judge bench judgment in Kedarnath Singh. That bench had upheld the constitutional validity of the sedition provision.

The list of SC judgments that were overruled by subsequent SC judgments is, happily, very long. SC should never be touchy about its judgments. Reviews are a sign of institutional strength, not weakness. India needs its top court to be open to the idea that even it can, sometimes, get things wrong.

Why Freebies Signal A Collapse Of Political Ambition

Handouts may win elections, but they don't build nations. We need a national code that prescribes how much can be spent on such largesse and compels parties to show where the money will come from

Duvvuri Subbarao



The recent Bihar election was, if anything, a masterclass in competitive populism. The governing NDA govt transferred ₹10,000 to roughly 1.2cr women even as the campaign was on. The opposition Mahagathabandhan was quick to up the ante, promising ₹30,000 to every woman and a govt job for every household in the state.

There was an air of unreality about these promises, as though the political class had collectively suspended all fiscal arithmetic. In the end, the extravagant assurances of the opposition simply lacked credibility; voters appear to have concluded that there are limits to what even the most generous govt can deliver.

There's a lesson here. Freebies cancel each other out. When every competing party is distributing money or promising larger and larger handouts, the effect on the voter tends to diminish. The governing party's last-minute cash transfer may still have swayed some votes, but broader competitive promises tend to neutralise each other. And when promises stretch credibility, people simply stop believing them. That may well be the fate that befell Mahagathabandhan.

But the problem with freebies runs much deeper. Govts that have come to power riding on a wave of generous guarantees now find themselves struggling to deliver that. Andhra Pradesh is discovering that implementing its elaborate welfare architecture is far costlier than imagined. Telangana, after years of high-octane handouts, is wrestling with a fiscal hangover. Maharashtra and Karnataka are belatedly realising that ramping up social transfers has left little room for other discretionary expenditure.

PM had once decried the *redvi* culture in politics and warned of the economic perils of excessive handouts. Yet, having witnessed their electoral potency, he now seems to have embraced them enthusiastically. This is not a partisan failing; it is a structural political problem. No party wants to be left behind in the freebie race. When electoral incentives are misaligned with fiscal prudence, prudence invariably loses.

The tragedy is that behind every freebie, there is an admission of political failure. As Chairman Mao said,

"Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." The modern Indian equivalent is this: every leader who promises freebies is, in effect, saying, "I cannot provide you the dignity of a decent livelihood and a regular income. So here is something for now; make do with it."

The politics of freebies thus reflects a collapse of ambition. We are no longer debating how to create jobs, improve productivity, or build human capital. Instead, we are debating whether ₹10,000 is good enough when ₹30,000 can be promised. What makes this more worrisome is that neither the Centre nor the states are financing these giveaways out of surplus revenues. They are funding them through borrowing. That means pushing today's consumption onto tomorrow's taxpayers.

In principle, democratic institutions should restrain such fiscal adventurism. Yet every institutional check has failed.

The legislature, especially the opposition, should be the first line of defence. But no opposition party dares criticise freebies for fear of appearing anti-poor

or conceding political ground. In fact, the opposition often goads govt into announcing even more generous transfers so as to garner some credit for itself.

CAG, which can legitimately comment on the sustainability of state finances, is hobbled by the inherent lag in its reports. Long after the freebie has been distributed, audit findings are released, the audit findings become irrelevant.

The market, which should provide the checks of excessive borrowing, fails to do so because investors assume that the Centre will not allow states to default. This implicit sovereign guarantee distorts risk and removes an important disciplining mechanism.

Election Commission has been suggested as a possible referee, but this is neither desirable nor feasible. EC can regulate campaign behaviour, not governance. And as an institution whose credibility depends on political neutrality, it should not be dragged into the political economy of welfare schemes.

We are therefore left with a peculiar situation: the political class has every incentive to overspend, and the institutional architecture has little capacity to restrain it.

To be clear, some welfare spending is essential. In a country where millions struggle for daily livelihood, transfer payments serve as vital safety nets. But when such transfers become the dominant form of discretionary spending, and when they are financed by direct or indirect borrowing, they crowd out investment in the very things that could improve livelihoods sustainably: education, health, physical infra and job creation.

The Bihar episode signals that voters will take what is immediately given. When the credibility of politicians is low, it's rational for people to vote for freebies over their alternative votes. There is a crying need for course correction. For this to happen, the Centre must take leadership. What we need is a national code of conduct on freebies - one that prescribes both how much can be spent on handouts and when they can be distributed. Crucially, political parties must also be required to indicate where the money will come from.

It's time to restore honesty and accountability to our fiscal politics. Freebies win elections; they do not build nations.

The writer is a former governor, RBI

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



Whoever said money can't buy happiness simply didn't know where to go shopping.
Gertrude Stein

Asht Lakshmi, Karm And Britain's UHNI Outflow

Surakshit Goswami & Sonal Srivastava

Recent reports suggest that industrialist Lakshmi Mittal may be considering leaving London for Switzerland or Dubai. The economic policies of Britain's Labour govt are reportedly spooking Ultra High Net Worth Individuals (UHNIs), who are now looking to relocate to tax havens. In India-spiritual parlance, this is not merely a flight of billionaires; it is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, deserting the once-great empire on which the sun never set.

According to legend, Lakshmi emerged during the *Samudra Manthan* - the great cosmic churning. Seated on a lotus, she carried a pot of nectar coveted by both the *asurs* and *devis*. She declared herself the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Lakshmi blesses those who worship her with abundance, but the nature of abundance is not limited to wads of cash. Since wealth alone is not a true measure of prosperity, Dhan Lakshmi is accompanied by seven other forms, completing Asht Lakshmi -

the octet of Lakshmi.

To be truly wealthy, one must cultivate all eight attributes that ensure complete well-being and spiritual harmony.

Yet we often make the mistake of preparing global and national lists of the 'richest people' based solely on monetary wealth. According to scriptures, one who does not embody all eight dimensions of Lakshmi cannot be considered truly wealthy. This is why the concept of Asht Lakshmi - the eight forms of prosperity - is emphasised. A person must be strong in each of these aspects.

The eight forms of Lakshmi are:
● **Adi Lakshmi** - The UK for Dubai (Source: WhatsApp chat) awareness that 'I am not the body, I am the soul, and I exist from the very beginning.' To awaken this

foundation, the presence of a spiritual guide becomes essential.

● **Dhan Lakshmi** - Material wealth, contentment with what one has, and a state where one does not need to seek money from others. Love is also a form of wealth.

● **Dhanya Lakshmi** - The ability to manifest resources. One who does not hoard wealth but spends on wholesome food or on their own nourishment.

● **Gaj Lakshmi** - A personality with dignity and gravity, a Lakshmi that is steady, and a presence that is naturally felt in any gathering.

● **Santan Lakshmi** - Harmony within family, children who do not become a source of sorrow, and the readiness to pass on knowledge

received from a guru to sincere seekers.
● **Veer Lakshmi** - Strength, joy,

enthusiasm and good health. Along with this, the courage to rise above laziness, desires and inner impurities.

● **Vijay Lakshmi** - The ability to overcome negativity and adversity. When challenges arise, one knows how to emerge victorious.

● **Vidya Lakshmi** - A life enriched by literature, music, the arts, true scriptures, good company, meaningful conversations and inner wisdom.

True prosperity unfolds when all eight petals of Lakshmi blossom within us - when wealth is not merely counted in currency, but life is balanced, wisdom, strength and grace in every aspect of life.

"You reap what you sow" is not just a biblical principle - it is a moral compass for attaining existential bliss. Do good deeds and you will not have to suffer; do bad deeds, and even if you escape their consequences in the short run, you will eventually face the music when the wheel of karm turns. Something similar is happening with India's former colonial masters - the not-so-Great Britain.



THE SPEAKING TREE

PUN OF THE DAY: Lakshmi is feeling

received from a guru to sincere seekers.

● **Veer Lakshmi** - Strength, joy,



Editor's TAKE

Indo-China: The faultlines that refuse to blur

The detention of Prema Thongdok, an Arunachal Pradesh woman, at Shanghai Airport has triggered a fresh diplomatic storm between India and China

China has once again indulged in its theatrics to claim that Arunachal Pradesh is its territory. It has been doing this for long but this time the victim was an innocent traveller from Arunachal Pradesh. The brief detention and harassment of Prema Wangjom Thongdok at Shanghai Pudong International Airport has once again brought to fore the simmering tension beneath the surface of India-China relations. This is despite the recent thaw in the relations at the higher levels.

For Prema layover on a routine international journey turned into an 18-hour ordeal, with Chinese authorities declaring her Indian passport "invalid" because it had Arunachal Pradesh as her place of birth. China's territorial claims over Arunachal Pradesh, which it refers to as "Zangnan" or southern Tibet, frequently manifest in such petty tactics.

An Indian citizen was detained not on security grounds, but on identity and nationality is unacceptable to every Indian. China has hardened posture on border claims, under President Xi Jinping. Of late China has indulged in creating irritants even in sports — archers, wushu athletes and university competitors have been denied entry into China.

The Sino India border conflict over Arunachal Pradesh is rooted in the 1914 Simla Convention, where the McMahon Line was drawn by the British and Tibetan representatives. China participated but refused to sign the final agreement. India accepted the McMahon Line at independence. The two Asian giants have clashed over border dispute several times — from the 1962 war to the 1975 Tuluang La incident and the 2020 Galwan Valley face off.

China has time and again resorted to provocations. It objected to the Dalai Lama's visits, renaming of Indian villages, Indian dam approvals in response to Chinese hydropower projects, and most recently, naming of a mountain peak after the sixth Dalai Lama.

However, the provocation so far have been confined to diplomatic level but Thongdok's case shows that they spill into civilian life, complicating travel, and the experiences of ordinary people.

While recent engagements between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping hinted at cautious cooperation, neither country has shifted its fundamental strategic stance. India must insist that international transit norms be respected and that unilateral interpretations of territorial claims cannot dictate global travel protocols.

Besides, infrastructure and border management must be strengthened. At the same time, both nations must recommit to dialogue mechanisms that prevent such flashpoints from escalating into larger crises.

Incidents like Thongdok's may appear minor in isolation, but they point to a larger truth: until the border dispute is meaningfully addressed, every interaction remains a potential battlefield.

Reclaiming soft power for a new global era

India must urgently reimagine its soft power for today's world. Though its legacy spans Ayurveda to AI and yoga to zero—built on dialogue over domination—campaigns like "Incredible India" have not fully translated this richness into global influence.



BHOPINDER SINGH

India's patent civilisational depth and vivid cultural heritage have been described as its latent (and underutilized) soft power. From Ayurveda to Artificial Intelligence (AI), from yoga to zero, the timeless wisdom of this ancient land convinces without conquest. Its resonance is predicated on dialogue and not on domination. Terms like "Incredible India," "Brand India," or even "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (literally, the world is one family) have been used intermittently to assert this reality, but the results are not commensurate with the riches that India has to offer. Invoking sovereign pride as a means of a nation's soft power was perhaps first presented in the form of "Cool Britannia" for the United Kingdom.

The term itself was a cheeky pun on the song "Rule, Britannia" — it attempted to front a hip, sparkling, and aspirational set of British outpourings designed to mesmerize the world. Starting in the mid-90s, it got a fillip with the advent of Tony Blair ("New Labour") fame, who was keen to shed the dour and shoddy shibboleths of the past to present a fresh and exciting proposition of everything British. Suddenly the times that were birthed "Britpop" as a genre with the likes of Oasis, Blur, Spice Girls, etc., movies like Full Monty, and movie characters like the mumbbling-fumbling, charming, and yet so quintessentially posh Englishmen like Hugh Grant or Colin Firth.

The global tabloids were ablaze with headlines that screamed that London was "the coolest city on the planet." Similarly, the recently elected Prime Minister of Japan, Sanae Takaichi, was earlier the Cabinet Minister of "Cool Japan." Japan has a full-fledged Ministry that aims to globally sell Japan as an "it" place, with all its uniquely Japanese products, services, and imagery. It has a defined objective to showcase everything that "encompasses everything from video games, manga, anime, and other forms of content, fashion, commercial products, Japanese cuisine, and traditional culture to robots, eco-friendly technologies, and other high-tech industrial products." Today, one has to be living under a rock to not have been confronted with a barrage of i-Pop, Hello Kitty, Sushi, or even Zen philosophy.

The smallest towns in the heartland of India abound with vernacularised versions of Doraeon, Shinnchan, Ninja Hatori, Pokemon, etc. Here in Britain in the mid-90s and thereafter, soon The New York Times was writing about "Year in Ideas: Pokemon Hegemon." But what very few people realized was that this was an outcome of a very deliberate national strategy



THE CHALLENGE TO A "COOL INDIA/N" PROJECT WILL ALWAYS BE THAT IT WILL REMAIN SUSCEPTIBLE TO FIXATIONS THAT ARE POLITICAL OR PARTISAN.

to rescript perceptions about Japan in the aftermath of World War 2. The imperial history of Japan had been bloody, brutal, and known to be thoroughly oppressive and expansionist — post World War 2, Japan needed to recalibrate and invoke its unique and latent soft power to endear itself to the world at large, and so "Cool Japan" was conceptualized.

India, which too seeks to claim its rightful place in the comity of nations, needs a similarly thought-through, packaged, and holistic program to appeal to the rest of the world. It need not be ponderous, heavy, and too puritanical (as the appeal for the same gets restrictive), but like the culturally rich Japanese

storyline, it needs to craft its antiquity in a more contemporary and palatable manner. Inadvertently, besides "Indian Food," Bollywood is a great example of soft power assertion.

It managed what Joseph Nye said about the ability of soft power: "to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies." But this too was uncoordinated, organic, and a disjointed outcome. Therefore, despite the fact that the number of Indian movies far outnumber the Japanese output, the Japanese have an edge in the number of Oscars won by their industry and people. Even "Indian Food" has struggled with its ability to morph into Michelin-friendly formats, unlike Japanese food.

The challenge to a "Cool Indian" project will always be that it will remain susceptible to fix-

ations that are political or partisan. Thus, the form that such a project would invariably take would always be saddled with cherry-picked ideological frontages and preferences of the dispensation of the day, to valorise or diminish elements simultaneously. Often the chosen elements could depend on what the government seeks to showcase, as opposed to what could naturally appeal to the sensibilities of the larger world outside.

Another lingering concern has been the stark disability to contemporize our cultural assets and codes in a way that could appeal to a younger and more uninitiated generation. Increasingly, from Canada, USA, to the UK, there are spiraling concerns about Indian B-1 visa seekers, asylum seekers, uncouth Indian tourists, and the ghettoised (non-inclusive) existence of its diaspora. The sometimes unfair image of stereotypical bargain-seekers, gawky starers, or even pesky tele-callers requires correction. The days of snake-charmers and impoverished fakirs are long gone as India marches ahead confidently and purposefully. Admittedly, the odd Indian (like any citizen from any country) can bring shame upon their conduct, but that cannot form the totality of perceptions about India or Indians.

We too need to emerge from the dual and contradictory shadows of humility and arrogance by putting our best foot forward, gracefully. A governmental initiative that goes beyond the bureaucratic and dated Festivals of India, a la a "Cool India," beckons.

The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry

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Vendors warm themselves near a small fire on a cold winter morning, at Ghazipur mandi, in New Delhi (PHOTO: PTI)

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INDIA'S TEST COLLAPSE DEMANDS ANSWERS

Appropos the news report, "Second whitewash at home: India surrenders to South Africa" (Nov 27), India's 0-2 series defeat to South Africa at home marks one of the most dispiriting moments in the nation's Test history. Losing by a record 408 runs and conceding the series within barely five days of collective resistance reflects not only technical shortcomings but also an alarming erosion of confidence. After South Africa coach Shukri Conrad declared that his team wanted India to "grovel," a spirited response from the hosts was expected. Instead, the Indian batting order collapsed repeatedly, unable to counter spin or build meaningful partnerships. The recurring failures against high-quality spin, exposed earlier by Mitchell Santner and now by

Simon Harmer's exceptional 17-wicket series haul, raise deeper concerns about skill, temperament and application. Gautam Gambhir's observation that the team is in transition offers perspective but does not conceal glaring issues in approach, shot selection and adaptability. The struggles of players such as Sai Sudharsan, combined with the swift dismissals of the all-rounders, highlighted inadequate preparedness for challenging final-day conditions. With the defeat pushing India to fifth in the World Test Championship table, the path to the final has become considerably tougher. A decisive counter to the current state of affairs before forthcoming tests test this side again.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

Please send your letter to the info@daily-pioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Can we teach our children to stand strong?



ASHA IYER KUMAR

2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

It was in the same week when two students, one in Delhi and another in Jaipur, died by suicide, unable to bear the harassment and bullying they faced in school, that I heard of two teenage breakdowns within my own circle. If the timing of these was a coincidence, it was a cruel one. A coincidence that confirms what we have long refused to acknowledge: our children are suffering.

They are suffering despite everything we claim to do for their comfort and happiness. Their world, which we assume is cushioned with care and opportunity, is instead filled with threats, tension and tears. We remain oblivious to the storms brewing behind their composed faces, their disciplined routines, their rehearsed smiles until one day they

decide that they are alone in this, and that the lonely battle must end.

The pattern is repeating with alarming regularity and it is unclear if it is being addressed enough. There is concern, sympathy and calls for stringent action against those who create conditions that lead our children to do unthinkable things. But there is no clarity or understanding of what ails them, what drives them to consider self-harm or suicide as the only resort they have when faced with external threats and inner turbulence, and above all, what as parents and teachers we could do to save them.

The world today is far more open than it used to be back in our days. Their exposure to the rawness of life and its vagaries is unchecked, and their once naive, little space is now contaminated with negative influences. Competition, comparison and intimidation are not confined to classrooms alone. There are devils in every corner waiting to pounce on them. The threats come wearing many disguises — peers who wield power through mockery, teachers who mistake discipline for dominance, institutions that still believe fear is a legitimate tool of regulation, and the relentless online world that creates distorted images of life. We keep asking why children are breaking down. They are exhausted, not merely by academics, but by the constant need to belong, the pressure to be perfect,

the unspoken expectation to be emotionally invincible. They are lonely even when surrounded by people who love them, because instead of parents, they seek love in their friends who are as waylaid as them. They are afraid of teachers who intimidate, of peers who mock, of parents who compare, of a world that measures worth in ways they do not fully understand.

They must be taught to face what frightens them, challenge what diminishes them and speak against what violates their spirit. They must become warriors by discovering within themselves a core that no bully, no insult, no exclusion, no failure can break. A core made of emotional intelligence, moral courage, self-trust, and an inner compass that does not sway with every external storm. And it is this cultivation of inner strength that we have so far failed to prioritise. In our zeal to protect them from discomfort, we have forgotten to prepare them for reality. If a harsh world cannot be softened overnight, then we must teach our children how to meet it without collapsing. To understand that setbacks are not catastrophes. To find within themselves the resolve to fight back, speak up, seek help, and keep moving.

The writer is a Dubai-based author, columnist, independent journalist and children's writing coach

COP30 Outcome Raises Key Concerns

COP30 concluded in Belém, Brazil, with nations adopting the Belém Package as the primary negotiated outcome. Guided by the "Mitirão text", it highlighted unity and collective responsibility in mobilising global resources to address climate change.

A major decision was the commitment to triple adaptation finance by 2035. The launch of the Global Implementation Accelerator and the Belém Mission further reinforced global intent to uphold the 1.5°C target set under the 2015 Paris Agreement. Optimism was also sparked by the pledge to counter climate misinformation and by two new roadmaps aimed at halting deforestation and transitioning away from fossil fuels. India, along with other Global South nations, stressed equity and climate justice, calling for predictable, grant-based climate finance rather than loan-driven mechanisms.

The Global South's reaffirmation of the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) and its opposition to trade-related restrictive measures such as the EU's CBAM demonstrated a united stance against climate inequity. However, the absence of a clear roadmap for moving away from fossil fuels remains a major shortcoming.

PRASUN KUMAR DUTTA | KOLKATA

India Must Protect Its Women

The editorial, "India's Fight Against Crime Against Women," rightly highlights the continuum of violence that women confront across social and professional backgrounds. From domestic abuse and sexual harassment to rape, harassment and coercion within live-in relationships, the range of crimes demonstrates how deeply gendered violence persists in India.

Legal reforms have broadened over the years, yet structural inequalities that enable such violence require urgent attention. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24, male literacy stands at 87.2 per cent while female literacy is only 74.6 per cent, reflecting a 12.6-percentage-point gap. This disparity curtails women's agency, reduces awareness of their rights and weakens their capacity to seek justice. Without addressing these inequities, punitive laws alone cannot curb gender-based violence. Equally critical is the need for empathetic policing, faster judicial processes and community systems that encourage reporting rather than silencing survivors. India's fight against violence cannot rely on legislation alone. Change requires dismantling social norms that normalise control over women while empowering them through education and institutional support.

HARSH PAWARIA | ROHTAK

Bribery in Medical Education

The recent ED searches across multiple States in the NMC bribery probe reveal not merely isolated wrongdoing but a deeper decay within the medical-education ecosystem.

When institutions entrusted with shaping future doctors resort to illicit means for approvals, the damage extends far beyond administrative malpractice. It undermines public confidence in healthcare itself. Medical colleges are not factories for degrees; they are sanctuaries where competence, ethics and compassion must be cultivated.

Bribery corrodes this foundation, disadvantages honest institutions, demoralises students and ultimately compromises patient safety. This scandal must serve as a wake-up call. Transparent inspections, digital audit trails and independent oversight panels are essential to restore accountability.

More importantly, India must foster a culture in which integrity is valued as highly as infrastructure and compliance.

Without such reforms, the credibility of medical training — and the trust patients place in future doctors, will continue to deteriorate.

VJAYAKUMAR HK | RAICHUR

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Modinomics: The architecture behind GST reforms

Recent data and policy shifts show that prisons can evolve into centres of learning, productivity, and real rehabilitation. With rising prison industry output and inmates eager to work and learn, the question now is not about possibility, but about India's readiness to scale this transformation.

FIRST Column



DEEPAK PRAKASH

India's growth story has a new chapter. When the Modi government was elected to power in 2014, it brought a new hope of development. Through the years, government took steps to transform the dynamics of India's economy positively. First breakthrough came with Jan Dhan Yojna which promoted the principles of financial inclusivity. For the first time in India, banking was made highly accessible to the common masses. This had set the stage for Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) where the citizens got the disbursed funds directly into their bank accounts. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi gave a statement in Kalahandi regarding corruption that if the government sends 1 rupee, the final beneficiary gets 15 paise. This has become a thing of the past. Now, the exact amount disbursed by the government reaches the final beneficiary under the Modi government. The government subsequently brought schemes like MUDRA Yojna, Goods and Services Tax (GST), PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojna, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, Make in India and many more revolutionary steps for the welfare of citizens. Now, the Modi government has brought GST Reforms and reemphasised the significance of Swadeshi goods.

The Next Generation GST Reforms by Prime Minister Narendra Modi have brought a revolution in the country. At a time when the global order is going through great churning, India is gradually building itself as a Self-Reliant power which is Atmanirbhar Bharat. The GST slabs were four in number earlier which were 28%, 18%, 12% and 5%. Now they have been simplified into two slabs 18% and 5%. Several goods have been brought to the lower slab or made nil, providing great relief to the citizens. At the same time, the government is pushing for Swadeshi goods. Leading by example, Home Minister Amit Shah shifted to Zoho Mail which was followed by rest of the country.

The reforms came amidst the festive season. True respect has been paid to our most revered Maa Durga during Navratri. In 2017, the Modi Government ended the regime of tax terrorism by introducing Goods and Services Tax (GST). It ended the plethora of taxes and rationalised the



IN THE QUEST TO MAKE HOUSING MORE AFFORDABLE, THE RATE OF BASIC ITEMS SUCH AS CEMENT, MARBLE AND GRANITE BLOCKS HAS COME DOWN. THE GOVERNMENT'S PRIORITY OF UNIVERSAL HOUSING HAS GAINED TRACTION AFTER THIS MOVE

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system. Earlier, there were multiple taxes like VAT, Octroi, Excise and other taxes. This contributed to a difficulty in doing business and burdened the end consumer. But today, we are a witness to how the government can actually promote 'Ease of Doing Business'. The alignment is with the vision of building a sustainable living standard for every individual in the country.

The supply chain of the country has largely benefited. It is favourable to both the sellers and consumers. On one side, employment generation is taking place and on the other side, the consumers are getting better leverage. This is an ideal condition for the market. Growth is prospering across different sectors.

From essential goods, textiles, healthcare, education to technology, every aspect has been touched.

The Modi government, which provided LPG cylinders to every household, is providing cheaper utensils by slashing the taxes. But more importantly, the prices of food items have also come down due to these reforms. The reduction in grocery bill supports household budget. It all takes an empathic government to consider such basic points which are fundamental to human needs.

Healthcare was one of the most neglect-

ed areas and was taken for granted. But the Modi Government made necessary interventions. After taking a profound step like Ayushman Bharat, these reforms are a part of an important move. Both health and life insurance have been brought to 0% slab. Insurance coverage and penetration will automatically broaden the base. Medical equipment, drugs and medicines have also become cheaper. This will cater to the medical needs of the citizens.

Education is one of the top priorities of the government. It has undertaken various initiatives to make education more accessible and inclusive. From opening schools to bringing in NEP 2020, the government has taken many initiatives.

These reforms bring down the prices of stationery and books. It shows the commitment towards building strong fundamentals for education. Farmers are very close to the Prime Minister's heart. He has taken several welfare initiatives in their favour. The new reforms bring down the GST on tractors from 18% to 5%. Farm machinery and items like bio-pesticides, micro-nutrients and other essentials for farming have become more economical.

The agriculture sector will surely get a competitive edge. In today's age of technology, electron-

ic items are fundamental to human needs. From Air Conditioners to televisions, the prices have been slashed down. In festival season, people have purchased electronic items, especially during the week of Diwali and on the occasion of Dhanteras. This has made the timing of the reforms perfect.

The Automobile Sector becomes another gainer. Financial institutions are reporting unprecedented demand for new motor vehicles. Cars and bikes have become more affordable especially cherishing the dreams of the middle class and lower middle class. With a single stroke, the whole sector has been taken towards the upside. In this festive season of Durga Puja and Diwali, people buy new clothes for themselves. This is resulting in the upsurge of sales in the textile industry. People are being able to buy cheaper clothes. The textile industry supports a significant part of the population which will definitely have greater wages and profit.

In the quest to make housing more affordable, the rate of basic items such as cement, marble and granite blocks has come down. The government's priority of universal housing has gained traction after this move. Both builders and buyers are happy as the real estate sector becomes more cost-effective. The toy industry,

which has already grown after the Prime Minister's call for Swadeshi toys is benefiting from this move. After his call, the market capitalisation industry has grown by leaps and bounds, projected to reach USD 3 billion by 2028 before the reforms. These reforms will prove to be a game-changer for the toy industry as well.

The number of sectors that have been positively pushed by these GST Reforms are beyond comprehension. From small-scale traders to large industries, it provides impetus to all. Definitely, it will further propel the boom of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) along with the startups. These enterprises will have a greater role to play in the future.

The Modi government is simultaneously promoting Swadeshi goods. As a staunch ambassador of Vocal for Local, the government has created both domestic and international marketplaces for goods that are made in India. Prime Minister Modi urged people they use Swadeshi goods. It should be a matter of pride to use Swadeshi products. This will directly empower the indigenous industries and support them economically. In turn, it will largely benefit the growth of the country.

The use of Swadeshi goods helps in employment generation in the country. The workforce of the country will greatly benefit, and the growth of employment is directly proportional to it. The MSME sector, which employs 62% of India's employment according to the report of McKinsey Global Institute (MGI). This sector is projected to grow further due to the Swadeshi initiative. The mantra of "Har Ghar Swadeshi, Ghar Ghar Swadeshi" has become a movement in the country. Consciousness is constantly rising among the citizens. The Startup culture, which is directly patronised by the Modi government, is taking the sale of Swadeshi goods to greater heights. Initiatives such as 'One District One Product' are being supported by the government.

The Prime Minister has given a call to the citizens of the country to build technology and present innovative solutions. This will definitely give India a chance to compete on the global platform in a more assertive way. We have the potential to build the leading tech companies of the future. Definitely, this can make India the tech capital of the world.

Please read the full article online at www.daily-pioneer.com

India's Javelin Missile Deal and Its Impact on Future Battlefield Preparedness



SANJOY BANERJEE

The last short lived skirmish with Pakistan, Operation Sindoor, was essentially a display of India's ability to destroy enemy targets over long distances with superior missile power. A conventional war with our eastern or western adversaries will not be restricted to only air power, missiles or long distant artillery. All the elements of Bharat's war machinery will be engaged in the eventuality of a full scale war of any magnitude.

The terrain and geography of India's western neighbour demand heavy involvement of Armoured Vehicles like Battle Tanks and Armoured Personal Carriers from both sides which is evident from the Indo-Pak battles of 1965 and 1971. Anti Tank Guided Missiles (ATGM) play a very important role against enemy Battle Tanks and Armoured Personal Carriers. It is in this aspect that the recent India-USA deal for procuring Javelin missiles has garnered so much attention.

Developed by Raytheon and Lockheed Martin of USA, the latest variant of Javelin missile is one of the most potent and lethal ATGMs that the world has ever seen. It has a fantastic 94 per cent hit probability and has exhibited its efficacy in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. The missile system is man-portable and can be carried by one trained soldier because of its light weight. An Armoured Vehicle or any other target can be effectively engaged up to a distance of 2500 metres with the optical sight or thermal imaging (for low light and night conditions).

The distance can be extended upto 4750 metres with a different launcher. Once the target is locked on, the missile is fired and it homes on to the target with the help of an inbuilt Infra Red Imaging seeker. In the case of Armoured Tanks, there is an option for Top Down attack wherein the missile takes an upward trajectory and comes down aiming at the top or turret of the enemy Battle Tank which is the most vulnerable part and has less armour protection than the rest of the tank. The tandem charge of the missile consists of



The Pioneer
SINCE 1945

a precursor charge to cater for reactive armour protection and then is a lethal main charge which destroys the Battle Tank. The Javelin ATGM also has a Direct Attack mode for targeting bunkers, buildings, helicopters and other targets. For safety of the operator from a backblast, the Javelin has a soft launch, that is, the missile is initially ejected to a safe distance by a small gas charge and thereafter the rocket engine gets fired and take the missile to its target. It is a 'Fire and Forget' missile which allows the firer to immediately disengage and move away to a safer location or engage another target. The soft launch also allows the missile to be safely fired from bunkers, buildings and constricted spaces.

Bharat will be able to equip only limited troops for engaging enemy armoured elements with this initial deal of 100 Javelin missiles and 25 Command Launch Units (launchers for the missile). Negotiations are being carried out for producing the Javelin missiles in India. The critical requirement of Anti Tank Missile systems is presently being catered by the latest version of Carl Gustav Rocket Launchers (of Swedish origin but being produced in India since long) and the Konkurs and Kornet missiles of Russian origin (also being produced in India).

India's efforts for indigenous ATGM systems has been successful and the man portable variant of Nag missile, a third-generation, fire-and-forget, all-weather anti tank guided missile developed by DRDO, would be India's answer to Javelin. The Nag ATGM and its variants have successfully undergone user trials and will be inducted after the necessary technical formalities.

The Javelin ATGM can be a very effective force multiplier for India in the eventuality of a war with Pakistan. During armoured engagements in the deserts of Rajasthan or in the plains of Punjab, the Javelin missiles can be used to hunt and destroy enemy battle tanks and other armoured elements.

They can also be used against low flying attack helicopters and to blow up command bunkers, ammunition and fuel dumps. In the mountains they can be used to counter movement by targeting enemy troop convoys and replenishment vehicles besides carrying out stand-off attack on important headquarters. The Fire and Forget capability of the Javelin missiles can help the firers to Shoot and Scoot for escaping or engaging other targets. Modern movement of heavy equipment and logistical capabilities along armoured tanks to be moved up the mountains. Though they have limited maneuverability in the mountains, the battle tanks are used as mobile pill boxes with lethal and enhanced fire power. After the Galwan incident, India and China deployed armoured tanks on both sides of the borders in eastern Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, where the flat stretches of land and cold desert plateaus can be potential arenas for intense and concentrated tank battles. The Javelin ATGMs will be very effective in such situations.

Javelin Anti-Tank Guided Missiles can be part of the arsenal for parachute battalions and special forces units. Once these forces are launched behind enemy lines, they can wreck havoc by using these Javelin missiles on vital installations and enemy bases.

With India making a deal with USA for Javelin ATGMs, chances are almost nil that Pakistan too will get the same missile from USA. However, Pakistan can bid for the Chinese HJ-12, nicknamed China's Javelin, at their own peril. While Javelin has been the cynosure of all the militaries during the initial phase of Russian Ukraine war and form a part of the arsenal of more than 20 countries, like most of the Chinese military armament, not much is known about the efficacy of the HJ-12 missile.

After the Javelin ATGMs are received and necessary familiarisation and training is carried out on simulators and otherwise, the authorities in charge will know best how to deploy and utilise them while India's adversaries may, at best, keep guessing.

Colonel Sanjoy Banerjee (Retd) is an Indian Army veteran with over three decades of service in the Corps of Engineers, with combat experience in J&K and Northeast

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Fight to save one of the very few leftover city forests in Delhi



ROHIT PRASAD

With the soaring AQIs, people finding it literally impossible to breathe and the start of long pending discussion on the removal of green cover off the Aravalli and how Delhi lost its green shield which saved it from the dust for centuries, it is imperative that every citizen values every single standing tree not just in solitude but as a intertwined network which selflessly makes our cities liveable.

Delhi's Deer Park has been a fine example of conservation of deer and as a green belt in the heart of Delhi, which not just helps us breathe but also provides a learning ground for city kids to understand biodiversity in its entirety.

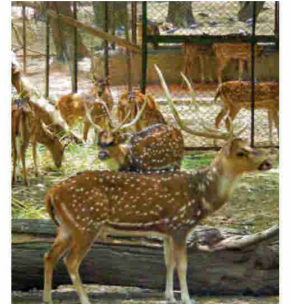
When the DDA decided to move the Deer from the Deer Park few years ago, alarm bells went off and some environmentalists including Verhaen Khanna, Barun Bhanot and Jeevesh Gupta along with their NGOs, New Delhi Natural Society and Campaign for Differently Abled picked up the cudgel to expose the mismanagement of the deer park, stop the movement of Deers and ensure that the land does not fall into the wrong hands.

The case which was dismissed by the High Court allowing the movement of Deer in favour of the DDA was moved by Verhaen and Jeevesh in the Supreme court where they not just got a stay on the deer movement but also managed to expose the illegal jhuggis having come up in the middle of the deer park, sale of ducks from the district park lake and no international protocols and guidelines being followed for movement of deers.

During the hearing of the case on 26th November 2025, the Supreme Court observed that the translocation protocol and best practices incorporated in the guidelines issued by the Central Zoo Authority and IUCN Guidelines were not adhered to during the translocation of deer from Deer Park to Ramghar Vishdharji Tiger Reserve and Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve in the State of Rajasthan.

There is no documentary evidence of pre-translocation genetic screening, tagging, translocation protocols, veterinary fitness certification, or behavioural acclimatisation.

The Supreme Court has not just set aside the Delhi High Court's ruling which refused to interfere with the DDA's chronic mismanage-



ment in the functioning of the AN Jha Deer Park but has also appointed a Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to conduct an independent, on-ground assessment covering, actual population at Deer Park, its ecological carrying capacity, survival status of deer already shifted to Rajasthan, and a scientific, welfare-compliant roadmap for any future relocation. Further, the Court has asked the DDA to explain, within eight weeks, the reduction in the AN Jha Deer Park area and to stop leasing the park for commercial events from now onwards.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's intervention marks a turning point not just for the AN Jha Deer Park, but for how Delhi - and India - approaches urban ecology as a whole. At a time when the city is gasping under hazardous AQI levels and battling the consequences of decades-long environmental neglect, the Court's decision reinforces a critical truth: preserving natural assets is not a luxury but a civic obligation. Deer Park is more than a green pocket; it is a living classroom, a biodiversity refuge, and one of the last remaining buffers protecting Delhi from complete ecological collapse. The Court's insistence on scientific norms, transparent governance, and accountability sets an important precedent for all future wildlife and green-belt decisions.

The author is a Professor of Economics and Public Policy at MIT Gurugram. He has a Ph.D. in Economic Theory from SUNY Stony Brook, USA.

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The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

CWG in Ahmedabad

A chance to transform sporting culture

AS expected, India has earned the hosting rights for the 2030 Commonwealth Games (CWG) in Ahmedabad. India's first mega sporting event since the controversy-ridden 2010 CWG in Delhi would demonstrate its preparedness and commitment for dreaming big — hosting the 2036 Olympics in Ahmedabad. The announcement could not hide the grim reality that plagues Indian sport — systemic neglect and indifference. Twin tragedies in Haryana led to two basketball players dying after the poles collapsed.

Ahmedabad is tipped to be transformed into the country's sports capital. Officials are confident of the venues being ready by early 2029. The first big test will be the World Police and Fire Games in October 2029. More than 9,500 personnel are set to participate. The evaluation committees assess candidate cities against a wide range of criteria, of which infrastructure is one aspect. Technical delivery, athlete experience and governance rank as high. The cricket-obsessed country has made strides on a variety of parameters, though the unprofessional control of sports federations remains a contentious issue.

Why Ahmedabad and not other cities as the chosen venue is now not central to the discussion. The focus ought to be on how to leverage the CWG hosting rights to stir up the sporting culture and ecosystem across the country — in an unbiased manner, based on region-specific needs. It's a mammoth task, but an opportunity not to be missed. For a nation wishing to host the Olympics, the goal has to be bigger than showcasing its capability as an able organiser. The targets must be more ambitious — firming up its sporting prowess by injecting money and support, inculcating the love for sport in an average Indian and providing at least the basic facilities. Now's the time to make amends and up the game.

No magic wand

Time Delhi got a unified clean-air plan

DELHI's polluted winter has once again forced the nation to confront an unpleasant truth: the crisis is now so chronic that even the highest court in the land feels compelled to remind citizens that it does not possess a "magic wand" to clear the air. The Supreme Court's observation is an indictment of decades of blame-shifting and institutional complacency. For years, Delhi-NCR has witnessed air quality sinking to hazardous levels every winter. Yet, the political debate continues to circle familiar culprits: stubble burning, vehicular emissions, construction dust, industrial pollution. As the Supreme Court noted, there is no single reason — because there has never been a single, coordinated, year-round strategy.

Experts have long emphasised that clean air cannot be secured through sporadic firefighting. But governments have perfected the art of short-term optics. They resort to temporary bans, emergency meetings and high-decibel blame games while the problem persists. The court's insistence that experts and scientists must lead the solution-building process reinforces what policymakers should have institutionalised years ago. Despite repeated judicial nudges, commissions set up to manage air quality seldom demonstrate the urgency or authority required. The states most affected often move in different directions, with little incentive to cooperate. Meanwhile, millions of residents, especially those medically compromised, the infants and the elderly, breathe the toxic air that erodes their health.

The Supreme Court's decision to monitor the matter and seek compliance from Punjab and Haryana on stubble-burning directives shows a willingness to push for coordinated action. But a metropolis cannot depend on courtroom reminders to breathe clean air. Delhi's smog is man-made. So is the apathy that sustains it. And the real tragedy is that the crisis persists not because solutions don't exist, but because those in power lack the courage to implement them.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1925

Indians in South Africa

THE Government of India has not seen fit to comply with the request of the Indian residents in South Africa for postponing the departure of its deputation to that country; but has instead issued a communique explaining its position in the matter. The main ground taken up in this communique is that the information which the deputation is charged to collect is urgently required to help it in making out its case with regard to the proposed legislation in South Africa which will come up for consideration in the South African Parliament early in the new year. And it is evident that if the investigation had been deferred, no time would have been left for its execution before the Union Government proceeded with the legislation, and the Government of India would consequently have been seriously handicapped in making necessary representations in regard to that legislation. Our first comment in regard to this contention is that it is scarcely believable that the South African Indians did not take so obvious an aspect of the matter into consideration in making the request. If nevertheless they thought that the deputation would serve no useful purpose and that its departure should be postponed until after the arrival of their own deputation in India, it was the clear duty of the Government of India to have respected that opinion. The most important thing to be borne in mind in this connection is that the South African Indians know as much about this matter as the Government of India can claim to do and know something more besides, and that they are undoubtedly the best judges of what is or is not good for them.

Bangladesh awaits a democratic dawn

India should be well prepared to engage with an elected government in Dhaka

VIKRAMDEEP JOHAL
DEPUTY EDITOR

DEMOCRACY has rarely survived and thrived in Bangladesh. Military coups, assassination of two Presidents (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman), autocratic regimes, rigged elections — this small nation has seen it all during its 54-year history. Now, it finds itself at a crossroads yet again. A parliamentary election and a nationwide referendum are scheduled to be held on the same day in February next year. The referendum pertains to the July Charter, which envisages much-needed political reforms through constitutional amendments.

The charter owes its origin to the 'student-people' uprising in July-August 2024 that overthrew the repressive government led by Sheikh Hasina and forced her to take shelter in India. A brutal crackdown carried out on her orders claimed the lives of over 1,400 protesters and left hundreds of others maimed. No wonder the deposed Prime Minister is an integral part of the political discourse in the run-up to the elections. Last week, a special tribunal sentenced Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death on the charges of "crimes against humanity". On Thursday, a Bangladesh court sentenced her to 21 years of imprisonment in three corruption cases.

Hasina-led Awami League ruled the country without a break from 2008 to 2024. The long reign was marked by impressive economic growth, even though increasing authoritarianism took



IN EXILE: Deposed PM Sheikh Hasina is an integral part of the political discourse ahead of the elections. REUTERS

its toll on democratic institutions and constitutional safeguards. The party has now been reduced to a bystander in view of suspension of its activities.

The top contender is the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by ex-PM Khaleda Zia. The Begum's indifferent health has prompted her London-based son Tarique Rahman to take charge of the party's campaign. He appears prominently on BNP posters and hoardings, which also carry images of Zia and her late husband, ex-President Ziaur Rahman.

Differences between the interim rulers and the BNP are coming to light. Earlier this week, the party slammed the government for signing long-term deals with foreign companies to operate key ports. Tarique Rahman has asserted that an 'unelected' administration cannot determine the country's future. The BNP has also accused Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus of violating the July Charter by going beyond the scope of earlier political consensus. Clearly,

Dhaka needs to be convinced that allying with a stable India is a much wiser option than siding with an unstable Pakistan.

the BNP is already projecting itself as the next incumbent.

The BNP's main rival is its long-term ally, the Jamaat-e-Islami, which is banking on religion to win over voters. Also in contention is the National Citizen Party, which was formed by students in February and aims to establish a viable third front. Students were at the forefront of the protests last year, but it is doubtful whether they can make a significant impact in the upcoming elections.

Amid the poll buzz, Bangladesh is rightly laying stress on international outreach, exemplified by the recent Bay of Bengal Conversation in Dhaka. This annual geopolitical forum showcases the host nation as a progressive player in the global scheme of things.

A key foreign stakeholder in Bangladesh affairs is none other than India. The interim government has intensified pressure on New Delhi to hand over Hasina so that she can be brought to justice in Bangladesh. It appears that India is finally realising which way the wind is blowing in the neighbouring country. The Ministry of External Affairs has stated that India is examining the request for Hasina's extradition and remains committed to Bangladesh's stability and the well-being of its people.

It's also important for India to rebuild ties with Bangladesh because Pakistan is out to exploit the situation created by the Delhi-Dhaka impasse. Pakistan is set to export 1,00,000 tonnes of rice to Bangladesh — a sign of the fast-

improving trade relations between the two countries. During the Joint Economic Commission meeting held in Dhaka last month, the Pakistani government offered Bangladesh the use of the Karachi Port Trust to increase its trade with other regional countries, including Central Asian states and China. Direct flights between the two nations are scheduled to begin in December, while the engagement between their militaries is also growing.

The majority of the Bangladeshi citizens today were not even born when the 1971 War of Liberation gave birth to their nation. The genocide carried out by Pakistani troops, India's military intervention and humanitarian support — these are chapters from the distant past for the voters at large. The 2024 uprising is the all-important epochal event for them; participants as well as witnesses see it as nothing less than 'Second Independence' for their country.

There is a lot that India has done in recent years to boost infrastructure development in Bangladesh. These gains must not be frittered away. Dhaka needs to be convinced that allying with a stable India is a much wiser option than siding with an unstable and unreliable Pakistan. The interim dispensation's Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain said last week that Bangladesh would prioritise its national interest and regional stability rather than "pick sides". However, Dhaka won't find it easy to walk a tightrope in South Asia.

India, which is closely watching the developments in the neighbourhood, should be well prepared to engage with an elected government in Dhaka. Finding a way out of the Hasina tangle must be a top priority. At the same time, the importance of countering Pakistani propaganda cannot be overemphasised.

(This writer was invited to participate in the Bay of Bengal Conversation held in Dhaka from November 22 to 24)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

There can be no daily democracy without daily citizenship. — Ralph Nader

A tribute to unsung heroes

COL. RES. NARULA (RETD)

ACTS of courage are often immortalised in history books, recounted in war stories or narrated by elders around a bonfire. Yet true bravery is not confined to the battlefield. It often emerges in the unlikeliest moments — when fear overwhelms many people, and an individual dares to act. One such incident happened in December 2013 at a construction site on the premises of Babina Military Station (Uttar Pradesh), where raw human valour provided a lasting lesson in courage.

It was a crisp, sunlit winter morning. Labourers were curing a freshly laid slab of a building with water. Watan Singh, the site foreman, was supervising the work, making sure that every part of the slab was evenly coated to prevent cracks.

Then, without a warning, the calm was shattered. A piercing scream tore through the air. Ramji, one of the labourers, suddenly began slapping his face and neck wildly. Soon, it became clear that he was under attack by a swarm of honeybees.

Ramji's desperate cries echoed across the site, but panic spread faster than help. Workers dropped their tools and fled out of fear. No one dared to climb the ladder to the rooftop where Ramji staggered helplessly. He slipped and fell face down into the shallow layer of water covering the slab. The bees continued their relentless assault.

Lance Naik BB Rao, who was nearby, witnessed the chaos and reacted without hesitation. Grabbing two blankets, he wrapped one around himself as makeshift protection and ran towards the building. As he climbed the ladder, the bees attacked him instantly. Some entered his blanket and stung him. But Rao pushed forward through the excruciating pain. Reaching Ramji, he threw the second blanket over him and tried to drag him towards the ladder.

But the bees vented their fury on Rao. Their unrelenting stings weakened him rapidly. Still, he managed to pull Ramji a few feet before collapsing near the edge of the slab. Barely conscious, he somehow descended the ladder — his courage paving the way for others. Seeing this, Watan Singh realised that delay would mean certain death for Ramji. Summoning all his courage, he wrapped himself in another blanket and climbed into the seething swarm. The bees attacked immediately, but Watan pressed on, reached the unconscious Ramji, and with immense effort dragged him to the edge. Workers below, emboldened by his bravery, pulled both men down to safety.

They were rushed to the nearby military hospital, where Major S Kaur and her nursing assistant acted swiftly — removing over a hundred stings from Ramji and others, administering anti-allergic medication and stabilising his breathing.

That day, three individuals stood tall — Rao, whose instinctive bravery sparked the rescue; Watan, whose determination pulled a dying man from the brink; and Major Kaur, whose timely expertise ensured survival. Their actions reaffirm a timeless truth: heroism is not about rank or circumstance — it is about refusing to look away when a life hangs in the balance. Bravo to these unsung heroes — when no one dared, they did.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cultural shift to combat junk food

Apropos of 'Junk food needs a strong policy dose'; the over-the-counter food is not merely a dietary choice but a behavioural addiction, reinforced by instant gratification and emotional satiety. Children reach out for packaged snacks out of habit, boredom or stress. Sometimes, parents too encourage processed food in place of home-cooked food. This normalises unhealthy eating patterns. In rural areas, cheap ultra-processed snacks are replacing traditional foods. Combating junk-food consumption requires not only stricter regulations but also a cultural shift that promotes wholesome eating habits.

ASHOK SINGH GULERIA, HAMIRPUR

Discourage bad eating habits

Refer to 'Junk food needs a strong policy dose'; the food we eat should come in contact with heat or *agni* three times — first during its cultivation in the fields under the sun, second while cooking, and third during digestion inside the body. Junk food breaks all these essential rules. Such food often contains processed ingredients stored for long periods. This kind of food culture is slowly replacing healthy, home-cooked meals from our platters, especially among youngsters and working couples. Prioritising small-term benefits, like taste and convenience, can have far-reaching consequences. The need of the hour is to take strong initiative. Awareness, education and supportive public health measures are necessary to make people get rid of these unhealthy foods.

ANUP KUMAR GAKKHAR, HARIDWAR

Avoid fresh trouble

Refer to the Two Views segment 'A feasible solution to the imbroiglio' and 'Why Chandigarh still eludes Punjab'; Chandigarh is financially unmanageable by any one state. The inclusion of Chandigarh in Punjab was linked to simultaneous transfer of designated Hindi-speaking areas of Abohar and Fazilka to Haryana overriding the fact that Kharar tehsil, including Chandigarh, had 55% Hindi-speaking population as per the 1961 census, a fit case for transfer to Haryana. Even today, Chandigarh has more Hindi-speaking population than Punjab. After 60 years of bifurcation, a new trouble should be avoided.

ASHOK KUMAR GOEL, PANCHKULA

China can't be trusted

Apropos of 'Arunachal row'; India does not assert itself when it comes to its neighbour China. We have a history with China of backstabbing — 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai' slogan for some years, followed by its 1962 incursion into India. But, in recent times, New Delhi has been showing pliability in trade matters. Beijing is always up to mischief in border areas, trying to transgress a little each time across the Line of Actual Control. PM Narendra Modi has unequivocally declared many times that not an inch of our land is under Chinese occupation, but is it so?

BM SINGH, AMRITSAR

India's rare earth reserves

The Union Cabinet's approval of Rs 7,280 cr for the Rare Earth Permanent Magnet scheme will help cut import dependence on China and establish a long-term rare earth reserves ecosystem. Although India possesses the world's fifth-largest rare earth reserves, we barely contribute 1 per cent to the global production. This scheme is a definitive corrective designed to capture the entire value chain within Indian borders. It will ensure that our push for 100 per cent electric mobility and renewable energy targets will not be held hostage to external price shocks, tariffs and trade embargoes. However, fiscal incentives without necessary political will are not enough. To translate the scheme into meaningful benefits, the government must dismantle the stringent regulatory blockade on mining and processing.

MADHVI SHARMA, BY MAIL

Awareness in border areas

Refer to 'A disturbing trend'; the alarming rise in Pakistani drug cartels targeting Punjab's adolescents reflects a deeper structural failure than mere policing gaps. It signals a collapse of both community vigilance and institutional deterrence. We need to focus on the social fabric by strengthening school-based awareness, holding youth engagement programmes and building rehabilitation pathways. Unless Punjab invests simultaneously in security and social resilience, an entire generation risks being trapped in a silent epidemic.

RIDHI MUDGIL, ZIRAKPUR

Story-telling amid Shillong's cherry blossoms



SANJOY HAZARIKA
INDEPENDENT COLUMNIST

IT'S that time of the year in Shillong, capital of Meghalaya, near but also far enough from the Assam valley, where high-voltage political challenges and pressures play out on a daily basis. The flow of life and the rhythms of days here are different: the sun is warm, the skies are blue and the AQI can be, as in my neighbourhood, below 10. Eat your hearts out, *Dilliwallahs* and all those from the most polluted cities in the world, a majority of which are located in India. The cherry blossoms are in bloom, their fragile pink blossoms bursting from the branches.

However, once the sun dips below the horizon, it's a different story — the weather turns chilly, dipping to 10 degrees Celsius and below.

The Cherry Blossom Festival has now gathered a significant following, with fans of rock, pop and heavy metal coming not just from the state but also across the country to listen to some of the top international bands.

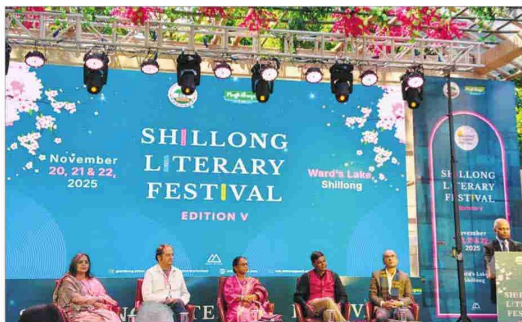
In the last season, Ed Sheeran and the 1990s star Bryan Adams performed;

this year the Irish group, *The Script*. Bollywood actor and performer Nora Fatehi and the DJ Diplo were among the big attractions at the festival which combines music with food, handicrafts and art exhibitions. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said that the government expected around 50,000 footfalls.

The push for the monetisation of musical talent comes in the background of concerns being expressed publicly about whether Meghalaya and other parts of the North-east, with their fragile ecosystems, hospitable and stunning vistas, have the infrastructure and social cohesion to stand up to predicted huge tourism inflows over the coming years.

Places such as Shillong and Sohra (also known as Cherrapunji) are being aggressively promoted as new tourist destinations by their own governments and the Centre. Social influencers, especially YouTubers, lead the way with a battery of recordings, which include a mix of correct as well as misleading statements, images and hype.

Shillong is a hill town, a small metro when compared to giant cities like New Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. It has all the aches and pains of a growing urban conglomerate, ugly concrete structures that have taken the place of the wooden and plaster bungalows of old, horrendous traffic (for several hours



INNOVATION: Celebrated authors like Francesc Miralles, Banu Mushtaq and Shehan Karunatilaka participated in the Shillong Literary Festival. PHOTO BY WRITER

every day, especially during school and office opening and closing hours) and a steady continuing influx from other parts of the state. New multi-storied apartment blocks and office spaces are springing up across the city.

Recently, there was a furore when a wooden bungalow belonging to the Government of Manipur was demolished by a department of that same government. It was no ordinary building; it had both historical and emotional significance for Manipuris — it was a former residence of the Manipur Maharaja and the place where he had signed his kingdom's accession to India.

These issues apart, the

Sangma's strategy is built around music, sports and literature to fuel economic growth.

state government is pressing ahead with a strategy to build an economy anchored in tourism and also as a rock capital, a major growth centre for sports and, according to the Chief Minister, seeking to carve a niche role for itself in the arts and literary space.

Sangma dropped by at another of the smaller 'festivals', one that comes at the tail end of the other huge gigs, the Shillong Literary Festival (SLF), to explain the strategy. Speaking to a packed audience that included the 2025 International Booker Prize winner Banu Mushtaq, the celebrated author of *Idigai* Francesc Miralles and the 2022 Booker awardee Shehan Karunatilaka, Sangma out-

lined a vision and mission and strategy built around music, sports and literature to fuel economic growth.

It is an unusual approach, to say the least. But for a state (like most other North-eastern states) that raises little financial resources of its own and depends on Central funding, this is an innovative strategy.

Thus, the Rs 23-crore investment in five major concerts last year generated a nearly six-fold return for the state, Sangma noted. This also put money in the pockets of aspiring performing artists as well as homestay owners, cafes and restaurants as well as taxi operators and small shopkeepers.

Authors and visitors listened to Sangma sketch some of his favourite projects which sound refreshingly different to the homilies about employment trotted out by other state governments.

Tapping into opportunities provided by local music talent, there is now a government-led Meghalaya Grassroots Music Project (MGMP), which currently backs over 7,000 artists. Some of these musicians and their groups played to enthusiastic crowds every evening at the venue of the literary festival — the lawns of the small and pretty British-built Ward's Lake, which is more than 130 years old.

The magic of this little space, with its landscaped lawns sloping to the waters,

cobbled paths and white wooden bridge (where visitors were not allowed) was not lost on authors. One of them called it the most beautiful setting for a gathering of writers.

But above the prettiness of the place, the SLF heard energetic and passionate conversations, readings as well as robust engagement as some of the world's — and the North-eastern region's — most celebrated authors gathered to share stories, exchange experiences and challenge stereotypes and prejudices. Last year's celebrity participants included Shobha De and Vikram Seth.

Apart from the impressive turnout of national and international authors in the North-east over the past years, local authors from Meghalaya, Khasi and Garo presented in their own languages and got a chance to interact with international and national stars. It was a point that was articulated by Sangma, who traced the SLF's growth from a 'small gathering' to a significant platform for Meghalaya's writers who had a 'passion ... desire and will, to write and to tell a story.'

The space for story-telling is growing even while that for others may be shrinking. It is important to emphasise this in the context of a small state and small city where freedom of expression is embraced and encouraged.

Tejas crash raises tough questions for HAL



AIR VICE MARSHAL ANIL GOLANI (RET)
DIRECTOR GENERAL CENTRE FOR AEROSPACE POWER & STRATEGIC STUDIES

ANY accident that takes place is tragic, especially when it results in the heart-breaking loss of life. The Tejas crash at the Dubai air show on November 21 that took the life of Wg Cdr Namansh Syal has left the IAF fraternity and the nation at large grief-stricken, to say the least. While fighter flying is inherently risky and entails significant challenges, display flying demands even more from those in the cockpit.

Pilots who conduct low-level aerobatics and display flying are not only carefully chosen for exceptional skill, professionalism and temperament but also rigorously trained and mentored. While accidents happen — and will continue to take place because of the risks involved — some come at an inflection point that demands critical course correction, not only for the aviators and air forces but also for the nation.

The loss sustained by the pilot's family is both profound and irreplaceable and something they would have to deal with for the rest of their lives. The loss of a professional pilot for any air force would take years to overcome.

The court of inquiry will get to the root cause of the accident and come out with recommendations and remedial measures and one only has to be patient and wait for its outcome.

As the aircraft was indigenously designed, developed and manufactured, it showcased the maturing of India's defence manufacturing capability in more ways than one. The loss of reputation, however, irrespective of the cause of the accident, would be difficult to restore. This is where the Indian defence public sector unit, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), comes in. The onus is on HAL to not only redeem its reputation but also the trust that the nation has reposed in its capability.

With the IAF having placed orders for 180 Tejas Mk 1A aircraft after the initial order of 40 Mk1, there is no denying the fact that a large part of the future IAF inventory would comprise this homegrown 4.5 generation fighter aircraft. With the Tejas aircraft coming under scrutiny after this accident, there is a need to differenti-



INFLECTION POINT: The safety of Tejas is not the problem — delivery is. SANDEEP JOSHI

ate between the aircraft's capability and HAL's production capacity, along with that of the wider ecosystem.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flew the Tejas aircraft in Bengaluru on November 25, 2023, and it was the first time that any Indian PM had flown a fighter aircraft. The present IAF Chief, Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, led a formation of three Tejas aircraft to welcome the Luftwaffe Air Chief when he was flying into India in a Eurofighter Typhoon during the multi-lateral exercise Tarang Shakti in August 2024.

With the aircraft having a zero accident rate during its development phase and

India cannot campaign for exports when domestic delivery schedules remain unmet.

having flown for eight years post induction into the IAF without any accident, needless to say that the aircraft has had a stellar flight safety record. The only other accident before the present one was in March 2024 during an exercise in which the pilot managed to eject safely. The preliminary findings attributed the accident to an oil system malfunction leading to engine failure. With more than 12,000 flying hours since its first flight in 2001 the Tejas has a robust safety record, with the lowest non-combat losses when compared to other single-engine fighter aircraft development and induction programmes across the world.

The contract for the first lot of 83 Tejas Mk 1A aircraft was signed in February 2021 at a cost of Rs 48,000 crore, with the delivery of the first three aircraft in three years and 16 aircraft every year thereafter. According to the scheduled delivery timelines, the IAF by now should have had at least 15-18 Tejas Mk 1A already inducted and flying whereas in reality even the first aircraft has not been delivered.

The IAF subsequently signed another contract for 97 additional Tejas Mk 1A in September 2025 at a cost of Rs 59,000 crore. While the delay in the delivery of GE F404 engines has been a major cause, there are other issues as well that relate to the integration of the indigenous Uttam radar and the Astra air-to-air missile. HAL has decided to go ahead with the Israeli EL/M-2052 AESA radars on early Mk1A aircraft to avoid further delays.

However, the Astra Mk1 missile still faces integration, software compatibility and certification issues that are yet to be resolved. The Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) made a great platform in the Tejas for HAL to build on and HAL needs to make a great production line to match up with that.

While it is good to showcase indigenous fighter aircraft capability in air shows and bilateral and multilateral exercises across the

world, the need to campaign for export orders is questionable under the circumstances.

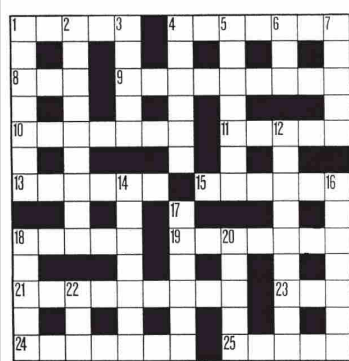
With expressions of interest from Malaysia, the Philippines, Egypt and Argentina in the past, it is not surprising that most of these countries have finalised their orders with other manufacturers. HAL has also produced the Dhruv, Advanced Light Helicopter, which has been inducted by the Indian armed forces and the Coast Guard.

With more than 380 helicopters produced to date and the Sarang display team of the IAF performing at multiple air shows across the world, exports have been limited to single digits.

This has been largely due to safety concerns and competition from other manufacturers globally. While the Indian armed forces will continue to buy what is Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured (IDDM) in the interest of promoting self-reliance or *atmanirbharta*, to export, one has to be globally competitive.

The HAL and the aerospace manufacturing ecosystem in the country are thus at an inflection point wherein all hands on deck will be required to redeem its reputation of being a dependable defence public sector undertaking.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Expressing feelings freely (5)
- Painter of The Sistine Madonna, 1512 (7)
- Monotonous routine (3)
- In effect (9)
- Receive as legacy (7)
- Detest (5)
- Details of little account (6)
- Uncompromising partisan (6)
- High-pitched signal sound (5)
- Directory of notables (4,3)
- Closely integrated as group (5-4)
- Light yellowish brown (3)
- Prohibit (7)
- Removal of undesirable elements (5)

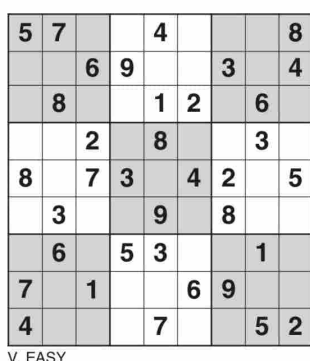
Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Off the cuff, 8 Syria, 9 Carnage, 10 Break up, 11 Valid, 12 Entail, 14 Clutch, 17 Fibre, 19 Preview, 21 Grimace, 22 Gaudy, 23 Put in order.
Down: 2 Fervent, 3 Track, 4 Except, 5 Unravel, 6 Frail, 7 Lead the way, 8 Subterfuge, 13 Inexact, 15 Tribute, 16 Spleen, 18 Blimp, 20 Eager.

DOWN

- Judgment (7)
- Ignite (5,4)
- Means to exert pressure (5)
- Something seldom found (6)
- Bird's feathers (7)
- The lot (3)
- One thickness (5)
- Bear close examination (4,5)
- Driving force (7)
- Thrash (7)
- A sword (6)
- A consignment (5)
- Too freely available (2,3)
- Snare (3)

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

6	2	1	5	7	3	8	4	9
5	8	7	6	4	9	3	2	1
9	3	4	2	8	1	7	5	6
2	9	8	1	3	4	6	7	5
3	4	6	7	9	5	2	1	8
7	1	5	8	6	2	9	3	4
8	6	3	4	5	7	1	9	2
4	7	2	9	1	6	5	8	3
1	5	9	3	2	8	4	6	7

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 28, 2025, FRIDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Margashirsh Shaka 7
- Margashirsh Purnimashi 13
- Hijri 1447
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 8, up to 12:16 am
- Vyagatha Yoga up to 11:05 am
- Shatbhisha Nakshatra up to 2:50 am
- Moon in Aquarius sign

FORECAST

SUNSET:	FRIDAY	MAX	MIN
SUNRISE:	SATURDAY	06:59 HRS	
CITY			
Chandigarh	26	08	
New Delhi	26	10	
Amritsar	20	06	
Bathinda	25	07	
Jalandhar	20	06	
Ludhiana	21	07	
Bhiwani	23	09	
Hisar	25	07	
Sirsa	25	07	
Dharamsala	21	06	
Manali	15	02	
Shimla	17	06	
Srinagar	16	0	
Jammu	25	12	
Kargil	07	-10	
Leh	05	-10	
Dehradun	27	07	
Mussoorie	19	07	

TEMPERATURE IN °C

V. EASY

Welcome,
Indian Air ForceFlames, but
it's only a drillNow let's
get working

WHAT'S THE DRILL?

Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Airport carried out a realistic emergency drill on Thursday — a dummy aircraft and simulated fire created controlled chaos to test response agility. This crucial exercise ensures passenger safety and operational excellence. For the first time, the Indian Air Force was involved and a passenger was airlifted as part of the drill. **RANE ASHISH** captures all the action

Spraying the
essence of rescueAll set to
be savedWork in
full 'flow'In the air,
on the moveCalm after
the 'storm'

comment

THOUGHT
FOR THE DAY

Incivility usually arises not from malice, but ignorance — Christine Porath, author

Aggression towards those doing their job is plain incivility

A woman who arrived at the Santacruz Traffic Department's towing yard to retrieve her car allegedly drove it away without paying the towing and no-parking charges, nearly running over two constables in the process recently, our report said. An FIR has been registered for rash driving, endangering police personnel, and obstructing government work.

A red Kia Sonet had been found parked in a no-parking zone near PH Medical on Juhu Tara Road. Despite

repeated megaphone announcements by a head constable, no one responded, and the vehicle was towed to the yard. An e-challan entry was made.

A woman reached the towing yard and began shouting at the towing staff and the constable, demanding her vehicle back. She then entered the Kia Sonet and tried to drive out. When she was stopped and told to first complete the formalities and pay the charges, she allegedly accelerated the car towards a duo. Both

had to step aside to avoid being hit. This is a shocking incident, and this woman must face the law. This is also an extreme case of not accepting that one has flouted the law, and consequently, one's vehicle has been towed away. We see car owners and towing staff have extreme aggro-filled exchanges on the road itself and have heard at stations too. Like road rage, there is something called victim of towing rage. One has seen people actually running after a towing vehicle

carrying their bike, especially. Arguments, at times, erupt at the towing spot itself. These escalate dangerously and threaten to get physical, and this, too, has happened at times. A couple of years ago, an irate woman had slapped and hit a police officer with her footwear after her car was towed away to the police station.

Correct conduct is dialogue, paying up and then filing a complaint when one is certain you have been wronged. Violence is unacceptable.

LETTERS

Animals can help with mental health

This refers to 'Meet IIT-B's pawfect stress busters'. Friendship with dogs is truly comforting. They sense human emotions and offer a calming presence that helps students living from home manage stress. Their needs are few, but their love and loyalty are unconditional.

PERVYNN KAVARANA

Stress has a cure, and it has fur and four legs

Dogs and cats ease stress, anxiety and depression, which explains their positive effect on students. Their popularity rose after COVID, but many Mumbai homes are too small to keep pets. Pet cafés help, but community pet parks would let more people spend time with animals.

SN KABRA

Stop blaming Gambhir, start addressing fatigue

This refers to 'India's Test team has a Gambhir samasya'. The issue is one of complacency and fatigue. A few days ago, Gambhir was praised for guiding Team India to the World Cup title, and now he is seen as a problem, showing how quickly opinions change.

VANITA SHENOY

Preserving memorials is everyone's duty

This refers to 'Memorials to our fallen heroes must be maintained'. Memorials honour martyrs, build pride and keep history alive. Preserving them respects their sacrifice and keeps their legacy alive.

AMIT BANERJEE

The grim reality of motherhood

LAVIE EN
ROSA

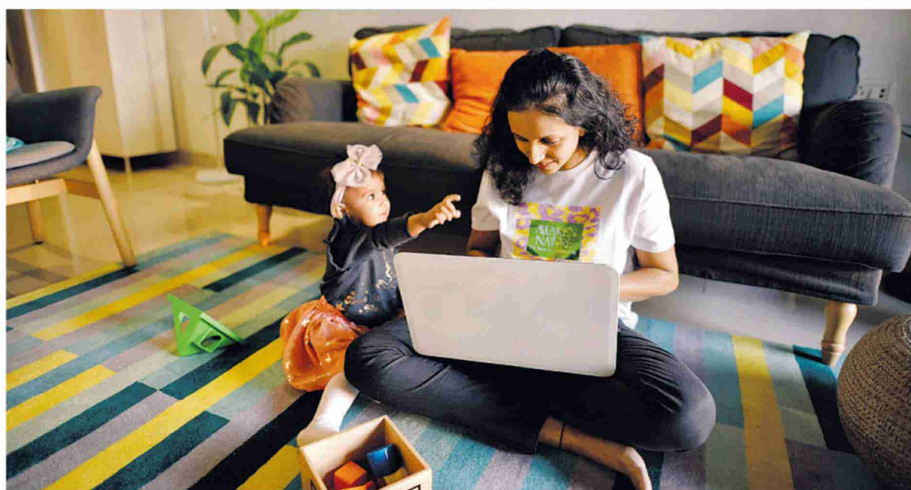


Rosalyn D'Mello

I saw a comic the other day that made me chuckle. A new mom opens her apartment door, newborn in one arm, another kid peering out next to her. The visitor — the grim reaper. "Relax, I'm just here for your career!" he says. I laughed, not a wholesome 'this-is-hilarious' laugh, rather the laugh of morbid disbelief. The illustrator succinctly captured the deepest, rawest, most disturbing reality of motherhood in the twenty-first century. Obviously, this comic was drawn by a woman, and I'm hitting myself on the head for not having archived it, because I'm unable to find it now. It's among my many research oversights; part of the malaise of being forced to underperform as a home-office-going mother.

My difficulties with productivity have been compounded by my recent diagnosis of postpartum Hashimoto's thyroiditis — a chronic autoimmune disease that many women find themselves with after having given birth. In short, my body decided that my thyroid gland was an enemy and attacked it. Now, I need to take a certain milligram of the hormone it would have otherwise produced in order to keep my body and its metabolism in working order. It's annoying, because I need to take blood tests every three months to measure TSH levels. For the rest of my life, I need to medicate myself every morning on an empty stomach and wait for a 30-minute interval before I can eat. On weekends, I've been prescribed a slightly higher dosage. For a long time, I was sure I had no symptoms, but then I read that the fatigue I have been experiencing of late could be attributed to the disease. Speaking to the editor of the German edition of my upcoming book — a mother now navigating menopause who has also had the disease for many years — I wondered whether the fatigue is a symptom or simply the consequence of parenting amid the absence of a robust support system. I'm not gutted about my diagnosis, because among

It is challenging to stay visible as a mother in the 21st century, when the world insists on shackling you, throttling your voice by making it impossible for you to find the time to sit still and think



There is a certain pleasure, an indescribable satisfaction that, as a writer, I can only get from getting into the flow. It requires immersion, which demands time. REPRESENTATION PIC/ISTOCK

the larger array of chronic diseases, this is perhaps the better one to have. It's easier to manage and I'm privileged to be living in a place where the chronic nature of the condition means I don't have to pay for the medication or for my visits to the endocrinologist, or for the blood tests. Still, it's hard not to read this disease as the grim reaper who has come for my career. Where before, I would try to slink into a book around 8.30 pm, when both kids were asleep, now I sit on the sofa, unable to even enjoy a second of leisure. There's a tiredness that runs through my bones that I'm still learning to shake off.

It's no mean feat to stay visible as a mother when the world insists on shackling you, throttling your voice by making it impossible for you to find the time to sit still and think. I was speaking to a friend and work colleague, also an art critic and mother to two boys, both about two years older than mine. Both of us no longer have time to visit art shows. If we do, we don't have the luxury of giving the work the faculties

of attention it demands. This has obviously meant that we cannot perform as art critics, and our livelihoods can no longer be dependent on us flexing the muscles that made our perspectives vital and valid. Instead, we work quietly as editors, improving upon other people's texts. Editing requires attentiveness, too, but it isn't as intellectually demanding as writing something from scratch. It's ironic, because for the first time, there is no dearth of publications that would be happy to have me contribute, but I simply cannot find the time to visit a show and then to review it. It feels like a cruel joke, because I spent so many years seeing art but struggling to find avenues to write about my witness.

I don't condone productivity culture. I actively resist the notion that our self-worth should, in any way, be tied to our ability to create or produce. But there is a certain pleasure, an indescribable satisfaction that, as a writer, I can only get from getting into the flow... It requires immersion, which demands

time. One needs to be able to sit with a set of ideas, then knead them like dough, play with their textures, their possibilities, roll them out, undo and remake and rebuild, then set aside for a duration before returning to them. This is a summary of what making art involves, at least for me. You have to let the world in, then allow it to metabolise and become part of your body before it becomes precipitate, like sweat. This labour is unlike any other. Sometimes I rue the inability to mess around with my sentences, re-order, re-think, re-calibrate. I have such an exciting idea for my next book, but I wonder if I'll ever get around to writing it or if, by the time I begin, the grim reaper will have gorged on my aching bones. Only time will tell.

Deliberating on the life and times of every woman, Rosalyn D'Mello is a reputable art critic and the author of A Handbook For My Lover. She posts @rosad1985 on Instagram. Send your feedback to mailbag@mid-day.com

have your say!



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Leachate havoc turns lake into death trap

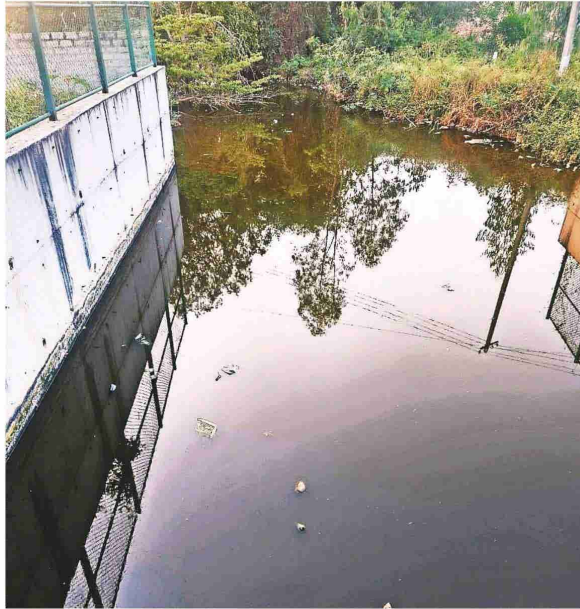
Citizens alarmed as leachate from nearby landfill pollutes 100-acre lake, threatening wildlife and raising health concerns for locals

I Y Maheswara Reddy
c-y.reddy@timesofindia.com

TWEETS @BangaloreMIRROR

Residents of Doddagubbi were delighted a few years ago when the then Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) carried out rejuvenation works on the lake. Spanning 100 acres, the lake has long been a favourite spot for residents to take morning and evening walks and is home to numerous birds, including migratory species. However, concerns are now growing over the deaths of birds and fish caused by water pollution.

Residents complain that the authorities spent crores of rupees on rejuvenating the lake but did nothing to prevent leachate from entering through a storm-water



(Above): Leachate entering into Doddagubbi Lake through a storm water drain; (Right): A portion of Doddagubbi Lake polluted with leachate

drain. They said leachate flows from the landfill near Bilekahalli into Kannur Lake, then Chikkagubbi Lake, and finally Doddagubbi Lake.

"We are shocked to see fish and birds dying due to water pollution. The water in the lake has become dark. We are worried about our health," said a resident who wished to remain anonymous.

Expressing concern about water pollution, Ravi Shah, a resident, said that fishermen catch around 400 sick fish. "If birds are dying after eating



these sick fish, there is no guarantee that humans remain healthy after consuming fish from this lake," he added.

Demanding that the authorities ensure the lake is clean, Albert R, a founding member of the Cooke Town

Residents Association and advisor of Bengaluru Eshanya Mahavedike, who frequently visits the lake, said Bengaluru was once known for more than 100 water bodies, but now their number has fallen to around 20. "Water pollution has become a major issue at Doddagubbi Lake. Leachate flowing into the lake not only pollutes the lake water but also the groundwater. It may not be safe for residents to drink borewell water. I appeal to the authorities to take measures to prevent leachate entering the lake," said Albert.

Meanwhile, Anand Babu, Secretary of Yellamma Devi Meenugarara Mahila Sahakara Sangha Niyamita, stated that he wrote to the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board, the Chief Commissioner of BBMP, the Chief Engineer of BWSSB, and the Chief Engineer (Lakes Department), Mahadevapura Zone, on December 9, 2024, requesting action to stop leachate entering the lake, but nothing has been done so far. "We have fishing rights in Doddagubbi Lake. Many fish died due to water pollution. We have incurred huge losses as a result," said Anand Babu.

Ramesh Gowda, a member of Chikkagubbi Gram Panchayat, said the leachate has become a nuisance and a health hazard. "Chikkagubbi Lake is completely polluted. Now it is Doddagubbi Lake's turn. I urge the authorities to take steps to preserve water bodies," he said.

Doddagubbi Panchayat Development Officer Rohith P added that leachate flowing into Doddagubbi Lake from Kannur Lake through the storm-water drain is the main cause of the lake's pollution. "I have already informed the Kannur Panchayat Development Officer about the leachate entering the storm-water drain and ultimately Doddagubbi Lake. I hope measures will be taken to stop this flow," he said.

Puttenahalli bird haven sewer line drags on

The 600-metre sewer line being constructed by the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) within the Yelahanka-Puttenahalli Bird Conservation Reserve is nearing completion.

However, the work involving the laying of 12.6 kilometres of lateral sewer line in the lake's catchment area will require another five months to finish, the water board has stated.

"Under the World Bank project for laying lateral networks, the work order has been issued, and the contractor has accordingly mobilised the survey team. The team has surveyed the Puttenahalli catchment area, and the design of the network is in progress. It will be completed within four to five months, and the entry of sewage from the BWSSB's jurisdiction can be prevented," BWSSB clarified in a status report filed with the National Green Tribunal.

Notably, in June 2024, the NGT ordered BWSSB and the Greater Bengaluru Authority to stop digging



around the lake to lay a pipeline to prevent sewage entry. The NGT halted the work after the Yelahanka-Puttenahalli Lake and Bird Conservation Trust raised concerns about its impact on the water body. Following this order, all activities, including excavation and pipe installation, were suspended.

However, in May this year, the southern zone of the Tribunal permitted both agencies to construct a 600-metre sewer line within the

reserve area, citing the urgency of ensuring that sewage is not released into the lake during the upcoming monsoon.

These interventions followed an incident last May in which a storm-water drain in the area discharged thousands of litres of sewage into the lake from nearby residential areas. Since then, the water body has suffered significant damage.

A water quality analysis of the lake conducted by a resident in December 2024 revealed that the conservation reserve is heavily polluted. While total coliform levels in the reserve had risen by more than 200%, faecal coliform values were found to be extraordinarily high.

The Yelahanka-Puttenahalli Bird Conservation Reserve was declared a bird reserve in 2015 under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 to safeguard its biodiversity. Since then, the Karnataka Forest Department has invested over Rs 10 crore in rejuvenation and restoration.

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MIRROR
9591233247

Problems in your area?
Send us a picture along with specific details. And please, no phone calls or spamming

Walkway hazard Gangondanahalli



Pedestrians have no safe walkway along the accident-prone Gangondanahalli Main Road, Mysore Road, Nayandahalli Post.

Blockage fixed Yelahanka



The open drain in front of Prestige Montecarlo, Yelahanka, has finally been covered.

Waste spot Sadashiva Nagar



Residents report daily dumping at an old vacant site opposite to an Apartment on Sadashiva Nagar 9th Main, 7th Cross, and are urging BBMP to take action.

IN THE COURT OF THE SENIOR CIVIL JUDGE AND JMFC & MACT AT CHIKKANAYKANHALI MVC NO. 591/2025

Petitioner: Susheelamma W/o Rangaswamy, Aged about 58 years, R/o Kadenahalli village, Kasba Hobli, C.N.Halli Taluk, Tumkur District.

V/S

Respondents: Ragunath and another
Respondent No.1: Ragunath, M.V. S/O Venugopal Major, R/o room No-24, Gayathri Thopavana 8th phase, J.P.Nagar, Bangalore-560078. Owner of the BAJAJ Platina Bike bearing no KA-51-K-8396.

NOTICE

That the petitioner has filed this claim petition, claiming compensation for the injuries sustained in a traffic accident you and another respondent on the file of Hon'ble Civil Judge Senior division and Addl. MACT, Chikkanayakanahalli. Inspite of several stepstakenfor issue of notice. The notice was not served on you. Hence this paper publication.

Through this publication you the respondent No.1 is hereby notified that the above case is posted for your appearance on 12.12.2025. Therefore after taking this notice you should appear before this Hon'ble tribunal in person or through advocate,otherwise the case will be decided in your absence by placing exparte.

Given under my hand & seal of this Court on 21.11.2025.

By Order of the Court

Sd/- Sheristedar (Admn)

Civil Judge (Sn. Dm.) and MACT

Chikkanayakanahalli

Advocate for Petitioner

S.Dilip

Chikkanayakanahalli