

8

Growth over inflation

The interest rate cut signals a shift in the RBI's immediate priorities

In the INITY of the Cut Signals a shuft in the RBI's immediate priorities whonetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RB) pivoted on in-terest rates, unanimously deciding to cut the benchmark report ate from 6.50% to 6.25%. This move, while maintaining a neutral stance, marks a significant departure from the previous bi-monthly review, where the committee had opted for the status quo with a 42 you 6.4 kH the ine, the MPC was contending with inflation at a 15-month high of 6.2% in October and a sluggish second-quarter GDP growth of 5.4%. Now, with inflation moderating to 5.2% in December, still above the RBI's 4% target, and growth projections for 2024 25 slipping to a four-year low of 6.4%, the central bank appears to be prioritising economic expan-sion over inflation control. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, in this first policy review, highlighted the challenges posed by global economic uncer-ainties, including stalled disinflation, diminish-ing prospects of rate cuts in the U.S., and a stron-ger dollar precepting emerging markets and their currencies, including the rupee. These factors have complicated policy trade-offs for India, making the case for supporting growth even stronger. The MPC justified its decision to look past current inflationary concerns, citing expec-tions that price pressures where and lease further, with inflation projected to average 4.2% in 2025-66 from 4.5% While inflation remains a concern, the panel has signaled that weak economic growth is more pressing.eleciality given the se b), which are, instructionary, inagor connerner, the panel has signaled that weak economic growth is more pressing, especially given the se-cond-quarter slump and limited signs of recovery since then. The BI's post-Budget policy stance also suggests closer alignment with fiscal policy, apparently heeding the government's call for mo-netary and fiscal measures to work in tandem rather than at cross-purposes. Whether the Bud-get's stimulus measures, combined with the rate cut, will revive consumption, attract private in-vestment, and boost growth remains uncertain. Interestingly, had the MPC met a week later, it might have had additional justification for the rate cut, given expectations that inflation in Jami-ary could have cooled to around 4.5%. With a new Governor at the helm and an upcoming ap-pointment for the Deputy Governor overseeing

pointment for the Deputy Governor overseeing monetary policy, the RBI could consider adjusting the MPC's review schedule to incorporate the latest inflation data. A slight shift in the timing of its bi-monthly meetings could make monetary policy more responsive and data-driven, enhanc-ing the committee's ability to justify its stance with real-time economic indicators.

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Prime time

The government must engage with the Opposition constructively

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vernment can initiate.

India's voice must resonate in global AI conversations

unified standards that promote safety,

n November 2024, a postgraduate student in Michigan, United States, had a disturbing interaction while discussing elderly care solutions with Google's

Artificial Intelligence (A) chatbot, Gemini. After some hours of discussing problems of old age, the chatbot suddenly snapped, issuing a blunt and alarming message: "This is for you, human...You are a waste of time and resources...You are a stain on the universe. Please die." Did anyone realise AI could behave like that? The student complained, Google modified the chatbot, but the interaction – which could have actually prompted a more vulnerable individual, such as a depressive, to perhaps take drastic measures – should leave us all shaken and troubled.

troubled. There are hundreds of such anecdotes about AI whose implications we in India will need to grasp. How do we protect ourselves through Al whose implications we in India will need to graps. How do we protect ourselves through sensible regulation without stifling the growth of this exciting new inventior? Al is reshaping industries, economies, and geopolitics, transcending national borders with data, algorithms, and innovations flowing seamlessly across regions. In this intercommeted landscape, effective governance and safety mechanisms require a unified international approach. For India, participating in global standard-setting on Al safety is not just an opportunity but an imperative. But, India has not even established a national Al safety institute. In November 2024, the International Network of Al Safety Institutes was inaugurated in San Francisco, U.S., marking a pivotal moment in global efforts to regulate and secure the development of Al. Building on the Seoul Statement of Intent agreed earlier that year, under which nations committed to work together to launch an international network of safety institutions to accelerate the advancement of the science of Al Safety his network represents a unified commuting a pivota in international network or processing statement of Intent agreed earlier that year, under which haviors to mitter in international network or gafety institutions to accelerate the advancement of the science of Al Safety his network represents a

science of AI safety, this network represents a unified commitment to fostering international cooperation in AI safety science. By serving as a dedicated forum for international collaboration, dedicated forum for international collaboration, the Network can unite technical expertise and policy inmovation to address emerging risks and establish robust best practices in AI safety. The Network will go beyond fostering dialogue to play a pivotal role in developing and harmonising global standards. India, so far, is sadly absent from this vital forum.

The borderless nature of AI

Al transcends national borders, operating through the seamless flow of data, algorithms, and innovations across regions. Its global sweep means none of us is immune from its impact. Collective action is indispensable to address shared challenges, from ethical concerns to security risks. At the same time, effective governance of this transformative technology requires a collaborative approach to establish

Shashi Tharoor

is the fourth-term Member of Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), Congress party, for Thiruvananthapuram and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs. Hi has previously chaired the Committee on Information Information Technology. He is ar award-winning author of 26 books, his most recent being 'A Wonderland of Words' unified standards that promote safety, accountability, and innovation. India's participation in such global discussions is not just desirable but essential. As one of the world's fastest adopters of Al, with an adoption rate of 30%, significantly higher than the global average of 26%, according to a recent Boston Consulting Group (BCG) report, India stands at the forefront of leveraging Al for transformative change across sectors such as health care, finance, agriculture, and logistics. India holds a significant portion of ChatCPT users – estimates place India as having the second largest user base behind the US, with around 10% of global ChatCPT users from India. A recent survey ranked India first among the percentage of consumers using ChatCPT. Clearly, we are major adopters of Al.

In this context, joining the discourse on international AI safety standards – indeed, In this context, plant and a lacourise off international AI safety standards – indeed, helping lead it – would offer India a dual advantage. First, we must ensure that India's AI ecosystem remains secure, ethical, and globally competitive. Second, it is in our national interest to position India as a responsible technology leader on the world stage, committed to safeguarding individual rights and advancing AI responsibly. Collaborative efforts with other nations on a multilateral level will enable India to anticipate emerging threats, adapt to regulatory shifts, and maintain its competitive edge in the global AI race. To do this, India needs to create a national institution urgently, and pitch it into the fray.

The intersection of politics and technology The intersection of AI and geopolitics is becoming ever more pronounced, as seen in recent proposals by the U.S. to impose export controls on advanced AI software. Such measures, while rooted in American national security concerns Un advanced in South and Security concerns about China, have the potential to reshape the global technology landscape, disrupting international scientific collaborations and altering the dynamics of innovation. India is the "non-China" for now, but there is no guarantee it will be exempt from such controls indefinitely. Countries like India could face the collateral impact of policies targeting China, and we too could find our access to cutting-edge Al tools, and technologies essential for advancing our own Al technologies essential for advancing our own Al technologies essential for do remain a passive observer in this shifting landscape. These developments further underscore the urgency of participating in international platforms such as

participating in international platforms such as the International Network of AI Safety Institutes to advocate balanced frameworks that protect legitimate security interests while preserving the spirit of collaboration.

Al's strategic importance spans economic development, military applications, and cyber-security, all areas of national priority in

which we must ensure our interests are protected. For India, the path to maximising AI's potential lies in creating opportunities for its startups to access global markets and drive AI-led

startups to access global markets and drive Al-led growth. By lostering innovation-friendly policies and aligning with international standards, India can position its Al ecosystem as a hub for cutting-edge solutions in all these sectors. Proactive engagement in global Al safety initiatives will further enhance India's ability to shape equitable frameworks that support global collaboration and transparency. These efforts will not only promote India's technological leaderships to al ason transmission. but also attract investments and partnerships, empowering Indian startups to thrive on the global stage while contributing meaningfully to the evolving AI landscape. Its engagement is particularly vital in a world where AI and geopolitics intersect, with nations enacting protective policies to secure technological advantaø

Leveraging India's strengths India's vibrant Al ecosystem, fuelled by its robust IT sector and talent pool, makes it a critical player in the global Al dialogue. Moreover, India's experience in navigating the complexities of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) initiatives such as Aadhaar and the Unified Payments Interface have demonstrated how inclusive, interoperable, and scalable systems can transform lives, enabling economic growth and social inclusion at unprecedented levels. These successes of our "Tech Stack" highlight India's ability to navigate the complexities of large-scale technological implemention while ensuring accessibility and equity. Just as India's

large-scale technological implementation while ensuring accessibility and equity. Just as India's DPI has established global benchmarks for digital innovation and inclusivity, its proactive engagement in AI safety initiatives can position the nation as a thought leader in shaping

the nation as a thought leader in shaping equitable and scalable frameworks for responsible AI development. In a world where AI is increasingly at the centre of economic and geopolitical strategies, India must take an active role in shaping its future. As the adage goes, in global politics, you are either at the table, or on the menu. Participation in global AJ safety platforms is not just about securing a seat at the table; It is about ensuring that global standards reflect India's priorities, aspirations, and values. By engaging proactively, India can protect its interests, foster cross-border innovation, and position itself as a global leader in AI governance.

global leader in Al governance. The stakes are high, and the time to act is now For India, embracing this responsibility is essential to navigating the opportunities and challenges of the AI revolution while ensuring a challenges of the A revolution while ensuing a secure, inclusive, and prosperous future for all. (The writer acknowledges Jameela Sahiba, AI Lead at The Dialogue, for her assistance in preparing this articleau. this article)

attendance is still a problem. In a village or a

schools.

attendance is still a problem. In a village or a community, some children go to a private school, some to a government school, others to private classes and some do not go to school at all. This is somewhat of a chaotic situation at the level of the village and also at the larger community level, which reflects in the quality of learning in schools.

schools. During the pandemic, in many villages of Maharashtra, a learning programme was broadcast from a vantage point. It should be possible to work out a curriculum and broadcast schedule in villages so that group learning can be organised. Organising new schools in this manner should be possible, although, initially, there may not be many takers. Every civilisation has created its own schooling schem out be bat 5000 was. Teachers and

Every civilisation has created its own schooling system over the last 5,000 years. Teachers and methods in one education system did not work in another, the curriculum in one country was not a good fit in another. That was because civilisations were separated by time, space, culture, and technology. The age of empires and colonialism started integrating civilisations. Although separated by national boundaries, countries today are integrated by science and technology. Education too is an integrating factor. But so is profit. Every technological innovation, barring those promoted by philanthropists as public

those promoted by philanthropists as public goods, has to look for a 'for-profit market'. Where profits cannot be made, innovations find limited

The prediction that hardware and devices

The prediction that hardware and devices would become inexpensive has come true but the need for a higher order and bigger hardware is growing with the innovations of Al. Will philanthropic investments be enough to help universalise the innovations that could revolutionise education? As a country, India needs to come up with a road map that allows the promise of technology to be harnessed for the benefit of those who need it the most.

Technology and the challenge of equitable education

In India, the 1990s and the early 2000s were a time of education activities on a mass scale. But results from the nationwide Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) surveys of that period indicated that while enrolment and infrastructure indicators showed a rush to schools, learning indicators pointed to no change. At the same time, computers, mobile phones, and digital technology were making waves. It was a time of many possibilities and promises with digital solutions and businesses. However, it was when the COVID-19 pandemic struck that the digital revolution hit the ground in rural India. This is reflected very well in ASER data.

Smartphone use and rural households Sina quotie use and that in denotes that in 2018, nearly 90% of rural households had simple mobile phones and 36% had simple mobile in 2022, the proportion of households with smartphones had risen to over 74% and, according to ASER 2024, it has grown further to 84% this year. While the percentage of children who have access to a smartphone at home is nearing saturation, the proportion of children and between 14 and 16 years who own a smartphone has risen from 19% to about 31% within a year. It is not clear from the ASER data whether mothers of young children have their own phones. This learning and their own learning. In 2018, nearly 90% of rural households had

young children's learning and their own learning. The main use of smartphones during the pandemic period was that of a carrier of texts, worksheets, and videos, which were a substitute worksheets, and videos, which were a substitute for textbooks. Virtual training sessions had become common too. As the pandemic faded away, the digital skills learned during the period sustained, although some of the practices becam less important and a new excitement began to build around artificial intelligence (A). The best promise of the digital revolution was,

The arrogant stance of the

Governor has lowered the dignity of the constitutional

post that he holds and the

That the Supreme Court of India has had to question the Governor for his

the Governor for his prolonged inaction is an even more unpleasant situation and a disgrace that he has brought upon himself. It is very apparent

respect that it accords.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Tamil Nadu Governor The rift between the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and Minister of Tamil Nadu and the State Governor has been going on for quite some time. It is high time the incumbent Governor is recalled, ("What was 'gross' about the 12 Bills kept pending for 3 years: Sc to T.N. Governor", February 7). **Parthasarathy N.,** Chennai



In a world where AI is increasingly at

the centre of economic and

geopolitical strategies, India

must take an active role

in shaping

its future

is a co-founder of Pratham

India lacks a

field of education that

allows the promise of technology to be harnessed for those who need it the most

road map in the

that his every action taken

against the State has the backing of the party ruling at the Centre.

Opposition unity "United we win, divided we perish", is the well-known saying. The INDIA bloc was formed to dislodge Bharatiya Janata Party but,

N. Visveswaran.

Opposition unity

nnai

to this writer, in the open and continuing education domain for the underprivileged. The need and the possibilities in India are tremendous. For example, at this time, over 40% mothers of schoolchidren are not schooled or have completed school less than class five. Nearly another 40% are schooled between class six and class 10, and the remaining have completed class 10. Educating mothers so that they can help children is an investment india should make to accelerate and strengthen the education of children. Over the past 30 years, we have lived through

acceierate and strengthen the education of children. Over the past 30 years, we have lived through the computer, the Internet, and mobile revolutions, and we are now looking at AI. With every new wave of technology, there is new hope and talk of revolutionising education. By the time the technology becomes affordable, something new and exciting for the privileged shows up on the horizon, but technology has not delivered on its promise where the education of the underprivileged is concerned. One of the biggest constraints is the availability of devices. But, as ASER 2024 data show, availability of individually owned smartphones is going to be less and less of a constraint. Most rural households already have a smartphone. Getting a second phone may be easier for many families in times to come.

times to come

No language barrier Hardware, without a doubt, is becoming easily available. Language used to be a major available. Language used to be a major impediment. It is not so any more. Writing or dictation in local languages is now possible. Translation from one language to another is easy. All the tools needed for learning are accessible, if you know what to access, where, and how. But what if there was one place in a village – let us call it school – where questions of what, where, and how were answered by an intelligent device? Access to school is complete. But school

> in the process, has become fragmented and, even worse, bereft of a competent captain. This is a simple truth which nurtures

I fill it in, I get a response that a candidate has to fill this only when he has appeared for the mains. If I do not fill this part, i.e., 'Add details of Examination/Recruitment'. the page does not move Jai Vijay, New Delhi

letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address A NO NOC

simple truth which nurtures the BJP to gigantic proportions. A total revamp of the Opposition strategy is needed which also needs a thundering orator of the likes of V.K. Krishna Menon.

C.K..Prem Kumar, Kalvakulam, Palakkad, Kerala

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Hours after The Hindu mentioned glitches in the

website for the civil services examination (February 7), glitch to report. In Part I of the UPSC examination

New website and errors

the UPSC examination information, the site asks for 'Add details of Examination/Recruitment' though I have not qualified for the prelims as yet. When

Letters emailed to

CM

THE HINDU -**GROUND ZERO**



Fisherfolk and people from the Tamil Nadu Forest Department bury a dead Olive Ridley turtle that was washed ashore. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

A surge of dead sea turtles in the sand

Hundreds of Olive Ridley sea turtle carcasses have been found since the first week of January in the Chennai and Chengalpattu districts. Conservationists say the number of deaths is three times the usual number during the mating season and have sounded alarm bells about bottom trawling, the widespread use of fishing gear, and + plastic pollution. Geetha Srimathi reports on the tragedy along the coastline

> The turtles are like the daughters of our village. They come back to their home to have children.

R. SANKARI Resident of Nemmeli

n a summy day in January, A. Prakash, 40, sits on a boat in Kovalam, off the East Coast Road (ECR) in Chengalpat-idistric of Tamill Nadu. He has just returned from a fishing trip where he saw 10 loive Riddey sea turtle carcasses floating in the sea. "We (fisherfolk) have been seeing many such carcasses every day since the beginning of the year," he says, perturbed. Prakash points to an elderly woman nearby, who comes to pick up a basket of tiger prawns from the boat, and says her son helps the Forest Department bury the carcasses. Placing the basket defly on her head, Rani, 65, says, "My son just buried six and came home tired and hungry."

Department bury the carcasses. Placing the bas-ket defty on her head, Rani, 65, says, "My son just buried six and came home tired and hungry." In the Chennai and Chengalpattu districts, lo-cated along the 1,076 kilometre-long coastline of Jamil Nadu, many people recall seeing dead Olive Kildey seat urtles washed ashore this year. C. Gnanasekar, 44, a fisherman from Uthandi, off CRX, spotted four of them in the first week of Ja-nuary. Rajiv Rai, 69, from Injambałkam in Chen-nai, says he has see andout 80 since the first week of the year. Maria, a nature enthusiast, says she saw 24 at Nemmeli Kuppam in Chengalpartu. Olive Ridley turtles, which are found in warm-er waters, such as the southern Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, haul themselves up on to In-dia's eastern shore every year by the tens of thousands and lay eggs in an event fnown as *arri-bada* (arrival by sea in Spanish). While Odisha is a mass nesting sife of Olive Kidley turtles in India, thousands of these small wild animals also come sonradicality to next bruzeme Tays and tseaf



thousands of these small wild animals also come sporadically to nest between December and April along the Tamil Nadu coastline, a lifeline for millions who depend on fishing for their livelihood. The biodiverse and eco-sensitive Gulf of Mannar, located off the districts of Thoothukudi and Rama

located off the districts of Thoothuludi and Rama-nathapuram in the south, is an essential feeding sife for these turtles. The creatures then migrate to Odisha, West Bengal, and beyond. Along the 34km-long coast from the Marina Beach in Chennai to Kovalam in Chengalpattu, seeing dead sea turtles on the shore during mat-ing season is not unusual – every year, an average of 350 dead furtles can be found, says Shravan Krishnan, a volunteer with the Students Sea Tur-tle Conservation Network (SSTGN). However, this year, until January 31, conservationists had counted 1,200 dead sea turtles, more than three times the normal fagure. The Tamil Nadu Forest times the normal figure. The Tamil Nadu Forest Department provided a more conservative esti-mate (706 turtles until January 23). The department has refused to provide numbers since then. To make matters worse, the number of sea tur-"Most turtles that works, the function of sea (un-the nests along the shores has been runsually low. "Most turtles that were to nest have died. All the dead female turtles we bury have eggs in their bodies," says Gnanasekar, who has been working with the TREE Foundation, a marine conservation organisation, for two decades.

Guests from the sea

Olive Ridleys are the smallest of the seven sea tur-tle species. They weigh up to 45 kilogrammes

and reach only about 2 feet in shell length. Their name comes from their olive-coloured carapaces (hard upper shells). Though their numbers have remained stable in recent years, Olive Ridleys re-main a key species in global conservation efforts and are classified 'vulnerable by the Internation-al Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. Sea turtles play a crucial role in the marine ecosystem. By feeding on crustaceans that live on the seabed, they help release the oxygen that is trapped there. They maintain healthy seagrass levels by nibbiling on segrars and algae. They provide shelter for commercially important fish species and control jellyfish populations that

provide shelter for commercially important fish species and control jellyfish populations that could otherwise harm fish larvae. In Tamil Nadu, conservationists and fisherfolk refer to Olive Kidley turtles as "guests" and even "god". For fishermen such as A. Palayam, 62, from Urur Kuppam in Besant Nagar in Cheman, sea turtles have a cultural and spiritual signifi-cance. "Our kuti annua (little mother) is impor-tant for us; he says. In addition to the creature's cultural significance, fisherfolk view sea turtles as a symbol of a healthy ecosystem. Every year, Olive Ridleys pore out of the sea, ar, 37, a resident of Nermeneli, says. "The turtles are like the daughters of our village. They come back to their home to have children." Sankari says she has been seeing an unusually high num-

says she has been seeing an unusually high num-ber of dead turtles this nesting season.

In Chennai, one of the few metropolitan cities in India where these sea turtles come to nest, it is not just fisherfolk who speak passionately about turtles; conservationists and students sport T-shirts urging people to save turtles and set off at midnight during the nesting season to scour dark



sands for eggs. Abhishaek, 24, a volunteer with SSTCN, and his peers patrol two stretches of the coast bet-ween the Cooum estuary and Neelankarai every night in the nesting season. As they walk, they search for tracks left by the turtles and follow them. When they come across a distinctive clear-ing, they use a 'probe', a long hollow rod, to check for nests. If they find eggs, they carefully collect them and measure the nest's dimensions to recreate the conditions in hatcheries, before to recreate the conditions in hatcheries, before continuing their walk. "Working with a commun-ity that cares so much about sea turtles has shaped my interest in wildlife conservation. Sea

Abhishaek, who has spent four years with SSTCN, says the team hardly found nests in the first three weeks of January. "Typically, we find about 30 nests. But this year, we could find only two," he says

Nets of destruction

Nets of destruction By the end of January, conservationists and auth-orities in Andhra Pradesh also began to notice that the number of dead turtles was higher than normal. C. Selvan, Conservator of Forests in the Tirupati Circle of the Andhra Pradesh Forest De-partment, says the problem is not confined to Ta-mil Nadu. Supraja Dharini, founder of the TREE Foundation who also works with the Andhra Pra-desh Forest Department, says at least 2,032 tur-tles had died until January 26 in the State. Dharini says one of the primary threats to sea turtles is bottom trawling and the widespread use of fishing gear, such as gill nets. The Tamil Nadu

Diarim says one of the primary timeats to sea turtles is bottom trawing and the widespread use of fishing gear, such as gill nets. The Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1983, stipulates that trawl boats should operate beyond 5 nautical miles (approximately 9.26 km) from the shore. This zone is reserved for artisanal fishermen us-ing smaller boats. "However, despite regulations, many commercial fishermen continue to violate these rules." Dharini aşs." When trawl boats of ten encroach into restricted areas, it increases the risk of trutte entanglement and death." R. Suresh Rumar, a wildlife biologist at the Wil-file institute of India, explains that turtles don't just visit nesting beaches but congregate in spec-ific areas before nesting. "Destructive fishing practices such as trawing and gill netting in these aggregation zones could be a significant factor in the rise in deaths," he says. Acknowledging the harmful effects of traw-ling, K Bharathi, president of the South Indian

ling, K. Bharathi, president of the South Indian Fishermen Welfare Association, says those who violate the law should be penalised. However, the government has failed to provide any viable alter natives to commercial fishing, he adds. After news reports of the high number of turtle



When trawl boats often encroach into restricted areas, it increases the risk of turtle entanglement and death. SUPRAJA DHARINI

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deaths emerged, the Tamil Nadu government formed a task force headed by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife War-den, Rakesh Kumar Dogra. On January 27, the task force decided to strengthen regulations on trawn fishing, enforce the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), and restrict the horsepower of heat merities. boat engines. TEDs are metal grids designed to allow turtles

to escape from trawl nets. But fisherfolk have ex-pressed concerns that these devices could reduce their catch. A fisherman working on a mechan-ised boat in Kasimedu explains that with dwindling resources in the ocean, even a small fall in the catch can have a significant impact on his profits. "There have been no efforts from the

the clarit can next asginization impact on mis-profits. "There have been no efforts from the Fisheries Department to introduce improved TED models or compensate fishermen for the months they are required to use them," he says. Kumar refutues this, He says TEDs do not result in significant catch loss. He explains that larger fish typically do not travel in schools and are not often caught in traw heets. The government has also increased joint pa-trols involving the Fisheries Department, Forest Department, Indian Coast Guard, and Marine Police. According to Dogra, long-term studies and monitoring, including telemetry research, will al-so begin soon. Plans have also been put in place to involve police authorities in monitoring and addressing trawler violations.

addressing trawler violations. Meanwhile, the Southern Bench of the Nation-

addressing travie's violations. Meanwhile, the Southern Bench of the Nation-al Green Tribunal took suo motu notice of the is-sue on January 18 and criticised the Tamil Nadu government for failing to regulate travlers and enforce the use of TEDs despite previous orders. The surge in turtle deaths also coincided with an unusually rough monsoon season. Fishermen report that the seas have been particularly turbu-lent as the north-east monsoon of 2024 persisted well beyond its usual last date of December 31, as per the India Metereological Department. Palayam argues that it's not fair to place the Jame Solely on fishermen. He has been tracking currents and wind patterns every day since 2018 and notes that this season has been unusual. "During the onset of the Tamil Thai month, the east typically calm. But that hasn't been the case this year. The Joini (easterly) current could are case this year. The olini (easterly) current could push objects back to the shore, which could ex-plain how dead carcasses from Andhra Pradesh could be washing ashore in Chennai," he says.

A collaborative effort

Kartik Shanker, an ecologist and author of From Kartik Shanker, an ecologist and author of From Soup to Superstar: The Story of Sea Turtle Conser-vation Along the Indian Coast, believes that many of the regulations that are necessary to protect turtles are already covered by fisheries laws, the challenge lies in improving compliance with the engagement of all stakeholders, especially tradi-tional fishermen.

engagement of all stakeholders, especially tradi-tional fashermen. Shanker also points out that a specific focus on turtle conservation can sometimes be counter-productive, leading to conflicts between sectors. "Sea turtle populations are increasing in many parts of the world, including on the east coast, but we need to make fishing regulations effective for the integrity of coasta le cosystems because bottom trawling is a destructive practice. Traw-inger turbe are un the seafforc crasisty damage ling tends to tear up the seafloor, causing damage to the entire habitat, not just turtles," he says.

Kumar says protecting critical turtle habitats can also benefit local fishermen. "When we se-

an also benefit local fishermen. "When we secure areas for turtles, it's not just good for conservation, but also supports the livelihoods of artiss-nal fishermen, who do not go venture deep into the sea," he says. This is not an easy task, he adds. "The Tamil Nadu Forest Department must collaborate close-ly with fishermen, while the Fisheries Department must collaborate close-ly with fishermen, while the Fisheries Department must collaborate close-ly with fishermen, while the Fisheries Department must collaborate close-urent needs to take a more serious approach to understanding where and what type of fishing is occurring," he says. The pressure on the marine industry is im-mense, with demands for both local consump-tion and exports. "We need to conduct tracking studies specific to this coast. We can't just repli-cate what works in other regions," Kumar insists.

cate what works in other regions," Kumar insists. Selvam calls for a more unified approach that

Cate what works in other regions, Kumar insists. Selvara calls for a more unified approach that includes identifying key mating and congregation areas in the sea. This strategy should involve the Fisheries Department and local communities more closely, he says. However, the department hasks it difficult to enforce regulations effective ly. Monitoring such vast ocean areas is also a lo-gistical challenge. "Collaboration between fisher-men, conservation groups, and the use of technological tools like apps to track turtle acti-ity will be crucial," he says. Fishermen point out that in addition to traw-lers, gill nets, and squid nets, the sea turtles face significant threats from the plastic waste that floods the ocean. "Why can't the government uild a structure to prevent plastics from enter-ing number of land structures, such as groynes, ing number of land structures, such as groynes,

ing number of hard structures, such as groynes, being built along Tamil Nadu's sandy beaches, which damage the nesting habitats.

"Over the years, we have noticed that when the turtles come to nest, they find the sand polluted and return without nesting," says Abhishaek

Abhishaek. Saving the turtles is about safeguarding the fu-ture of both the sea and the people who rely on it. Sankari says, "I remember my father offering prayers if a sea turtle accidentally got caught in his net. He wouldn't go out to sea for a day. If the turtles are in trouble, how will we survive?"



Along the 34-kilometre-long coast from the Marina Beach in Chennai to Kovalam in Chengalpattu, seeing dead sea turtles on the shore during mating season is not an unusual phenomenon, but the numbers this year have been unprecedented. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

A ND-NDF

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2025 1 **BIG PICTURE**

38TH NATIONAL GAMES, UTTARAKHAND

Yoga's big flex

What was not too long ago an activity confined to homes and neighbourhood parks has now gained a fiercely competitive edge. As yoga transforms into a medal sport in time for India's bid to host the Olympics, NIHAL KOSHIE travels to the National Games at Almora, where young athletes pull off some of the most complex manoeuvres and asanas

EARING COLOURFUL

medal sports. This is yogasana's third straight appearance at the National Games as a medal

medal sports. This is yogasma's third straight appearance at the National Cames as a medal sport, after the 2023 and 2024 editions. Over the last couple of years, yogasma, an activity hitherto confined to community parks, homes, yoga studios and smallen (ccal competitions, has gained a sharp edge. Recognised as a competitive sport in 2020, Yogasma Bharat, the governing body of the goort in India, attimed associate membership of the Indian Olympic Association in 2021. India is also maling a pitch fory toyga, along with Twenty20 cricket, kabaddi, chess, squash and kho ko, to be included in the 2036 Olympics that the country hopesi t can bost. Incidentally, at the Paris Olympics in 2024, yoga sessions were held at the Louver, for the first time, the Asian Games to be hosted at Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, next year will facture yogasma as a demonstration event. The sport has a popular brand ambassa-fort, tooi, myag zuru and businessman Baba Ramdey, who, besides heading Yogasama Bharat, is the looding president of World Yogasama, the body dedicated to promoting versaria as a very febality.

Bharat, is the founding president of World Vogasana, the body decitated to promoting vogasana as a sport globally. Yogasana, in the soft form, is rigorous, and full of verve, far removed from the stretches and pranayama that it is popular for. The giant marquee tent at the HNBSports Stadium in the heart of Almora – where Purva and Prapti are competing in the artis-tic pair category – has an odden sports arena feel to i with a doctor's room, lounge for ath-lets, awarm-up area, a designated Space for technical officials and anti-doping officials, strobe lights and giant screens.

technical officials and anti-doping officials, strobe lights and giant screens. The sisters represent Maharashtra, one of the 22 states that have together sent 171 yoga athletes to the Games. Haryana topped the tally at the Games with six medials, fol-lowed by Utrarakhand and Maharashtra with five each and West Bengal with four.

From the mat to the arena

Until half a decade ago, the sport had no

Until half a decade ago, the sport had no centralised governance system; instead, over 200 disparate yoga associations across the country functioned parallely, hoding demon-strations and small-scale competitions. It was in 2020 that World Yogasana set the ball rolling to bring various yoga factions un-derone umbrella. That, along with the govern-ment's recognition of yoga as a competitive sport, meant that yoga would make a giant leap to trivial the most complex of its scamas. The recognition meant that Yogasana Bharat was recognised as a National Sports

Bharat was recognised as a National Sports Federation by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. It also translated into incentives for the athletes. Medallists at the National Games, for instance, have received prize money from state governments and some of them have landed



jobs in government departments — all of which have served to bring yogaout of the con-tines of a fringe sport and into the mainstream. For yogasana's new avatar as a sport, an updated and clearly defined points system for each soma was created, athletes started to compete ingymnast-like ledards and the size of mats were standardised. the National Games. After the government the National Cames. After the government officially recognised yogasana as a compet-itive sport in 2020, there has been a boom, not just in India, but globally too. Over 12 countries, including Zambia and Tanzania, have conducted their national competitions," says Rohit Kaushik, an executive committee

member of Yogasana Bharat. Over 5,000 registered athletes and 350-plus technical officials are listed on the Yogasana Bharat website. Jaideep Arya, secretary of World Yogasana, Jaideep Arya, secretary of World Yogasana, credits Randver for expanding the scale of yoga by "catching them young". "Earlier, peo-le would come to yoga after the age of 30, if they have ailments, but that has changed. Now, there are thousands of athletes between the ages of 8 and 10. We have aspirations to reach the global stage and have set our eyes on the Olympic pathway", says Arya. Hars are after for they asplease to be offi-cially announced in March, with the first edi-menchedulad For Chroken-Xusanator this use Yogasana bharat Website. Uttarakhand is an early mover, with the state gov-ernment last year an-nouncing plans to become the first state to implement a yoga policy. While Haridwar and Rishikesh are yoga hubs, Almora is not far behind. The "Private players and universities have shown interest in the 12-team league," adds Arya. National Games venue is walking distance from the

walking distance from the most comp Soban Singh Jeena University, apopular learn-ing centre in Kurnaon that offers PG Diploma, BA, MA and PhD courses in yoga. Naveen Chandra Bhatt, the head and con-vener of the Department of Yogic Science at the university, says seats for all courses are getting filled up. The first course, PC Diploma, was introduced in 2005 in the university? I the head and the seater of the base Two years later, we started MA and kept adding courses. PhD courses began in 2017. Today, we have 350-plus seats for ALL courses," Bhatt says.





(Clockwise from top) At the HNB Sports Stadium in Almora, where 171 yos lay ome of the most complex asanas; athletes compete in th sisters Purva and Prapti have won multiple medals at the Artistic Pair ev mes: a teammate helps a Madhya Pradesh athlete with his make-up

els a notch higher. The greater the area the athletes cover on the mat or field of play, the more the points. At the Games, yogasana has clearly de-fined events: traditional, artistic single, artis-tic pair, artistic group and rhythmic pair. There are at least five categories: forward bending, badward bending, body twisting, leg balance and hand balance.

leg balance and hand balance. Athletes in the artistic pair event that Purva and Papi are competing in must com-plete 10 different exams scark bhythmic pair participants, on the other hand, must choose the same camses. The number of judges also vary, 10 in traditional and up to 13 in artistic. The fledging sport already that is stars. Purva and Papit, both engineering graduates from Ratnagit in Maharshira has won mul-tiple National Cames medias, across categories. Purva aren thin this the handline when sho

Purva recently hit the headlines when sh was nominated for the prestigious Shiv Chhatrapati Award, Maharashtra's version Chiarapati Award, Maknashek ya Kura of the Padma award, "Yoga was recently added to the sports category for the awards. When Purva receives the award later this month, it will be a major noment for ourin-digenous sport," say hurva and Prapti scoach war Bhusan Kurnthekar. The sisters train for over five hours a day, every single day. "Missing even one or two days of training can set you back by week timers of flexibility and strength, Week hink like modern athletes," says Purva. The sisters, who have opted for a Shiv Tandaw theme for their amistic pair event own moving to the soundtrack ReamBholle from the Akshay Kumar-starret *Lawnii*. Ther

EX. Traditional, Artistic Single, Artistic Pair, Rhythmic Pair, Artistic Group

NUMBER OF JUDGES Varies from 10 to 13 as per category, including scorer-cum-announcer and stage manager.

THE POINTS SYSTEM

TRADITIONAL YOGASANA 10 points (Accuracy of posture: 4 marks; Mounting/Dismounting: 2 marks; Stability: 1 mark; Stressessness, Grace, Presentation: 1 nark; Holding: 2 marks)

Artistic Single, Artistic Pair, Rhythmic Pair, Artistic Group: 10 points: (Accuracy of posture: 4 marks, Mounting/Dismounting: 3 marks, Stability: 2 marks, Stress-lessness, Grace, Presentation: 1 mark)

"Earlier, people would come to yoga after 30... Now, there are thousands of athletes between 8 and 10 years. We have aspirations to reach the global stage and have set our eyes on the Olympic pathway"

JAIDEEP ARYA SECRETARY OF WORLD YOGASANA

jerseys have tiger skin prints and feature im-ages of Lord Shiva. Shades of red are promi-

jerseys have tiger skin prints and leature im-geso fluct dishus. Shades of red are promi-nent, too, to match the colour of the sari of the Bollywood strin the song. "A lot of research goes into a three-minute performance for an artistic pair. This year, the theme is Krodh (anger); last year when we wong odd, the theme was Radha and Krishna, "says Purva. Judges are hard to please, says Shreyas Markandeya, asports consultant of Yogasna Bharat. "You can't smile if your theme is anger-based, for example If a pair is perform-ing Shiv tandaw and their costrum them terflexts that, then they carm points. But if you wara costrume that reflext Sanesh you and an in-stead, the judges won't be impressed and the joints will be docked", says Markandeya, adding that while the music can be devo-tional, patrixic or films songs, the lyris." musi-tonian no vulgarity". "No point can be won easily. A lot of ef-fort, hard work and hours of practice ar

"No point can be won easily. A tot of ef-fort, hard work and hours of practice are needed to win a medal. The judges watch making the difference between a medal and returning empty-handed', says Purva. Like the sister, Indu Mathuniaand Kanika, 21-year-olds from Moradabad, are compet-ing in the artistic pair category. Students of an all-gift sgundul, they are aiming to win their instremedal for Utar Pradeshin their maiden appearance at the National Cames. "Yogasana is a viable career option now. Earlier, we didn't know what we could do af-rel earning yoga, but today, there are recog-

Earlier, we didn't know what we could do af-ter learning voga, but today, there are recog-nised competitions where it is a medal sport, "says find. As the sport evolved, so did judging, says CV Jayanthy, a jury member. On their Japtop screens, judges can see images of sources sub-mitted beforehand by competitors and punch in scores depending on the performance. "Till four years ago, we had a very tradi-tional scoring system -scores would be writ-ten on a slate or displayed using showcards.

But with the addition of new events, the sys-tem has been revised. It is computerised so

tem has been revised. It is computerised to athletes get the points they deserve. In addi-tion to the judges, there are three jury mem-bers (who at as referees). It is very scientific and accurate. Participants can register their protest, too, if required, 'says Jayantly. Modern-day parchitiones of yoga are not very different from other professional ath-letes, says Chattisgarh coach Nurendra Kumhar, adding that they maintain diet charts and follow research-based warming-up and cooling-down routines. They watch what they eat - there is restriction on sugar up and cooling-down routines. They watch what they eat - there is restriction on sugar and ensure there's more protein intake - out down on body fat percentage, keep a tabon sleep patterns and have physics travelling with them. Ours is a sport with Asian Games and Olympic ambitions... The athletes are ready to embrace the future," he says. Satish Mohagaonkar, a veteran national yogg judge who is also the convenor of the behnic a committee at the Mixten IG Cames

Figure 1 and the second the bepartment or storing and raining now recognises jogasna as a sport, any of-ficial or athlete who is a government servant can avail of special casual leaves for yoga-re-lated events. All these years, I had to use my paid leave for yoga, "says Mohagaonkar, who has been doing yoga since the late 1970s. Mohagaonkar believes the awards and the instability of the servers of the servers of the servers of the moment of the servers of the

Mohagaonkar believes the awards and the incentives will draw more youngsters to the sport. "For example, the Maharashtra gov-ernment gave prize money for winners of the previous National Games. We could not even dream of such perks earlier. There has been no better time to be a yogasana athlete."

interest in the 12-team league," adds Aya, Though Ramdev isone of the most recog-nisable faces of yogasana, Aya also credits other imminent yoga practitioners for throwing their weight behind the sport -among them, HR Nagendra, ayoga therapist and founder-vice chancellor of the Bengalun-based Swami Virekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana University, and spiritual leader and Padma Bhushan awardee Kamleh D Patel. Aya says Rishileish-based American yo-gaphile. Sadhw Bhagawah Siarsawati, willbe brought on board to push yogasana's global expansion. expansion. "This is the third edition of yogasana at

tion scheduled for October-November this year



It was in 2020 that

Almora and Nainital campuses. "In the be-ginning, we had 40 seats for PG Diploma

acons have competitive forms. It's an attrac-tive sport, beneficial for both the mind and body. Songs complement sana set the so bring ions under i.a. With A complex scoring system Gymnastics-like in its

presentation, minus the high somersaults and

Aarti Pal, Assistant Professor (Yoga Science) at the University of Patanjali Haridwar, insists yogasana has the credien-tials to match sport climbing and breaking, two new sports added to the Paris Olympics Last year. "Yoga is no longer associated with senior clitzens in a park. The youth are com-ing to participate in yogasana in droves; *assnos* have competitive forms. It's an attrac-tus crost. Howeficial for both the mind and

high somersaults and flips, yogasana's modern version induces jaw-dropping awe as athletes stretch, hvist and end up in the knottiest of positions. At Almora's HNB Sports Stadium, where the artistic pair event is underway, physios, coaches and managers, who have travelled with the teams, stand outside the playing

with the teams, stand outside the playing area, intently watching the participants. The officials use a complex point scoring system to rank the athletes – face make-up, expressions, smart themes and imaginative designs on costumes earn points, while hu-man pyramid formations take difficulty lev-

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE A WORD AFTER A WORD AFTER A WORD IS POWER. - MARGARET ATWOOD

The Indian **EXPRESS**

RAMNATH GOENKA BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

FOR GROWTH'S SAKE

RBI lowers interest rates as economic momentum slows. Inflation projections suggest space for further easing

N FRIDAY, THE RBI's monetary policy committee cut interest rates by 25 ba-sis points, joining the list of central banks across the world who have moved to ease rates. The benchmark repo rate stands at 6.25 per cent. The decision of the committee — this was the first time the MPC had met under the new RBI governor, Sanjaj Malhotra – was unaimous. Alongside, the committee worded to continue with the neutral policy stance. The MPCs decision to adopt a less restrictive pol-icy clearly indicates that growth considerations now outweigh concerns over inflation.

(c) Change y instances U way to operate or binore distributions have to merged to since the Ver Thimmonic The momentum in the economy dipped sharply in the second quarter, with CDP growth coming in at 5.4 per cent. The first advance estimates have pegged growth at 6.4 per cent for the full year. However, the pick-up in the second half of the year does not seem to be ro-bust. The RBI has noted "early corporate results for Q3 indicate a mild recovery in the manufacturing sector." Greater clarity will emerge in the coming weeks and months. The cenunits and ing. Sector: specific using vince transport for coming vince of and instance in the cur-trat bank now expect the economy togow at 6.7 per cent in 2025;26 — this is at the higher end of the Economic Survey's projections, which had pegged growth to range between 6.3 and 6.8 per cent. Inflation, however, is now less of a concern with subdued core inflation and food prices expected to moderate. As per the RBI's latest projections, the consumer price index is projected to come down from 4.8 per cent this year to 4.2 per cent next year It is asy that food prices should witness softening due to "good khanf production, witne-easing in vegetable prices and favourable rabit crop prospects". The decision to cut rates comes only days after the central bank announced its plant to inject liquidity into the bank-ing system through open-market operations, variable rate repo auctions and dollar/pues buy/sell swap auctions. In his comments, the RBI governor said that the central bank would continue to monitor liquidity and financial market predicaments, and "take appropriate name to monitor indumity and maintain market predictaments, and case appropriate measures to ensure orderly liquidity conditions". As per analysts, this should allow for smoother transmission of rate cuts in the money market". The MPC's decision to lower rates comes after the government cut personal income "smooth

Takes in the Union budget, a measure that is expected to boosh tousbedid consumption, providing a fillip to the broader economy. The question, now, is? To what extent can the cen-tral bank cases policy rates further to support growth? Its inflation projections – 4 per cent in the second quarter, 3.8 per cent in the third quarter and 4.2 per cent in the fourth quarter - suggest the space for further easing. But the global and domestic environment is challenging. In an uncertain environment, the pressure on the currency is also unlikely to ease Much will depend on the playing out of the growth-inflation dynamic.

JOURNEY'S END

Images of deportation of Indian migrants from the US are troubling. They point to larger issues and predicaments

HE DEPORTATION OF illegal migrants from the US, including from India, is not new. Data shows that hundreds of people have been sent back to india for being in the US illegally every year. It is this context that External Affairs Minister? Jaishankar sought to lay out in Parliament on Thursday. His task, wever, was an unerviable one. In the current political moment, in both India and the US, foreign policy is coming under new pressures and is being asked to submit to the tests of a performative patriotism. The images of 104 Indians being flown back on a US mili-

on performance particular the image of the main of the main of the second of the theory of the second of the theory of the second of the secon has been one of the main issues in LIS politics for at least three decades. It is also an issue has been one of the main issues in too pointer for a read infect of earning in trail, arguably with racist overtones. The spectade around the deportations earlier this week can be explained by the Trump administration's desire to address and appease its political base. That said, similar deportations were undertaken during earlier administrations — both Democration similar or portations were inter-taken rouming and readimission and the similar and the similar and Republican. The restraining of passengers has been a part of the US immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) procedure since November 19, 2012. While such measures may be cause for concern, migration is only one among several issues between India and the US at a time of churn in international relations, including around growing protectionism and talk of tariffs and trade barriers.

tomain and calk of units and trade contress. In India, the deportation has evidently provided fodder for an Opposition that, since the general election last year, has struggled to find the language to talk to the govern-ment and to hold it to account. Partisan politics, however, fails to address the broader is-uses that this episode is a symptom of. Across Western democracies, liberal politics has failed to adequately counter an anti-immigrant sentiment that, too often, fails to distinance to acceptacely connect an anter-iming and seminine in the too content, and so usually guish between legal migration and illegal border crossings, and often conflates asylum seekers and refugees with "criminals", amid growing insecurities about the fraying social fabric of host countries. These issues do not have easy answers. Unfortunately, few are even asking the right questions.

POP GOES THE FLUFF

A leading publisher plans to ditch the book blurb.

It's about time

S FAR AS anecdotes go, the blurb, that ubiquitous endorsement of literary merit on book covers, had a rather unpropitious beginning. In 1856, the second edition of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass bore a glowing tribute from the Conference of the storage of the a marketing trend in which glib testimonies would become advertorial pitches. Sean Manning publisher of Simon8 Schuster's flagship imprint in the US, now seems keen to buck the trend. Whiting in *The Jublisher's Weekly*, het has decreted that his authors would no longer be required to indulge in this particular frivolity as it only perpetuates "an incestuous and tocratic literary ecosystem that often rewards connections over talent'

It is a brave new world that Manning foresees, since the practice of the blurb is now entrenched in the book trade. Coined in 1907 by the American satirist Celett Burgess, it referred to the flishies, exaggerated – often vacuuse – praise from one's som hype squad comprising friends and colleagues in high places. Often a quid pro quo arrangement, this enforced collegiality has created opaque power structures and insular cliques that further

enoncer conceasing the or clearcy opaque power su occures and instant cupies instituture a culture of obligation and favoritism. The transition may not be as smooth as Manning envisions. The blurb has become pivotal for sellers to position new titles and the tempatation to solicit glowing endorse-ments from peers is difficult for many writers to resist. Unless, of course, like George Orwell, one can cut through the marketing puffery and get to the heart of the matter. In 1936, in an essay 'In Defence of the Novel', he wrote: "When all novels are thrust upon you as words of genius, it is quite natural to assume that all of them are tripe." In short, let the book speak for itself.



ADITI NAYAR

THE MONETARY POLICY committee of the RBI has embarked on a rate-cutting cycle in its February 2025 review. The growth-inflation trends and outlook mix had provided a wintrends and outlook mix had provided a win-dow to cut rates. The committee presciently used this opportunity to do the same even as the global arena is fatagith with uncertainty, which has manifested most wishly in the de-preciation in the rupee versus the US dolar. However, while India's rate cut cycle has kicked off, it is highly likely to be shallow. Backtracking to the MPCS previous policy meeting in December 2024, the last available PCI(Consumer Price Indes) inflation print had breached 6 per cent, the upper threshold of the medium-term target range 02-6. Per cent. This had signalled that arate cut was clearly off the table, even though GOP growth had

the medium-term target range of 2-6 per cent. This had signal tell that a rate cut was clearly off the table, even though GDP growth had slumped to a lower-than-expected 5 A per cent in the second quarter of 2024-25. The February 2025 policy meeting seemed 'live' for a rate cut, with inflation having receded appreciably and expected to moderate further in 2025-26. Iven as the teal eaves of the high frequency indicators portend a pickup in don-mestic growth from the trough of the second quarter. it is likely to remain well below the level of 82 per cent recorded in 2023-24. Eventually, the MPC unarimously cut the reporter by 25 basis points, while maintaining a neural stance both in line with our ex-pectations. Interestingly, it was last in April 2019, when the MPC land rouced the policy rate to 6 per cent from 6.25 per cent, while maintaining a neural stance. This had been, however, followed by a charge in stance to ac-commoduline and a senis of rate cuts pre- and spet-the onset cell the pandemic to the low of 4 per cent by May 2020. Inourview, this cycle silkely to be mainted y different. (TeX believes

is likely to be markedly different. ICRA believes that the outlook for inflation and growth car That the outdoor for only one more rate cut of 25 provide space for only one more rate cut of 25 basis points in the near term, although the timing of the same needs to be calibrated to the domestic and global developments. We expect the CPI inflation to dip to 42 per

cent in 2025-26 from 4.8 per cent in 2024-25, in line with the MPC's estimates. This is ex-pected to be driven by a sharp moderation in food inflation, even as core inflation is expected to rise slightly. The supply-led cooling in food inflation, benefitting from the healthy rabi

A shallow cut

Outlook for inflation, growth can provide space for

only one more rate cut of 25 basis points in near term

inflation, benefitting from the healthy rabit sowing and ample reservoir levels, as well as the Budget's announcements regarding schemes for preishables and pulses, is ex-pected to provide relief to low and middle-in-come households. The start cuts of 81 influes, is unveiled by the Union Budget are generous from a macro point of view. However, the monthly improvement in disposable income is not large-enough to prove inflationary, inour sessemmer. This is especially so with overall fiscal policy being mildly restrictive, with the fiscal deficit set to narrow to 44 per cent of CDP in 2025-26 from 48 per cent in 2024-25. However, the global environment is mired in 2025-26 from 4.8 per cent in 2024-25. However, the global environment's mired with inflation risks, one of which stems from taff-related actions by the US and counter-measures by other counties. The yo-yo ontar-iff measures has already enhanced financial market volability and impacted the ruppee, which has depreciated over the last few months, even though it has outperformed other emerging market currencies. This raises concerns on account of bass-thouseh to infla-The global environment is mired with inflation risks, one of which stems from tariff-related actions by the US and countermeasures by other countries. The vo-vo on tariff measures has already enhanced financial market

other emerging market currencies: This raises concerns on account of pass-through to infla-tion and adverse growth outcomes, which have also been acknowledged by the MPC. Weile global headwinds are likely to ad-versely impact India's near-term outlook, the muted outlook for exports, particularly for the goods segment, is expected to constrain India's CDP growth over the medium term as well. This would imply that the bulk of the heavy lifting interms of growth would need to be done by domestic consumption, and that the private capex cycle will lifely remain volatility and impacted the rupee, which has depreciated over the last few months, outperformed other emerging market currencies. This raises the private capex cycle will likely remain measured and non-exuberant in the absence concerns on account of passthrough to inflation and adverse growth outcomes, which have also been

even though it has

acknowledged by the MPC.

Another rate cut in early 2025-26 would certainly play an important role in support-ing urban consumption and GDP growth in the next fiscal. This would aid in reducing the

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EMIs of borrower households, augmenting their discretionary consumption. Although the impact of this may not be significant, it will be spread across a wide number of house-holds; as per the RBI data, there were as many st 1943 million personal loan accounts, in-cluding 147 million home loan accounts out-standing as of end-September 20204. Additionally, the aforesaid income tax re-life to the tune of Rs I trillion that was pro-vided in the budget to individual taxpayers would result in consumption multiplier and has the potential to boost GDP growth in the ourning year. This combination of rise cuts, in-come tax relief and lower food inflation is ex-provided a cuber tunta (not sumption. In the budget, the government has also provided acapter tunts of Rs I trillion which is agrowthof 10.0 per cent. However, over the medium items, government cap ests unlikely to

is agrowthof 10.1 per cent. However, over the medium term, government capes via unlikely to grow at very high rates on a sustained basis, owing to fiscal constraints, notwithstanding the shift to the new fiscal anchor, namely deh/CDP from the more rigid estant fiscal deficit/GDP. Besides, fiscal consolidation will have to contend with challenges owing to the recommendations of the 8th PayCommission and the 16th Finance Commission, which are scheduled to be released during the coming year. This assessment suggests that India's growth potential remains around the 65-7 per

year. This assessment suggests that India's growth potential remains around the G5-7 per cent mark, well below the 8 per cent alluded to in the Economic Survey. Interestingly, the RBI governor stressed that the exchange ratepolicy remains focused on smoothening excessive and disruptive volarily rather than targeting any specifices-change rate level or band. This suggests pol-icy continuity despite a change in guard at the BLI It debunks the expectations of increased comfortof a depreciation in the US dollar/nu-pe pair that the market scenes to have develpee pair that the market seems to have devel-oped over the last few months.

The writer is chief economist, head — Research & Outreach, ICRA

THE H-1B PARADOX

India needs to stop celebrating brain drain as a marker of 'global success'

ITs without reaping direct benefits from this training, while the US gets to cherry-pick our top talent without bearing the cost of train-ing. Indians who go abroad must also trade political equality for economic prosperity. The H-IB narrative has become a story of class privilege. Celebrating individual success the myth that talent naturally finds success. In reality, structural advantages – access to elite institutions, networks, and resources – play a decisive one in determining who gets abead. Proponents argue that lucrative oppor-cation domestically and that brain drain is everstated. This has meth that is normylete. Beiptintons effectively outsources the responsi-bility to built arobust education and employ-ment system. While opportunity adroad may spark aspiration, access to quality education remains severely limited, as evident from the intense competition, easn paper leaks, corintense competition, exam paper leaks, cor-ruption and youth suicides. Consequently, only a small percentage benefits while the vast majority — particularly in rural and underpriv-

majority – paracularly in rural and uncerpriv-lieged communities – are left behind. The true cost of this talent exodus extends beyond brain drain. It perpetuates an outward focus that weakens the urgency for domestic reform, allowing the state to neglect its re-sponsibility to create equitable opportunities and an environment conducive to growth and instruction. Thematicina isone conservation the innovation. The question is no longer whether Indians can succeed globally - they clearly

Indians can succeed globally – they clearly can – but why India struggles to replicate this success domestically and equitably. Consider why India, with its abundant talent pool, has produced relatively few glob-ally competitive companies or Nobel laure-

ates. The issue isn't individual capability but the absence of robust institutional frame works: Stable governance, transparent regu-lations, accessible capital, and consistent rule lations, accessible capital, and consistent rule of law. Equally important is an environment that values knowledge and fosters innova-tion by investing in research and promoting inquiry. These deficiencies stille domestic in-novation and entrepreneurship, leaving India primarily with state-supported national champions or venture-funded copycat serv-ices. This gap became particularly apparent in recent discussions about India's absence in the olohal I cao. in the global AI race. India's real challenge is to transform its as-

initia strait-naienge is to transform its as-pirational energy into a movement for sys-temic reform. No country has become a world leader through outmigration of its trained tal-ent. Over-indexing on the diaspora for remit-tances, investments, and prestige risks under-mining the development of domestic institutions. Instead of celebrating this exodus, India must focus on creating conditions that make staying more attractive than leaving. This requires a fundamental shift in priorities Improving the quality of education, expand-Improving the quality of education, expand-ing access to infrastructure, stream lining gav-emance, and fostering an environment con-ducive to innovation are critical. True atmaintibutaru (self-reliance) cannot be achieved without universal access to oppor-tunities that enable every Indian to achieve their potential within the country's borders. National progress is not measured by how many critizens succeed abroad or how many and the saccess abroad or how many critizens succeed abroad or how many of the saccess abroad or how many criticans succeed abroad or how many and the saccess abroad or how many criticans abroad or how many criticans succeed abroad or how many criticans abroad abroad or how many criticans abroad or how man

billionaires India has but by how many can fulfil their aspirations at home.

The writer is executive director Future of India Foundation

FEBRUARY 8, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

CRISIS IN CONGRESS (I)

The true cost of this talent

brain drain. It perpetuates an outward focus that weakens the urgency for domestic

reform, allowing the state to neglect its responsibility to

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exodus extends beyond

FACED WITH THE prospect of a large number of rebel candidates with the backing of some senior leaders, the central leadership of the Congress (1) initiated a series of steps to face the challenge. The high command has got re-ports of widespread rebel moves from almost all 11 states going to polls. Powerful leaders from, at least, half a dozen states have arrived in Delhi with a plea to avert the crisis

INDIA, BRITAIN & ARMS A SENIOR OFFICIAL of the British Ministry of Defence, Sir James Blythe, is reported to have

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visited India last week, unannounced, in a re-Visited india last week, unannounced, in a re-newed attempt to sell sophisticated arms to India. Another British minister was slated to come to India this month, but the wisit was put off because India felt that the British government was not dealing with Sikh extremists sternly.

TWO KILLED IN TRIPURA CPM LEADER BINANDA Jamatia and a surren-

red extremist Hrishya Kumar Jamatia wer killed by some unidentified miscreants at Kasku village in south Tripura's Amarpur sub-division. Jamatia. was "chairman" of the erst-while All Tripura People's Liberation Organisation (ATPLO) and a central commit-tee member of the CPM's tribal wing Ganamukti Parishad.

MISSING KEYS IN TIHAR ALLLOCKS OF a ward in the Tihar district jail had to be broken after the keys mysteriously disappeared overnight, Jail officials broke their way into their own jail after plans for yet an-other escape bid from Tihar went avry, sources said. It was from the same ward that two prisoners, Shyam Sunder and Corakh had escaped on the night of October 23. Gorakh, a dreaded UP dacoit, is still at large. Shyam Sunder surrendered a month after the escape.



ANDHRA

200



more conflict." – DAWN, PAKISTAN

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2025

THE IDEAS PAGE

AI race: What India should do

India has the necessary foundation to catalyse both the pace



IUST A FORTNIGHT back, the US committed JUST APORTNICHT back, the US committed billions to semiconductor investments with the Sargate initiative, laying the groundwork for its technological future. The aim was to create 100,000 jobs and secure pole position for the US in AI. In another part of the world, an open-source AI model emerged in DeepSeek, shaking the foundations of pro-prietary systems with its umnatched cost-efficiency and performance. DeepSeek de-efficiency and performance. DeepSeek de-sours with 200 employees and less than Stomillion in capital. In comparison, OpenAI boasted 4500 employees and had \$6.6 bil-lion in funding.

boasted 4500 employees and had \$6.6 bil-tion in funding. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, who previ-ously called dia's efforts to develop its som AI models "totally hopeless", has made a complete about-turn and said that India should take a leadership role in the 41 space. The global AI race has begun. Each week, the world bears witness to groundbreaking in-novations that push the boundaries of what world bears witness to groundbreaking in-public Infrastructure (DPI), India needs to rapidly develop capabilities to lead the next place of the AI revolution. India has 4,20,000 AI professional – a force larger than many nations' entire tech sectors. A 52 per cent AI adoption rate wonds, the terprises – the highest in the world. And a \$17-billion market potential.

world. And a \$17-billion market potential. These are the building blocks of a new tech-nological superpower. The governments' commitment is unequivocal; its IndiaAI Mission is a clear declaration of intent. Our developer community is the second largest in the world, behind only the US. India has 240-pits Gen AI startups, of which 70 per cent cater to industry-specific heallenges in sectors such as healthcare, education, BFSJ, and agriculture. For instance, Sarvam AI is working on building a foundational model with Indian languages. Niramai is a healthworking on building a foundational model with Indian languages. Niramai is a health-tech startup using Al to detect early signs of breast cancer in women. BHASHINIS break-ing language barriers with built-in support for 22-pits languages to make communica-tion more inclusive. It has already powered over 100 million inferences, proving its wide-spread use and reliability. With such a vibrant ecosystem of inno-vation, we have the necessary foundation to tratalyse both the pace and scel a new wave of digital transformation. India's story some ad a billion-pits poet foundamentally

is one of a billion-plus people fundamentally reimagining its digital architecture in less than a decade. First, look at what we have than a decade. First, look at what we nave achieved in financial inclusion — we took bank-account penetration from 30 per cent to over 80 per cent in just seven years. The World Bank and the IMF said this should take 47. By rethinking DPI, we cut the cost of open-ing a bank account from \$23 to just 15 cents. Second, examine the scale of digital pay-meters. ments – \$568 billion in monthly UPI trans-actions, with India handling 49 per cent of global real-time payments. More than just the digitisation of existing payment flows,



India has created entirely new economic be-haviours and possibilities. This infrastructure has created a completely new generation of technology companies. We built close to 108 the technology compared by the general technology compared with built close to 100 unicorns in this period, powered by DPL From payments, we moved to healthcare startups using the health stack, lending plat-forms leveraging the account aggregator framework, and commerce companies building on top of open networks. Tind, look at how DPI proved transformative during a crisis. During the pandemic, we could in-stantly transfer \$4.5 billion to 160 million people. From construction workers to farm-ers, from women to rural workers – Indiafa-cilitated direct, instant, and leakage-free cilitated direct, instant, and leakage-free transfers when they needed it most.

transfers when they needed it most On this open-source, interoperable infra-structure, we created an ecosystem that al-lows both public and private innovation to flourish. The results speak for themselves: 14 million businesses registered on CST, 863 million intermet users, and an expected 13.42 per cent digital economy growth rate. With a globally recognised talent pool, relatively low electricity costs, abundant land, a vast

low electricity costs, abundant land, a var reservoir of data, and strong government support for an aspirational entrepreneurial vision, we should lead this race. A foundational pillar of the Al cosystem that demands urgent attention is hardware. GPUs are the brain of Al and the key pillar on which machine intelligence is built. The Biden administration, in one of its last or ders, issued the Al diffusion rule, thereby putting severe controls and restrictions on the import and export of CPU computing facilities. Despite India being a Quad partn the US put it under the Tier II category – 1 stricting the import of advanced GPUs as well as large-scale training of frontier AI well as large-scale training of frontier AI models. This places a severe handicap on India's ability to develop and grow as an AI power. India must take decisive steps to build and fortify the hardware backbone powering AI systems, ensuring that they de-liver unmatched efficiency, reliability, and scalability. Owning our AI hardware capa-bilities is a necessify for securing independ-ence in an increasingly tech-driven world. Investments in AI hardware will create inbs Investments in AI hardware will create jobs and attract significant capital, while also

India must take decisive steps to build and fortify the hardware backbone powering AI systems, ensuring that they deliver unmatched efficiency, reliability, and scalability. Owning our AI hardware capabilities is a necessity for securing independence in an increasingly tech-driven world. Investments in AI hardware will create jobs and attract significant capital, while also sparking a ripple effect of innovation

across industries.

C R Sasikumar

C K Saskump sparking a ripple effect of innovation across industries. By developing robust hardware ecosystems, India can position itself as an indispensable partner in global supply chains, amplifying its influence on the inter-national stage. Nurturing cutting-edge re-search and cultivating homegrown expert-ise will unlock breakthroughs that solidify India's leadership in Al hardware innova-tors. Finally, championing open-hardware ecosystems will foster collaboration and in-lusivity. ensuing accessibility for innova-tors and developers around the world for innova-tors and developers around the world for innova-tors and developers around the world is and and this truth: Hardware is more than an acces-sory – it is the engine driving it all.

this truth: Hardware is more than an acces-sory — it is the engine driving it all. To maintain our sovereignty in techno-logical advancement and lead from the front, we must not allow ourselves to be-come a technological colony of the US and China. This requires us to do the following. One, India must innovate in a nimble, less energy-consuming, cost-effective manner. We must do more for less like ISRO. Two, open source is the way forward, but we must create an environment that encour-ese brilliant and cleaver nepidencering. We open source is the way forward, but we must create an environment that encour-ages brilliant and clever engineering. We must converge software with computing power to achieve solutions for pressing thallenges like improving learning and health outcomes at the lowest cost. Three, we must build sovereign frontier models that are based on our data sets and do not have any inheren biases. It should be an end-to-end Al ecosystem and not just the application layer. Four, since India has 22 recognised official languages and a vast number of local dialects, we must build multifingual and multimodal foundational secure its position among Tier-I countries in the realm of Aldfitusion, and not be sub-jected to any restrictions or controls. Six, there must be a sense of great urgency and tory of Al, they must marktilis decade as the moment when India transformed from a service providen to a global invoxtor.

service provider to a global innovator

The writer is India's G20 Sherpa and former CEO, NITI Aayog. Views are personal

TOM GOLDSTEIN

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S second CREATERN 1 DUNALD TRUMP'S second term in office began this month just as his last term ended: Awashi niles. The Washington Post counted an astonishing 30,573 false or misleading claims during Trump's first presidency, an average of 21 daily.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

the Palestinian people, the only foreseeable outcome is

"In the absence of any workable and just solution that protects the rights of

Winning back

public trust

Journalism must find myriad ways to improve. For starters,

In the inaugural remarks of his second In the inaugural remarks of his second term, Trump's unrelenting assault on truth continued. He blithely repeated wildly inaccurate claims about the econ-omy, immigration and investigations into his own culpability. By stubborn repetition, Trump has shown there is substantial upside and little downside in telling systematic lies. He seems to be as populara seew, while pub-lic opinion continues to devalue the role of the messencer. The news media

lic opinion continues to devalue the role of the messenger. The news media. Beset by diminishing advertising rev-enues and audiences, the news media is muddling through hard times. In order to fulfil its role of holding those in power ac-countable, the established media must find ways to respond to Trump's lies. Over the long term, journalism must find myriad ways to improve. For starters, it needs to recruit a lot more and find bet-ter talent. In the near term, it can follow the advice offreed by an Associated Press edi-

advice offered by an Associated Press edi-tor at the start of Trump's first term:

tor at the start of Trump's first term: "Double down on facts", Journalists need to develop new protocols to meet head-on the erosion of confidence in journalism. As one antidote to the public distrust of the media, journalists need to embrace the art of fact-checking – a term that is often misunderstood or misused. Fact-checking, which sounds so mundane, is not a mere substitute for editing. It is a bisher form of editing. A traver than not a mere substitute for editing. It is a higher form of editing, far more than checking a story for grammar and spelling. To be sure, fact-checking is time-consum-ing and expensive (The New Porter maga-zine, which sets the gold standard, has nearly 30 journalists checking success, But it is also a relatively simple way to guard against falshood, whether it is written for the web, Facebook or a conventional news outlet. A second, skilled person es-sentially re-reports a story. Once given a draft of a story, a checker does independ-ent research, getting in touch with every-one mentioned in the story.

ent research, getting in touch with every-one mentioned in the story. Far-t-checking in not perfect. No easy way exists to fully oheck a breading news story. Not every assertion can be checked, of course. Trump's claim, after a bulle grazed his ear this summer, that he was 'saved by God' goes beyond the realinn of checking. When it is needed most, fact-checking on the internet suffered a largely over-looked serious blow earlier this month, dealt by Mark Zuckerberg, chief of Meta and a one-time enthusiastic backer of

and a one-time enthusiastic backer of fact-checking. In a barely coherent message

embrace fact-checking It that seemed designed to placate then-President-elect Trump, Zuckerberg said Facebook and its alied services would aban-don fac-t-checking because in itterifered with free speech and expression. Noone wants to be accused of stilling these freedoms. But in this instance, accuracy was the victim of this shift in priorities by Zuckerberg. Meta announced that it would end its partnership with independent American

Meta announced that it would end its partnership with independent American journalists to identify false information and hoaxes on its platform. Instead, it would rely on crowd-sourcing, sometimes a du-bious way of arriving at the truth. Zuckerberg justified his move by argu-ing that the checking procedures they had put in place produced unwanted censor-ship – a claim immediately disputed by some of Meri's fart-berking sources in

some of Meta's fact-checking partners. In a statement, dozens of these partners

some of Meta's lat-checking partners. In a statement, dozens of these partners lamented: "We believe the decision to end Meta's third-party fact-checking program is a step backwards for those who want to eae an intermet that prioritises accurate and trustworthy information." We can always hope that a lightbulb will flash, and Trump will realise that be and other world leaders are really great beneficiaries of quality journalism. Without journalists, he would resemble a playwight with no critics to praise (or pan) bis performances. Rather than treating journalists as a target, he should learn to im-prove their product. While waiting for that lightbulb mo-ment to arrive, journalists might review deas from the part – some serous, some less so – on how to improve. A J Liebing, the unparalleled press critic of the last century, told the story of Combut, a resistance newspaper pub-lobed in Paric univer World War II had

how Albert Camus, once the editor of Combat, a resistance newspaper pub-lished in Paris during World War II, had hatched a plan to enhance journalism. Camus proposed the creation of a "com-trol" newspaper that would appear one hour after the others with estimates of the percentage of ruth in each of their stories along with articles interpreting how the stories may have been slanted. Moreover, Camus wrote: "We'd have complete dossiers on the interests, policies and idiosyncaries of the owners. Then we'd

complete dossiers on the interests, policies and diosyncrasies of the owners. Thenwe'd have a dossier on every journalist in the world. The interest, prejudices and quirks of the owner would equal 2. The prejudices, quirks, and private interests of the journal-ist, Y.2 times Y would give you X, the prob-able amount of truth in the story." Carmus never tested his wise but tongue-in-cheek hypothesis. This energy, Liebling deadpanned, was "dissipated" in creative writing

creative writing.

creative writing. The great journalistic minds of today need to be focused on ways of restoring trust in journalism. Journalists in Chicago in the last century reduced the quest to a pithy bromide: "If your mother says she loves you, check it out." Indeed!

The writer has served as dean of journalism schools at Columbia University in New York, University of California, Berkeley and the O P Jindal Global University, Sonipat

An encompassing budget It will stimulate increased spending, create more jobs and investment

RAM RAJYA BY RAM MADHAV

MANY INDIANS LOOK at annual budgets only for relief in direct and indirect tax regimes that benefits the middle class, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman did not disappoint them this time. For years, the FM endured criticism this time. For years, the PM endured criticism for failing to increase the income tax exemp-tion rate substantially. This year, she an-nounced that incomes up to R5 12 lakh would be exempt from income tax as against R5 7 lakh until now, answering the call of the coun-try's middle class. This development has been widely applauded. In the short term, the decision is clearly a sound one, especially because more money in the hands of the middle class means more readering. This will crabke amore independent

spending. This will catalyse more production and create jobs. Last year, the consumer prod-ucts market saw a decline in profits. ucts market saw a decline in profits. Consumption items like oils and pulses as well as daily-use products like soaps and sham-poos saw a decline in sales. The reasons for this need detailed study. But, on the face of it, it appears that one reason could be the expo-nential growth of the gig economy. Ordering food through delivery agregators like Swiggy and Zomato rather than cooking at home or visiting one of the mushrooming beauty par-law ar sther thom scanding and home or lours rather than spending on shampoos and other beauty products have become rampant in the middle class. Globally, the manufacturing industry is a

major job provider. But the sector remained an Achilles' heel for India. Thanks to the efforts



of the Narendra Modi government, growth in the sector has picked up in recent years. According to the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) data, the sector experienced 7.5 per cent growth in FY 2023, taking the number of em-ployed in it to 18.5 million. Any slowdown in the sector would create a challenge to the created of are growing semplation by heavily ployed in it to 18.5 million. Any slowdown in the sector would create a chillenge to the country's ever-growing employable popula-tion. India is a country with a massive popu-lation of the young. The millions of young peo-ble entering the workforce put the commous stress on governments on the job front. As shortages in the traditional job sector con-tinue to plague the economy, a large number of youths are in India, providing employ-ment to around 10 million people today. AS-SOCHAM analysts predict that this figure is growing at a compounded rate of 17 per cent. buble Niti Agogs inpriceing that Ituli cross 123 smillion by 2029-30. Three is no clear definition of gig work. It is broadly understood as work arangement that is non-permanent, outside the tradi-tional definition of employer and employee. The FM seems to have followed the tradi-tional legic that increased tax exemption rate.

tional logic that increased tax exemption rates will place excess money in the hands of India's primary consuming class – the mid-dle class – and that will increase domestic consumption. More spending means more tax revenue, more manufacturing and more

jobs. But this time, the minister has paid at-tention to the gig sector too. There has been a long-standing demand from labour organisations for insurance cover for gig workers. Heeding those, Sitharaman has announced Heeding those, Sitharama has announced several social security measures like cover-age under the PM pan Arogya Yojana, aiming to provide health protection to over 10 mil-lion gig workers. She may have to keep in mind, though, that leading companies in legisector alradod have certain welfare meas-ures in place for their workers. At a time when digitisation and Al threaten to take away jobs, securing capital inflows into the manufacturing sector remains India's biggest challenge. In the last few years, the gov-emment has user dhe infortance was ending.

ernment has used the infrastructure spending route to boost employment, which continued route to boost employment, which continued in this year's budget. It may be a temporary re-prieve, but the real answer is to catalyse a greater inflow of domestic and foreign capital into industrise with greater employment po-tential. So far, only the defence manufacturing industry has shown promising growth. Now, the government wants to encourage other labour-intensive sectors like shopluiding. Although India depends on oceans for almost S are and officaroots in dimension is readen. 95 per cent of its exports and imports, its share in the global shipping industry remains mi-nuscule. By granting industry status to ship-building, the FM has opened doors for potential growth in the sector. The most important reform, however, is

for regulatory institutions. In a successful economy, regulatory institutions play the role of facilitators. Instead, in India, overzeal-

economy, regulatory institutions play the ole of facilitations. Instead, in Indus, overzeal-ous regulators made the country less attrac-tive to foreign capital, Recognism (its bot-tleneck, the FM has cautioned that the regulators "momed" a light the chomologi-cal innovations and global policy develop-ments". She promised" a light touch regula-tory framework? based on "principles and hugh-level committee with the objective of building a" modern. Incivide, people-friendly, and trust-based regulatory framework ap-portate for the 21st century." Another far-reaching announcement was of the Jan visitwas Bill 2.0. In 2023, through a similar bill, the government de-timinalised methan 1800 legal provisions in various departments under different min-stres. With a view for further entancing the

istries. With a view to further enhancing the ease of doing business, the minister an-nounced the decriminalisation of another 100 provisions in various laws. The Chief Economic Advisor to the finance ministry, V Anantha Nageswaran, summarised the mood in the government in

way of business.

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Delhi Polls PAY FOR KNOWLEDGE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DELITIOLLS THIS REFERS to the report, Most exit polis give BJPedge, AAP says never right (IE, February 6). The BJP should be thankful not only to the Congress, which made introads into the AAP's oute share, but also to the Election Commission for fixing the date of the Doljs just a few days after the presenta-tion of the Union Budget – which brought major income tax relief for middle- and higher-income groups – and also for incoming violations of the I AT I FOR KINGWLED/GE THIS REFERS TO the article, Turning point, cutting edge (IE February 6). A comprehensive and well-balanced strategy of Inancing in proportion to societal needs is imperative in enhanc-ing growth in the innovation sector. This approach requires long-term contracts in approach requires long-term contracts with private entities and universities to ensure efficient funding and execution. The 82 20,000-core budget for 2025 marks a crucial step toward strength-ening India's innovation sector. NSAS middle- and higher-income groups – and also for ignoring violations of the Model Code of Conduct by the BJP and allowing the Prime Minister to take a dip in the Triveni Sangam with great publicity on election day. Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

DHAKA'S TASK

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Let's work together' (IE, February 6). World Bank data shows that Bangladesh has a strong track record of growth and destrong track record of growth and de-velopment since 1971, even amid eco-nomic uncertainties. From the poorest, it cimbed to lower-middle income sta-tus in 2015 because of stable macroeco-nomic conditions and improved human development outcomes. However, in recert years, it has witnessed new dhal-lenges such as growing inequality, de-grading real CDP growth and high in-flation. To balance this, Bangladesh needs to focus on its development, in-cudine building human canital. cluding building human capital. Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

marks a crucial step toward strengtn-ening India's innovation sector. NASA sets a strong precedent, outsourcing 80 per cent of its projects, while Tesla thrives on federal contracts. ISRO, BARC, and AIIMS should reconsider outsourc-ing major research projects to maximise knowledge spillovers. Shaswat Jena, Chaziabad

SC MUST ACT

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Against his oath' (IE, February 6). The speech by oath' (1E, February 6). The speech by Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court at a VHP gathering, breached his oath of a fice to uphol the Constitution. His vitu-perative language othering the Muslim community is usustainable for a judge. His audacity in justifying his conduct is an open challenge to the Constitution and the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has to take usilable action to pre-serve people's faith in the majesty of the Justice Law and the integrity of the courts. LRMurmu, New Dethi

his pre-budget Economic Survey in one sen-tence: "The government should get out of the

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2025 EXPLAINE

making borrowing cheaper for individuals and businesses, thereby encouraging spend-ing and investment. The central bank hopes that this will ultimately increase job creation and unselument.

and employment. A rate cut can also help maintain price

What will be the impact? All external benchmark lending rates

Push for spending and investment: Why RBI has cut the repo rate

GEORGE MATHEW & HITESH VYAS

THE RESERVE Bank of India's (RBI) six-mem er Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on ber Monetary Policy Committee (MFC) on Friday reduced the reporate – the rate at which RBI lends to other banks – by 25 ba-sis points (ps), bringing it down from 6.50 per cent to 6.25 per cent. This was the RB's first reporate cut in nearly five years. The decision will lead to a fall in interest rates, and equated monthly instalments (EMIs) on home and personal loans.

Why did RBI cut the reporate? The RBI expects that a lower reporate will help stimulate economic activity by

THIS WORD MEANS

DUNKI

Iourneys that India's undocumented migrants undertake to reach the US via multiple countries

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR

ON THURSDAY, Opposition leaders in Parliament protested the manner in which undocumented Indian immi-grants were deported from the United which undeclared grants were deported from the United States. A US military plane carrying 104 Indians landed in Amritsar on Wednesday, with many of the deportees complaining about being handcuffed and allowed limited access to washrooms

allowed limited access to washrooms throughout the journey. External Affairs Minister 5 Jaishankar addressed the issue in the Raya Sabha, saying, "We are engaging the US Government to ensure that the returning deportees are not mistreated in any man-ner during the flight. At the same time, the House will appreciate that our focus should be to crack down strongly on the illegal migration industry..." These illegal "dunki routes" for reach-ing the US have been utilised by people from Purjab and Haryana and are now finding takers from other states, too.

Via South America

The first step in the most popular dunki route from India is to reach South America. Countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, and Guyana have visas on arrival for Indian citizens. A migrant's route also for Indian citizens. A migrant's route also depends on the links that his "agent' has with human trafficking networks, but the process can be long. Agents charge be-tween Rs 30-40 lakh to Rs 1 core per per-son and usually take the sum before the migrants reach the US. One woman aboard the US military planes aids bet ravelled with the 10-year-old son. "We were flown to Medellin in Colombia and lext there for nearby two

old son. "We were flown to Medellin in Colombia and kept there for nearly two weeks before being moved to San Salvador (apital OFI Salvador) in Alight. From there, we walked for over three hours to Guatemala, then travelled by taxis to the Mexican border. After staying in Mexico for two days, we finally crossed over to the US on January 27," she told The Indian Express.

over to the US on January 27," she told The Indian Express. Some agents arrange a direct visa for Mexico from Dubai. However, landing directly in Mexico is considered more dangerous, in terms of the threat of ar-rest by local authorities. Most land in a



Migrants cross a river in the Darién Gap to reach the US. The NYT

Latin American country and are then

Perilous journey to Mexico

Perilous journey to Mexico Tom Colombia, the migrants enter Panana. This involves crossing the Darién Gap a dangerous forest between the two ountries, with risks of wild animals and ariminal gangs. Migrants can face robust and rape, with crimes committed bere going unreported. If everything goes well, the journey takes eight to 10 days. If a mi-grant dies, there is no way to send the oddy home for last rites. Unatemala is a big coordination cen-free on this route. Migrants are handed over to new traffickers here, to enter free on this route. Then starts the game of hide a bese with government agencies. Cardaspur youth Gurpal Singh Calywas killed in abus accident in Mexico while on the way to the US in 2023. Risks at every turn

Risks at every turn

Another route from Colombia starts from San Andrés but is not much safer. From San Andrés, migrants take boats to Nicaragua in Central America. Fishing boats with migrants go to Fisherman's Cay, around 150 km from San Andrés

Cay, around 150 km from San Andrés. From there, migrants are transferred onto another boat to Mexico. The 3,140-km border separating the US and Mexico has fencing, which the mi-grants jump across. Many choose to cross the dangerous Rio Grande river. After crossing over, migrants are detained and then kept in camps. Their fate then de-pends on whether US authorities find them fit for asylum.



(EBLR) – lending rates set by banks based on external benchmarks such as the repo rate – will come down by 25 bps, giving relief to bor-rowers as their EMIs will fall as well. Lenders may also reduce interest rates on loans that are linked to the marginal cost

A rate cut can also help maintain price stability while supporting growth as infla-tion is within the RBF starger range, which is 4 per cent with a leeway of plus or misus 2 per cent. Inflation stood at 5.2 per cent in December 2024. The reduction in the reporate aligns India with global economic trends, as many central banks across the world have adopted accom-modative monetary policies.

are linked to the marginal cost of fund-based lending rate (MCR, or the minimum lending) not allowed to lend). Before the announcement of the cut on Friday, there had been an in-crease of 250 bps in the reporate since May 2022. As a result, banks increased their repo-rease of 250 bps in the reporate since May 2023 As a result, banks increased their repo-linked EBR.BSys a imilar magnitude over the years. The one-year median MCR increased by 175 bps between May 2022 and December 2024.

Although a lower repo rate has several benefits, it can lead to higher inflation as in-creased money supply and lower interest rates can drive up prices. It can also reduce the interest earned on savings, making it less attractive for individu-

AINED OMICS ends to save. Notably, the RBI's deci-sion to cut the repo rate de-pends on various factors, in-cluding inflation, economic growth, and global economic trends. EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

What do GDP growth and inflation projections say? In the December 2024 monetary policy, the RBI slashed the GDP growth estimate to 6.6 per cent for FY 2024-25, from an earlier

projection of 7.2 per cent. It has now pro-jected a GDP growth of 6.7 per cent for FY 2025-26. Speaking to The Indian Express, Suman

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

Chowdhury, executive director and chief economist at Acuité Ratings, said, "The Indian

economist at Acutie Ratings, said, "The Indian economy has witnessed a slowdown in the current fiscal with consensus estimates of 6.4 per cent CDP growth from 8.2 per cent PY 2024. While headline inflation has mod-erated to 5.2 per cent in December 2024 and is expected to subside further to 4.5 per cent over the next few months, there are concerns on triss sustainability a midd the rupee touch-ing 87 to the US dollar."

India's GDP growth estimate for the FY 2024-25 is 6.4 per cent, according to the first advance estimates released by the Ministry

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of Statistics and Programme Implementation. This estimate is slightly lower than the projection of the Economic Survey for 2024-25, released last week, which put the country's GDP growth be-tween 65 per cent to 7 per cent. Retail inflation is expected to be 42 per cent in 2025-26, according to b8B Governor Sanjay Malhotra. In a report, the Bank of Pando sad, We expect a significant mod-eration in headline retail inflation in jamary 2028. Retail inflation is expected in the range of 45-47 per cent. The inflation outgots significant support stemming from easing prices of vegetables'. Global prices of deible oils have also softened, which is positive for, the domestic inflation trajectory. the domestic inflation trajectory

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS Budget, beyond the tax break

While historic tax cuts - like the one for income tax payers in 2025 - garner all the attention, they come at the cost of chronic underfunding of critical areas such as education and health. Here's what the data show



UDIT MISRA

THE UNION Budget for 2025-26 has pro-vided a massive Rs 1 lakh crore (1 trillion) re-lief to income-tax payers with the hope that the money left in their pockets will boost consumption demand and push the GDP growth rate above 6%.

Governments can influence overall GDP

Governments can influence overall GDP growth by their taxation and expenditure policies, together known as fiscal policy. Less tax leaves consumers with more money to spend, and triggers economic ac-tivity. Spending more on creating productive assets (capital expenditure) relative to spending on everyday expenses such as alaries (current or revenue expenditure) also helps overall GDP growth.

Disappointing fiscal impulse

The government did both these things in the Budget. And yet, an inspection of the Budget numbers suggests that the huge tax break notwithstanding, overall impact on growth – also called the fiscal impulse of the Union Budget – may be negative or, at best neutral

the Union Budget — may be negative or, at best, neutral. Analysis by the independent research agency HSBC suggests a likely negative fiscal agency HSBC suggests a likely negative fiscal impulse of the Budget — this remains true even after the improved quality of the central government's expenditure is factored in. Another research agency, Nomura, said

honer research agency, wonta, sam that "In the near term, we see the budget as largely neutral for growth". It also said that "our estimates suggest a minimal fiscal im-pulse to growth". Data from both HSBC and Nomura show

a negative or neutral fiscal impulse in most years following the Covid-19 pandemic year of 2020-21. Which would mean that the eco-nomic recovery of the post-Covid years had little to do with any impetus provided by the Union Budgets for these years.

Budget priorities over the years Look at the data presented in the table alongside Theidea is to understand the rate at which the economy grew – both the overall GDP as well as the incomes and expenditures of the average Indian and of the corporate sec-tor – and compare it with the rate at which the Union Budget (essentially the size of the event budget of the second second second second second the second second second second second second the second central government's expenditure) and its key ents grew over the past 10 years -

that is financial years (FY) 2016 to 2025. The data for FY15 are taken as the base

LOOKING BACK AT UNION BUDGETS (FY15 TO FY25)



| All data in ₹ lakh crore | 2014-15 | 2024-25 | Annual CAGR* |
|--|---------|----------|--------------|
| Nominal GDP of India | 124.7 | 324 | 10.00% |
| Nominal GDP of avg Indian** | 98,405 | 2,30,195 | 8.90% |
| Nominal Expenditure of avg Indian** | 57,201 | 1,42,256 | 9.50% |
| Corporate sales@# | 103.3 | 156.7 | 4.70% |
| Corporate profits after tax@# | 2.43 | 11.06 | 18.30% |
| Size of the Union Budget | 16.6 | 50.7 | 11.80% |
| Budget exp. on Education | 0.69 | 1.14 | 5.20% |
| Budget exp. on Skill Development^ | 0.01 | 0.03 | 14.1% |
| Budget exp. on Health & Family Welfare | 0.31 | 0.89 | 11.10% |
| Budget exp. on MG-NREGA | 0.33 | 0.86 | 10.10% |
| Budget exp. on Food subsidy | 1.15 | 1.97 | 5.50% |
| Capital exp. in the Budget | 1.97 | 10.2 | 17.90% |
| Fiscal Deficit | 5.1 | 15.7 | 11.90% |

All data in ₹ lakh crore, except the heads marked with ** that are in ₹. ^data starts from 2015-16 CAGR is Compounded Annual Growth Rate, @ only non-financial firms, #Data until FY24 Source: Budget documents, CMIE, Indian Express Research

While the Budget for FY15 was the first of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's govern-ment, it was not a full-fledged Budget, since it was presented well after the financial year had started. 13.31% in FY15, and expanded to 15.65% in

13.31% in FV15, and expanded to 15.65% in FV55 This may contrary not a base one half of the second second second second second second observations. Maximum Governance, Maximum Governance, Maximum Governance, Maximum Governance, Maximum Second Secon

table: India's annual GDP grew at 10% in nom-inal terms (that is, inclusive of inflation) dur-ing this period. In comparison, per capita GDP (or the average income of an Indian) grew at only 8.5%. However, at 9.5%, the av-erage Indian's expenditure grew faster than their income

Skill Development.

On Education, the allocation went fr Rs 69,000 crore (0.69 lakh crore) in FY15 to Rs 1.14 lakh crore in FY25, at an annual growth of 5.2% - especially paltry given that the overall budget grew at 11.8% during this period. Over the past decade, the al-location for education fell from 4% to just 2.2% of the Budget. On Skill Development, while allocations have grown at an annual rate of more than

14%, the fact is that the total amount allo-

reaction of the factors that the other announce and cated is quite low. It was Rs 0.01 lakh crore in FY16 and grew to Rs 0.03 lakh crore in FY25 – that's 0.06% of the total Budget in the current fi-

 The spending on Health and Family
Welfare is even lower than on education.
While the allocation has grown at a rate almost in sync with the overall size of the Budget, despite this increase, the allocation is just 1.7% of the total government expenditure. The allocation to MG-NREGA, the rural

The allocation to MG-NREGA the rural employment program, has a trajectory sim-ilar to the allocation on health.
Expenditure towards providing food subsidy, the increased help during the pan-demic notwithstanding, has grown by only 5.5% annually over the past decade.
Allocations to capital expenditure show why it is the hallmark of the Modi govern-ment. They have registered an increase of al-most 18% – I ari nexcess of either nominal GDP or the size of the Budget itself. The only variable that has grown faster than the gov-

GDP or the size of the Budget itself. The only variable that has grown faster than the gov-ernment's capex is corporate profits. As of PL25, capex is over 20% of all expenditure. I astly, the fiscal deficit — the amount of money the government has to borrow each year to meet the gap between its ex-penditure and earnings — has grown at a faster rate than the rate of growth of the Union Budget or the CDP It has growth of the Union Budget or the CDP It has growth at the 4.1% of GDP in FY15 to 4.8% in FY25. The Modi government has not once met the fis cal prudence norm of restricting the deficit to 3% of GDP.

Upshot of the data It is clear from the data that there is no free lunct. When governments provide his-toric tax reliefs — such as the income tax cut for the next year or the corporate tax cut in 2019 — what is often ignored are the cut in al-locations to other sectors. The chronically/low levels of Budget allo-cations on otheraion wild it devolument and

The chronically low levels of Budget allo-cations on education, skill development and health are a case in point, especially at a time when developments in artificial intelligence are seen as potentially threatening India's growth and job prospects. It is an open question whether income tax cuts for those earning five to six times more than the average Indianis the best way to use taxapare money to incentivise long-term growth.

It is also noteworthy that this tax rebate effectively shrinks India's tax base at a time when many have argued that India should be expanding it in order to bring down the tax burden on all.

sent to a Bill "as soon as possible", i

sent to a bill as soon as poissible if cloves not mandate aspecific timeline. The Schas addressed this issue in past decisions. However, it has not passed any directions imposing a timeline for Governors. In Nabam Rehia and Bamang Felix vs DeputySpecker(2016). Justice Madan Lokur, who was part of a five-judge constitution Bench which was hearing the case, wrote a

Bench which was hearing the case, wrote a separate concurring opinion on the issue. He said, "The Covernor cannot withhold as-sent to a Bill indefinitely but must return it to the Assembly with a message and this could include this recommendation for amendments to the Bill." The SC reiterated this in November 2023 while hearing a case filed by the Punjab gou-ernment, which had a ccursed Covernor Earwarial Purohit of withholding assent for Re Bill: The correct radit the horses "x

to four Bills. The court said the phrase "a

soon as possible" in Article 200 means that "the Governor cannot be at liberty to keep

the Bill pending indefinitely without any action whatsoever".

What issues will the SC consider in the TN govt-Governor dispute case?

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM

Jaipur

THE SUPREME Court on Friday continued to hear petitions filed by the Tamil Nadu government raising questions on the scope of the Governor's powers in the legislative process. The state argued that the prolonged delay in acting upon Bills passed by the state legislature would result in a situation where the "system of democracy will fail in this country."

fail in this country." The hearing essentially involves debat-ing the contours of Article 200 of the Constitution, which requires the Governor to declare "that he assents to the Bill or that he withholds assent therefrom or that he reserves the Bill for the consideration of the President". It also states that this should be done "as soon as possible after the presen-tation to him of the Bill for assent".

Since 2023, when the Tamil Nadu gov-ernment first approached the SC about the

issue, several opposition-ruled states, in-cluding Kerala, Telangana, and Punjab, have moved the apex court over such delays. The Tamil Nadu case would be a precedent for all other cases.

Governor's role in lawmaking The Constitution envisages the office of the Governor as an apolitical entity. Over the years, the SC in several rulings has lim-ited the Governor's exercise of the powers in a permissive manner. Broadly, the Governor is bound to act on the aid and ad-Covenion is bound to act on tract and and a vice of a state's Council of Ministers. However, there are a few exceptions to this. For instance, in recommending the impo-sition of the President's rule under Article 356 of the Constitution, and in granting as-sent to Bills under Article 200.

After a Bill has been passed by a state Assembly, it is presented to the Governor for her assent. Article 200 envisages three enarios where the Governor can: Give assent to the Bill, in which case it

Withhold assent to the Bill and send it back for reconsideration by the state

sembly. Reserve the Bill for consideration by President of India. If the Governor withholds assent and

ds the Bill back for reconsideration, the Assembly can amend the Bill

or pass it again as is. When the particular Bill is presented to the Governor again, she "shall not withhold assent therefrom", mandating the Bill's passage, except in cases where the Bill, in the opinion of the Governor, could "dero-gate from the powers of the High Court." In that case, the Bill shall be reserved for the

sident's consideration. The Tamil Nadu dispute

Since Governor RN Ravi's appointment in September 2021, the Tamil Nadu govern-ment, led by the Dravida Munnetra Issues that SC will consider

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Kazhagam (DMK), has repeatedly raised con-cerns about the Governor withholding as-sent and delaying the passage of Bills passed by the state assembly. In November 2023, the state government moved the SC, claiming that Governor Ravihad beem withholding as-sent on several Bills, the earliest of which had

been pending since January 2023. While hearing the matter on November 6, 2023, the SC said EXPLAINED Governors "cannot be oblivious LAW to the fact that they are not vv bit ne fact mat they are hot people". It also said, "Why do parties have to come to the SC? The Governorsmust act before it comes to the SC? Around two weeks late; the Tamil Nadu Assembly re-enacted the pending Bills. However, Governor Ravi referred two of these Bills to the President for her consid-

Data for corporate sales and profit are

vailable only till 2023-24. All data are in Rs lakh crore to allow for an easy comparison with the Rs 1 lakh crore tax relief announced

The size of the Union Budget, or the rate

at which government spending expanded (11.8%), was higher than the rate of nominal

GDP growth. It is for this reason that the Budget as a percentage of GDP was only

The key takeaways from the

lakh cr on February 1.

table:

their income.

eration, and withheld assent for the rest.

by the Court are: If the Governor has the authority to withhold assent for a second time after a state Assembly has passed a Bill following its initial withholding, especially when the Governor did not reserve the Bill for the President When it was first presented. If the Governor's power to refer a Bill the second second second second second second second the second second second second second second I the Governor's power to refer a Bill the second second second second second second second second second I the Governor's power to refer a Bill I t ■ If the Governor's power to refer a Bill to the President is exercisable upon any Bill

or it is limited to certain specified categories. Considerations that influence the Governor's decision to refer a Bill to the President instead of giving assent. President instead of giving assent. Examining the concept of pocket veto — when the Governor holds assent indefi-nitely — and if it has any constitutional va-lidity in India. If there should be a time frame for the

Governor to give assent to a Bill under Article 200.

Although Article 200 states that the vernor must take a call on granting as-

SC on time frame for assent